

A Guide To

BUILDING AUTHENTIC CONNECTIONS WITH BLACK MILLENNIALS AND GEN Z

Created in partnership with Blavity Media Group's
Cultural Insights Council

FOREWORD

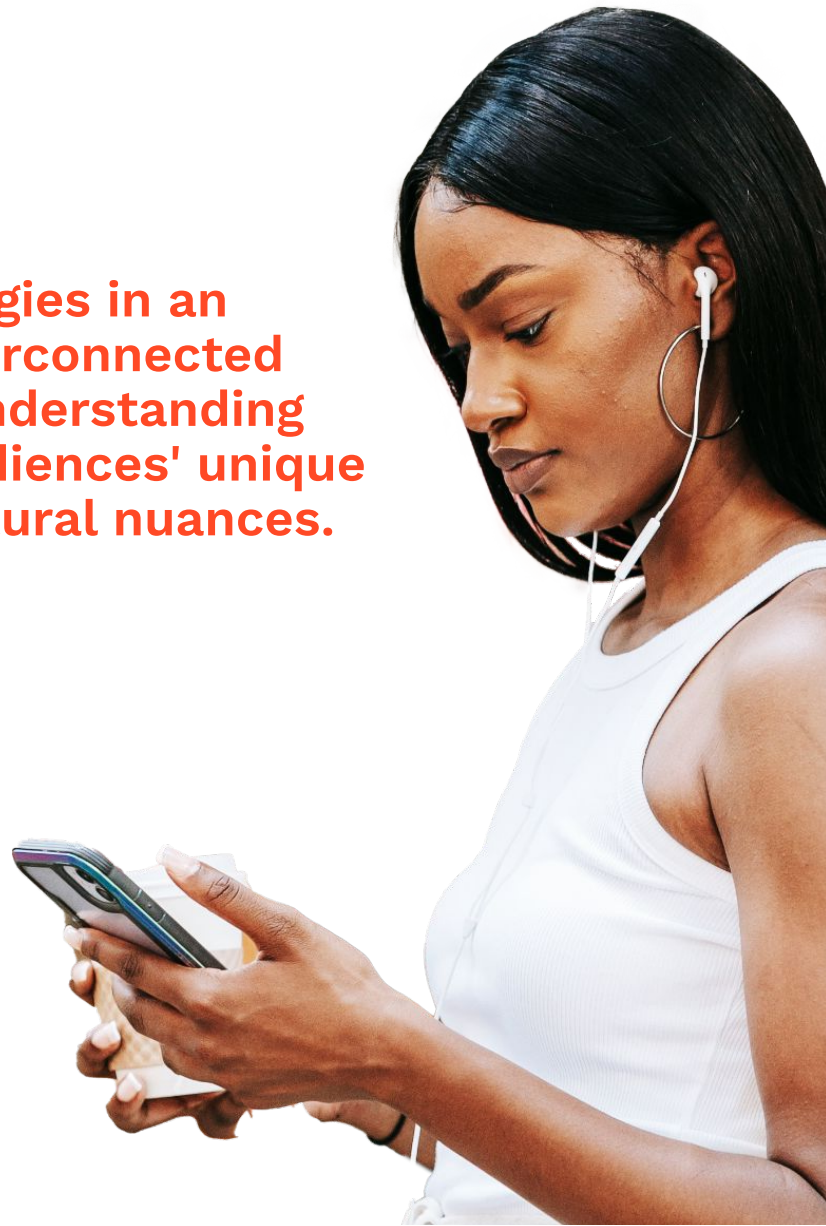
Successful marketing strategies in an increasingly diverse and interconnected world must begin with an understanding and catering to different audiences' unique needs, preferences, and cultural nuances.

African-American millennials and Generation Z represent a dynamic and influential market segment with significant influence and growing purchasing power as they mature. It is essential for marketers to gain deep insights into their behaviors, values, and aspirations to engage and connect with this vibrant demographic effectively.

Cultural relevance and inclusivity remain paramount to brand success. This report aims to equip brand leaders with invaluable insights and strategies to effectively engage African-American millennials and Generation Z. They serve as a starting point for brands seeking to build genuine connections and drive meaningful impact within the young African-American community.

