

Do middle class South Africans care about the climate crisis?

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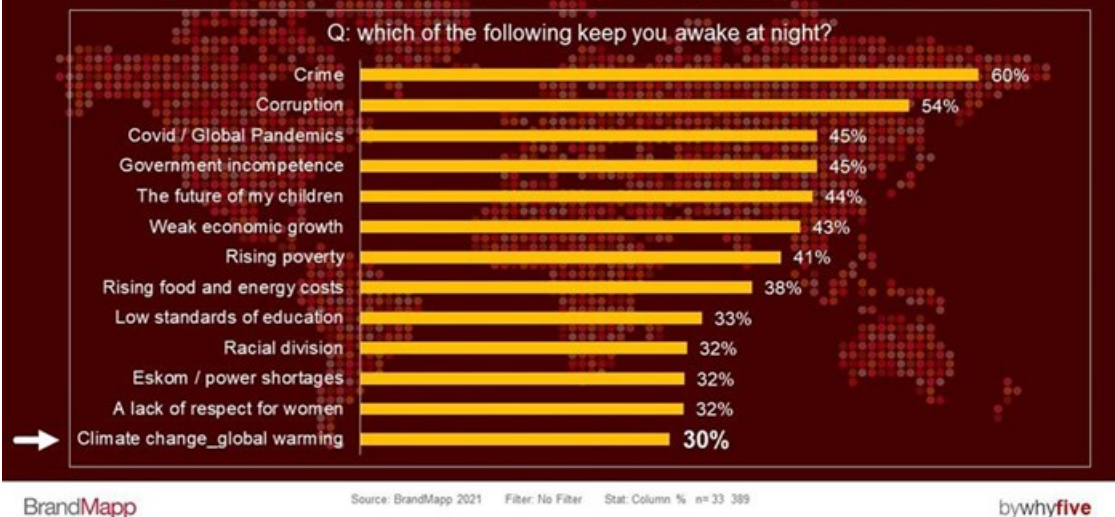
Have you noticed that the planet seems to be throwing something of a temper tantrum? Western Germany has been roiled by devastating floods, Haiti has been shook to its core by massive earthquakes and wildfires are still sweeping through the United States. Rain has fallen on the summit of Greenland's ice sheet for the first time on record. The tiny town of Sitacusa on Sicily recorded what is believed to be the highest temperature ever recorded in Europe - 48.8°C - which may not be hot enough to bake off a pizza but would certainly melt mozzarella in a minute.



And since we live on it, and our children will have to live on what's left, there's just no good reason for any of us to be disinterested in the future of our planet. Yet, with so many everyday challenges that we must face in South Africa, the big question is, how high do environmental concerns rank in the minds of the segment who can probably most afford to make better choices - the middle class-and-up?

Released in mid-2021, BrandMapp's consumer insights research has uniquely captured the opinions of more than 33,000 South Africans living in households with a R10,000+ monthly income. While that may be a 30% segment of the population, BrandMapp respondents represent 100% of the country's taxpaying base and 80% of all consumer spend. When asked what keeps them awake at night, it turns out that only 30% of mid-income South African adults recognise the climate crisis as a concern.

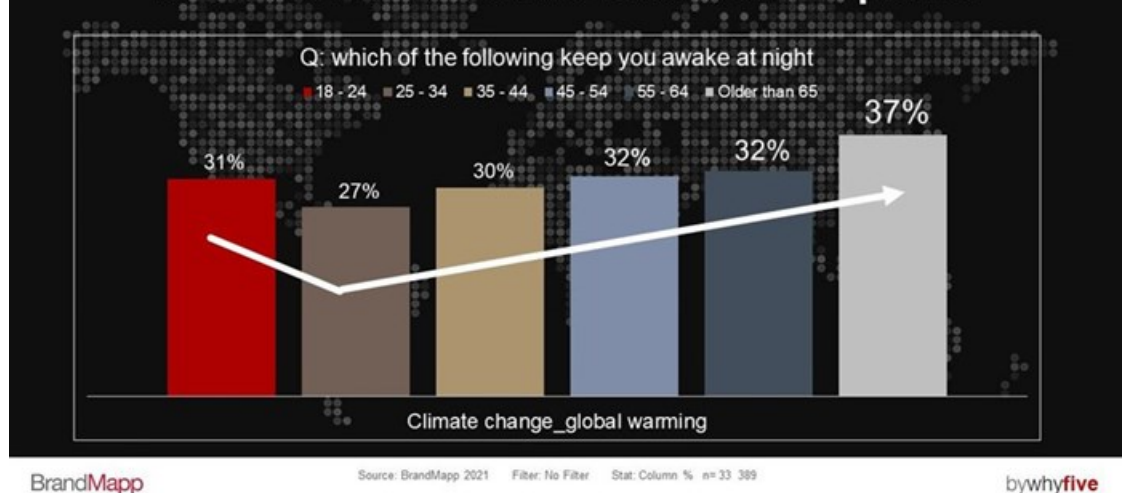
Climate Change doesn't even make the Top 10 concerns of middle-class-and-up South Africans



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Brandon de Kock, BrandMapp director of storytelling says, “Let’s face it: life in SA is hard and there are a lot of things we have to worry about in terms of safety, security and basic survival. Just getting a chicken on the table is hard enough, let alone worrying about how free its range was! But still, it’s worrying that relatively privileged adults are less concerned with the environment than things like Eskom’s power shortages and racial division.” The results of the survey also revealed some unexpected trends when it comes to who cares, and who doesn’t.