This report should not be considered a conclusive and definitive guide. It is a broad reflection of the audience at this moment in time and could shift as society changes over time, and new generations dominate youth culture. Additionally, there are specific nuances to consider for key industries that deserve their own attention.

The data found in this document references the BMG audience survey, Pew Research, and Nielsen insights. All sources are included in footnotes.



Methodology: Blavity Meda Group conducted a public survey involving a broad dissemination strategy through various owned channels, including social media profiles and branded email newsletters. The survey collected responses from a diverse and representative sample of individuals and received 2,343 responses from participants across different demographic groups and geographic locations across the United States.

THE COMMUNITY

In the United States, Millennials and Gen Z are changing the face of what it looks like to be Black in America.



These two generations make up **nearly half of the African-American population** and are the driving force behind the internal diversification within the community.

56%

of African-Americans live in Southern states that have seen a **growing population for the first time since the Great Migration.***

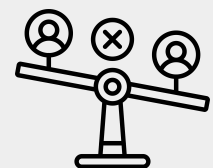


The number of **African American adults with a college degree or more**

HAS DOUBLED SINCE 2000

just as Millennials entered adulthood, with **Black Millennials and Gen Z being the most educated generation.****

Despite the college education trends for Black Millennials and Gen Z, **this population still faces large income inequality differences and higher unemployment rates** when compared to the general population.**



Sources


*<https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2021/03/25/the-growing-diversity-of-black-america/>

**<https://www.newamerica.org/millennials/reports/emerging-millennial-wealth-gap/the-millennial-racial-wealth-gap/>

DIGITAL BEHAVIOR UNIQUE TO THE COMMUNITY

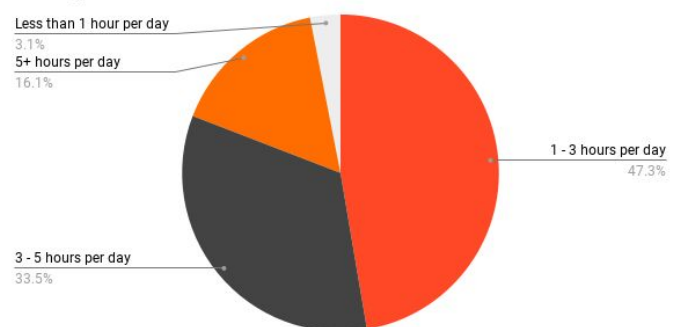
AS HIGHLY TECH-SAVVY INDIVIDUALS, BLACK MILLENNIALS AND GEN Z ARE DIGITAL NATIVES

who have seamlessly integrated the internet and social media into their lives. Their digital engagement is noteworthy, with active participation on various social media platforms and other digital channels. Black millennials and Gen Z have distinct preferences and behaviors when it comes to consuming news and engaging with social issues. They rely more on social media as their primary news source than their white counterparts. On average, Black millennials and Gen Z spend 60% more time on social media than the general population with 33% spending between 3-5 hours.

47% 

Black millennials and Gen Z report spending 1-3 hours on social media per day with nearly 34% spending 3-5 hours per day..

HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU SPEND ON SOCIAL MEDIA PER DAY ON AVERAGE?



HOW LIKELY ARE YOU WILLING TO PARTICIPATE IN VIRAL TRENDS?

Very unlikely, never have participated in viral trends Somewhat unlikely Neutral Somewhat Likely Very likely, I have participated in several viral trends



EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY REPRESENTATION

Black millennials and Gen Z not only use social media as a means of engaging with their community, but lean into it as an eCommerce platform with 86% of respondents admitted to purchasing something after seeing it on social media and at least one purchase occurred without ever leaving the app.