The older you are, the more likely you are to be worried about the future of the planet

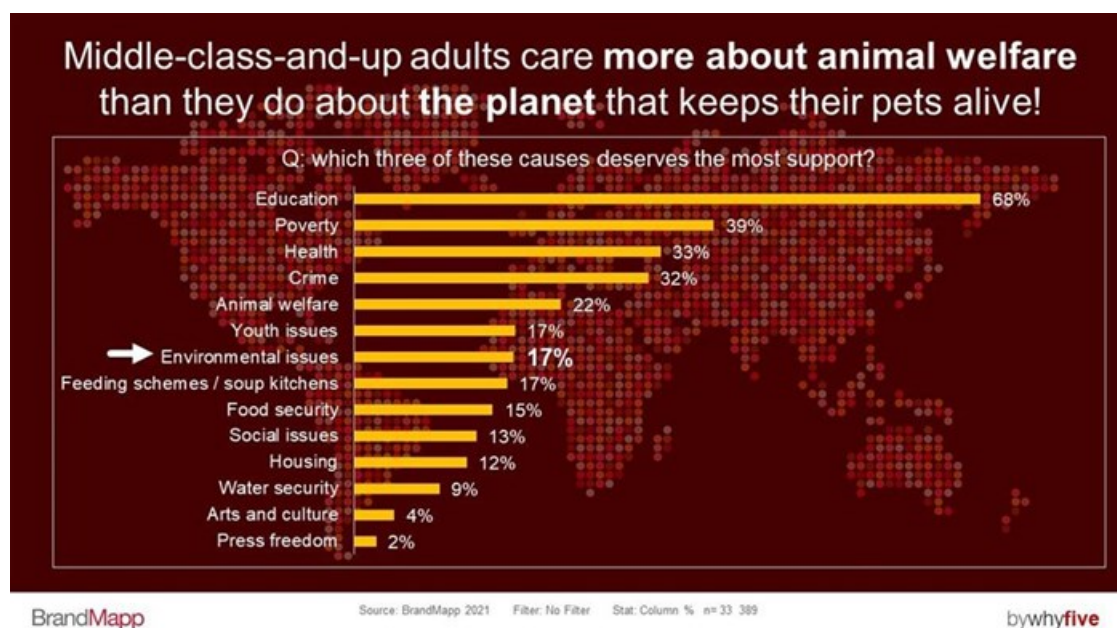


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Young South Africans don't have the same levels of climate anxiety as their counterparts in the developed world

De Kock says, “Interestingly, in South Africa, it’s the older generations who are more likely to have climate concerns on their minds, and this puts our younger generations, especially our millennials, out of step with both the climate anxiety and climate activism that’s so pervasive amongst the youth in other parts of the world. When we looked at support for environmental issues by age category, we also found that the older generations are doing much more to support environmental causes than younger South Africans. The problem with this is these older South Africans will be gone in the next thirty years when the climate crisis is full-blown. With education on a variety of environmental concerns built into the country’s curriculum for decades now, our younger generations have received considerably more formal education around the planet problems than their parents and grandparents. Yet, it seems this is not resulting in awareness, concern and