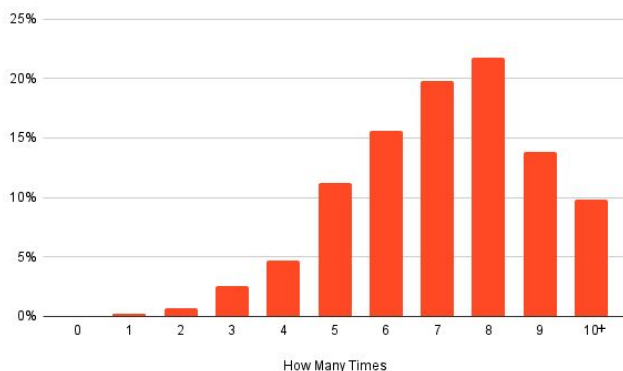


respondents have purchased a product after seeing it on social media

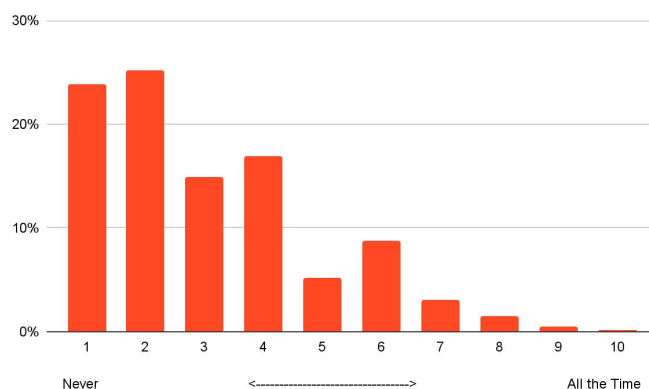


HOWEVER, MANY STILL DON'T FEEL REPRESENTED IN A BRAND'S ADVERTISING.

How Many Times In 2023 Have You Seen An Advertising Campaign That You Felt Was Performative Or Insincere When Representing A Diverse Group Of People?



On A Scale Of 1 Through 10 Where 1 Is Never And 10 Is All The Time, How Often Do You Feel Represented By Brands In Their Advertising Or Branded Content?



Sources: BMG Survey Data

CULTURAL OWNERSHIP AND APPROPRIATION

Our survey revealed that

86%

of Black millennials and Gen Z **actively seek out and follow publications, media personalities, or content** that are **Black-owned or for a Black audience.**

And a staggering

88%

purchased a product or supported a brand specifically

because they felt represented in its ads.



88%

of respondents believe **cultural appropriation is a serious issue in today's society.**

82%

of respondents stopped supporting a brand **because of bad or culturally insensitive advertising.**

Sources: BMG Survey Data

CULTURAL OWNERSHIP AND APPROPRIATION

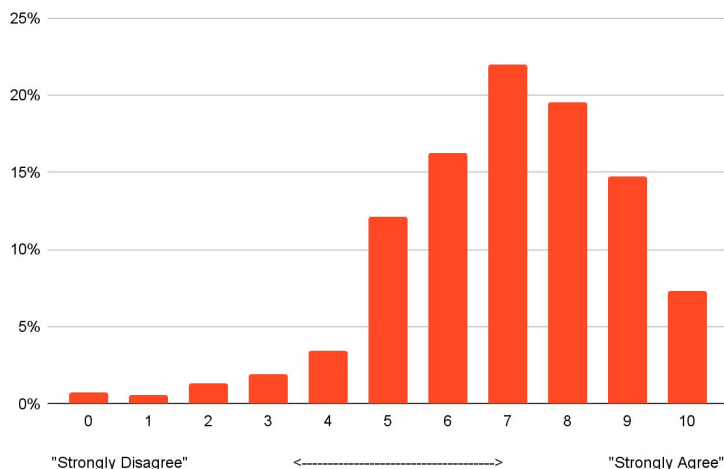


The Black community can discern when brands are **inauthentic** by examining how they portray Black people, their language usage, and whether they have a history of supporting Black causes or issues. If brands are seen as exploiting or profiting from Black culture without giving back to the community, it can severely damage their reputation and erode trust.

28% do not think it's appropriate for brands to use cultural symbols

practices, or vernacular in their marketing.

Majority of respondents believe that increasing representation of Black, Indigenous, and people of color in executive or marketing roles **would lead to a reduction in cases of cultural appropriation.** With the results as shown:



74% have witnessed cultural appropriation

or content stealing from influencers or content creators.

33% do not think it's appropriate for influencers

or content creators to use cultural symbols, practices, or vernacular in their content that is different from their own.



80% have boycotted a brand

or product because of cultural appropriation.

CULTURAL OWNERSHIP AND APPROPRIATION

In today's market, brands often try to relate to younger consumers by using slang that they believe is synonymous with Gen Z. However, this slang is often rooted in appropriating African American Vernacular English (AAVE) as well as Black Queer or LGBTIA+ culture. Words like "Sis," "Bae," "Periodt," "Cap/No Cap," "Pressed," and "Spill the tea" are frequently misidentified as "internet slang" when, in fact, they have their roots in Black culture that spans decades. This erases the unique cultural significance of AAVE while isolating the intended audience and appearing insincere.

While individuals from other ethnicities may benefit from using AAVE to appear cool or edgy, it is important to note that many Black people are often stigmatized and unfairly judged for using the same vernacular. Moreover, when non-Black brands, businesses, and creators profit from Black identity without proper consideration or strong, positive connection to the Black community, it reinforces the idea that Black culture is only valuable when commodified and consumed. It is essential for brands to acknowledge and respect the cultural origins of linguistic elements and actively work to support and uplift marginalized communities.

Still, there are significant benefits when brands specifically engage with Black consumers in their marketing efforts as long as they are mindful of a few key aspects to consider and cultural nuances within the Black community. These include:

- 1. Representation:** Ensure authentic representation of Black people in campaigns, avoiding stereotypes and tokenism, and collaborating respectfully and equitably with cultural creators and communities.
- 2. Language:** Use inclusive and respectful language in campaigns, product descriptions, and marketing materials, refraining from using derogatory terms or language that may offend or marginalize Black people.
- 3. Research:** Understand the Black community's history, traditions, and customs to ensure campaigns are sensitive and knowledgeable about their experiences.
- 4. Feedback:** Engage with cultural producers and communities, seek diverse perspectives, and be open to feedback from experts and consultants who can provide insights and guidance.
- 5. Tone:** Be mindful of the tone used when communicating with the Black community, as it can convey authenticity or insincerity, impacting trust and credibility.

CREATOR COLLABORATION

Brands should consider several crucial factors when seeking collaborations with Black publishers, creators, and influencers.

First and foremost, it is vital to approach these collaborations thoughtfully and respectfully. Recognize the unique experiences and perspectives that Black influencers bring to the table, understanding that their voice and content style is integral to the success of the collaboration and engagement with the audience they've built..

To achieve an authentic outcome, it is important to allow content collaborations to reflect the influencer's own voice. Brands should not try to dictate the exact messaging or tone of the influencer's content. Instead, grant them creative freedom to develop content that resonates with their audience and remains true to their personal brand. Their audience has specific expectations and trusts the influencer's voice, so anything that deviates from that may be perceived as inauthentic.



76%

of respondents think social media algorithms **restrict content** posted by Black people or **prevent it from the potential of going viral** compared to content posted non-Black individuals.

Still,

85%

think that Black influencers or content creators **have an equal access to brand partnerships** as non-Black influencers.

However, a study conducted in 2021 by The Influencer League and MSL revealed that the **income disparity** between white and Black influencers **is approximately 35% less.**

Sources : BMG Survey Data | <https://mslgroup.com/whats-new-at-msl/msl-study-reveals-racial-pay-gap-influencer-marketing>

CREATOR COLLABORATION



of Black viewers **are more likely to buy from brands that feature someone from their identity group** in advertisements.