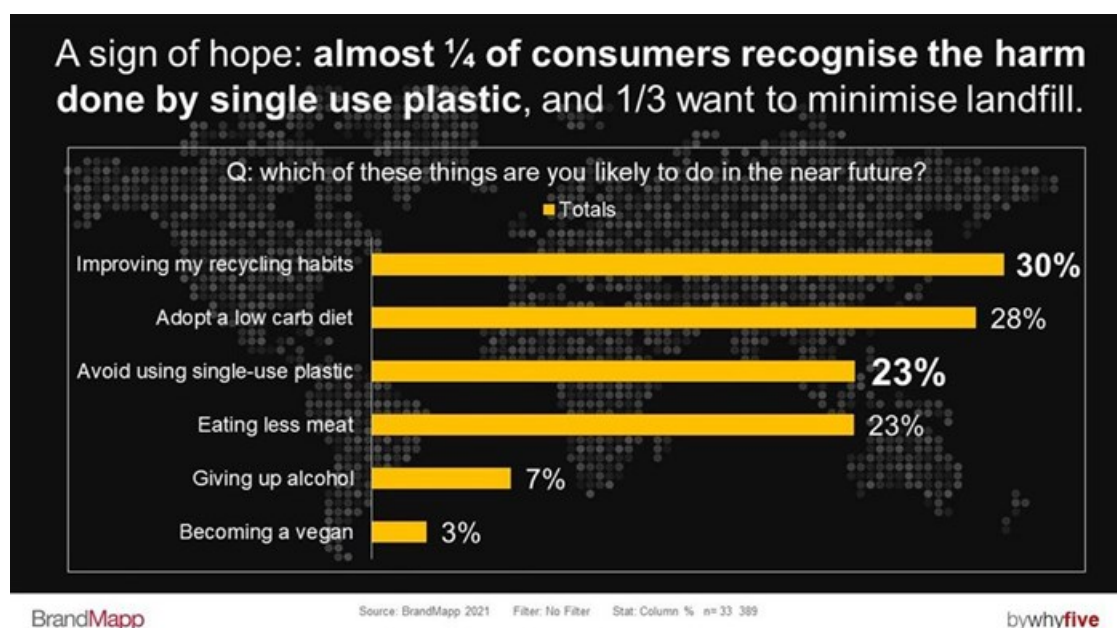
action. What does this say then, about the state of environmental education in our schools?”



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In SA, animal welfare trumps environmental issues

“Further evidence of a disturbing disconnect comes to light when it came to choosing top causes South Africans believe deserve support,” De Kock says. “Firstly, environmental causes ranked astonishingly low given the imminence of the threat, and secondly, how ironic is it for animal welfare to take precedence over the planet itself?”

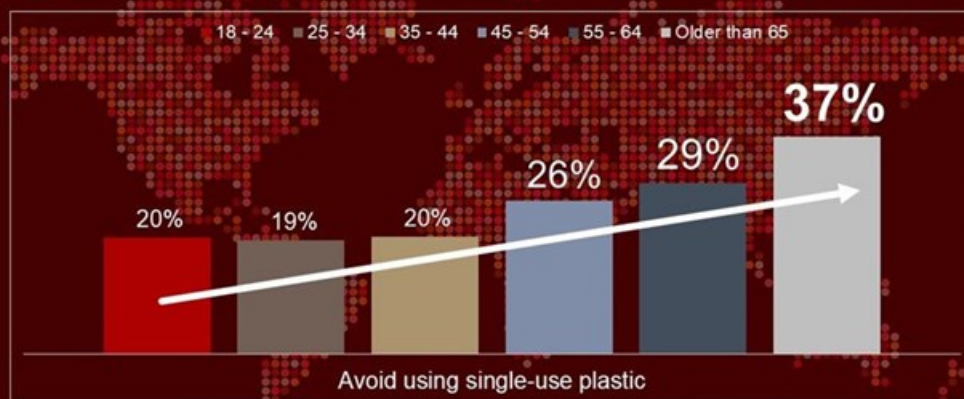


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Recognising the impact of our consumerism

“A glimmer of hope is seen in a quarter of consumers recognising the impacts of avoiding single-use plastics, reducing meat consumption and more acknowledging the benefits of improving their recycling efforts,” says De Kock. “However, it must be noted that when we filtered this by age, it was again the older generations who are mostly taking these actions, creating a picture of young South Africans who are simply less aware and less concerned about their impact on the planet. I can’t help feeling though that this is more a question of a lack of education as opposed to youthful apathy. Maybe older generations are assuming that their actions speak louder than words? If so, it’s not working.”

The age pattern repeats: younger people are not as concerned (or educated?) about **their impact on the environment**.



Q: Which of these things can you see yourself doing in the near future?

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Eco-friendly shopping is a downer

De Kock concludes, “The final nail in the coffin of the supposedly ‘conscious’ South African consumer is clear in this disappointing result where only 14% of middle-income South Africans say they make an effort to buy eco-friendly products. This is set in a context where 54% acknowledge that their purchasing decisions are price-driven, and eco-friendly unfortunately tends to come with a luxury price-tag in this country. Then again, it begs the question: can you put a price tag on the future of the planet?”.

In the midst of latest unfolding of radical weather events across the planet, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued a final warning report in August, dubbed a ‘code red for humans’. “Unequivocal evidence showed greenhouse gas emissions were propelling us towards a calamitous fiery future triggered by extreme climate change,” it announced. Water-scarce, polluted and losing biodiversity at an alarming rate, it seems that South Africa needs a swift and meaningful reaction that particularly needs to engage the generations of South Africans who will, in the relatively near future, be the ones facing the full fury of climate crisis head on.

Earth-friendly products really aren't on the shopping list yet



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BrandMapp is a unique South African dataset that uses a mega-sample of more than 30 000 respondents to profile the 12 million adults who live in mid to top-income households earning in excess of R10 000 per month. Now in its eighth year, the BrandMapp survey is a bespoke, independent survey that powers the WhyFive consumer insights consultancy.

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