Source: Nielsen: Black DIS Report October 2022

Black adults were

71%



more likely to buy products endorsed by influencers on social media

Source: Nielsen: Black DIS Report October 2022

CREATIVE BEST PRACTICES

Developing content that resonates with Black millennials and Gen Z requires deeply understanding their cultural nuances and preferences. To effectively engage with these groups, embracing authenticity and avoiding appropriating or exploiting Black culture is essential. Your content should genuinely reflect an understanding of their experiences and showcase a sincere commitment to their community. Additionally, inclusivity plays a crucial role, and it's important to feature diverse voices and experiences from all segments of the Black community, including Black immigrant, queer, or rural experiences. You can create a more inclusive and representative narrative by highlighting various perspectives found in places like Black Twitter (X) and TikTok

Before launching any campaign, thorough research and feedback sessions with your target groups are vital. This lets you gain insights into their preferences, ensuring your content is culturally appropriate and relevant. Conducting media assessments and quality assurance on your marketing materials is essential to avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes or inadvertently offending your audience.

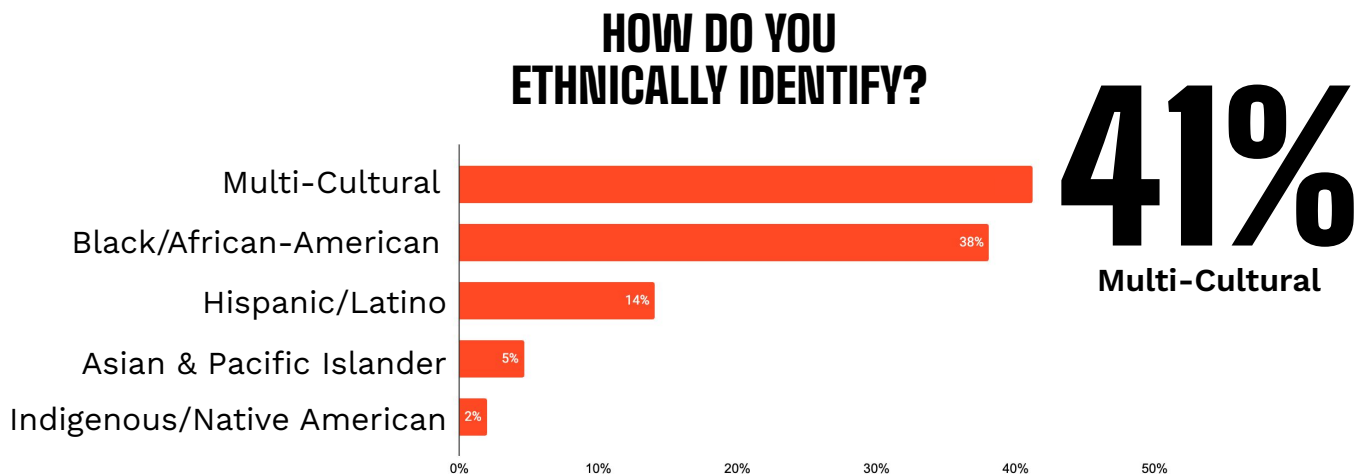
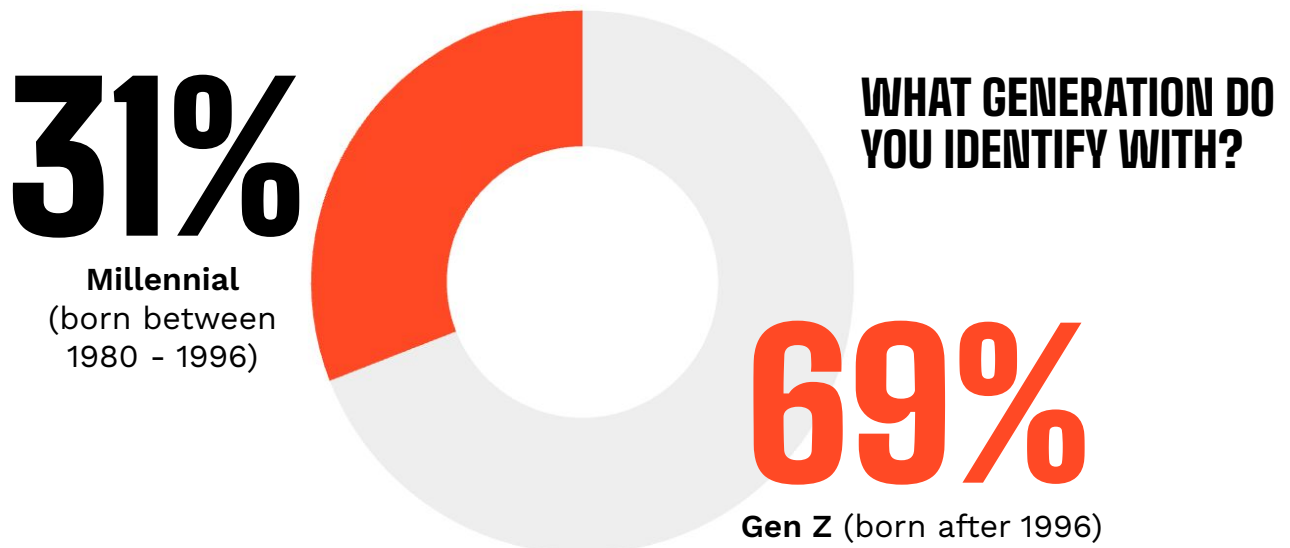
To ensure a successful and diverse digital marketing campaign, consider the following checklist items:



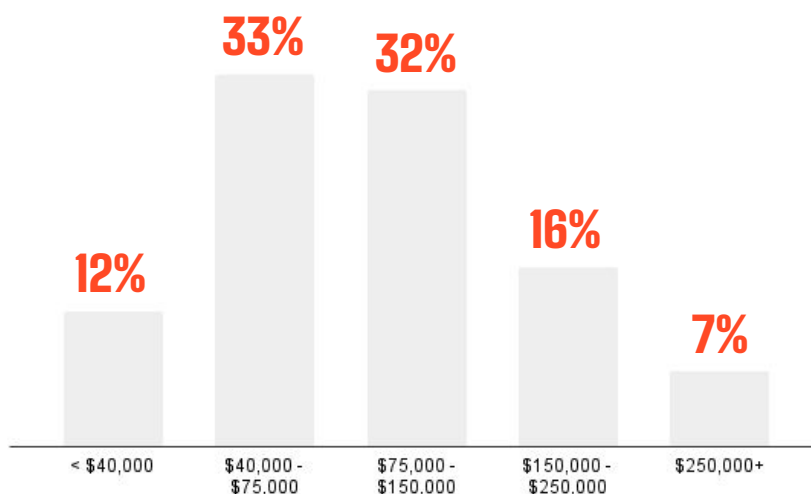
1. Embrace authenticity and inclusivity in your content.
2. Conduct comprehensive research on your target audience's preferences.
3. Seek feedback from diverse groups to test and refine your content.
4. Review your materials for cultural insensitivity and harmful stereotypes.
5. Empower and involve your BIPOC employees in providing insights and feedback on your campaign.
6. Provide cultural competency and sensitivity training for your employees.
7. Continuously monitor your campaign's performance and be ready to adjust your strategy based on feedback and data.

Engaging in open conversations with your organization's BIPOC employees can provide valuable insights into the preferences and concerns of the community. By leveraging their expertise, you can create culturally appropriate content that resonates with your target audience and fosters a deeper connection with Black millennials and Gen Z.

SURVEY RESPONDENT INSIGHTS



WHAT'S YOUR ESTIMATED HOUSEHOLD INCOME?



Sources: BMG Survey Data

THANK YOU FROM BLAVITY MEDIA GROUP

Ultimately, the success of a brand's marketing efforts within the Black community hinges on its ability to establish meaningful connections and demonstrate a genuine commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. By adopting the insights and best practices outlined in this white paper report brands can navigate the complexities of cultural appreciation, avoid appropriation, and build authentic relationships that drive business growth while making a positive impact.

We hope this guide serves as a roadmap for brands looking to create meaningful connections with the Black community, fostering a more inclusive and equitable future for all. Together, we can ensure that every voice is heard, every perspective is respected, and every individual is valued.

The team at Blavity Inc. can help brands authentically reach and connect with these audiences by leveraging their expertise in cultural trends, storytelling, and community engagement to create impactful campaigns that resonate with the unique experiences and aspirations of the Black community.

[CONTACT US TO LEARN MORE.](#)

