



# Ebony Marketing Systems

Multicultural Market Research

## Quick Guide: Understanding Black Americans in 2021





# On Authentically Connecting with the Black Community

Dear Marketer,

The importance and influence of the African American consumer have never been greater. Black Americans have a buying power of a tremendous \$1.4 trillion – and that figure is expected to rise to \$1.8 trillion by 2024. What’s more, at 13.4% of the total U.S. population, African Americans spend in greater proportion to their representation in several key consumer categories, sometimes representing over 20 percent of the market share. Black young adults are also well-known to be trendsetters who influence the spending habits of consumers outside of their ethnic group, bringing even ethnic-oriented products into the mainstream.

The facts leave no room for doubt: if you neglect African Americans in your marketing strategy, you’re ignoring a valuable target group and shortchanging your bottom line.

Despite the significance of this market segment, many brands struggle to form a meaningful connection with the African-American consumer. Some companies make the mistake of haphazardly inserting African Americans into ads without considering whether those images or roles have cultural resonance for the Black community. Other brands turn their attention to Black consumers only when cultural or current events spotlight African American issues, then abruptly move on to other things when the light fades.

African Americans aren’t shy about expressing what they want from companies. The group shows strong brand loyalty to companies that genuinely and consistently reflect the Black cultural experience in their marketing. Black people want to feel their spent dollars are appreciated and that Black consumers are a welcome part of the brand. For success, your marketing strategy must have a long-term plan that deliberately and authentically embraces African Americans within the context of their culture and lifestyle.

This short guide is designed to help your brand understand how to connect authentically with African Americans, better understand the Black community and market, and develop strategies that drive long-term loyalty and growth. When done right, marketing to African Americans can be a win for everyone.

Kai Fuentes, President and CEO of Ebony Marketing Systems



LivingScapes™





# Understanding Lifestyles

First and foremost, marketers must understand that African Americans are not a monolithic group. With a population of 48.2 million, Black Americans are a diverse people with varied backgrounds, tastes, interests, and viewpoints. As with any demographic, such diversity is strongly influenced by geography, education, socio-economic status, and ethnicity.

Geographically, African Americans are strongly concentrated in the South. Over half (56 percent) live in Southern states, particularly Texas, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi. Outside of the South, New York, and California are the states with the highest number of Black residents, while 19 percent of Black people live in the Midwest. African Americans tend to live in large cities within a metropolitan area. The cities with the highest Black populations are New York, Atlanta, Chicago, and Washington, D.C.

While the vast majority of the Black population are American-born, about 4.2 million are immigrants from the Caribbean, Africa, and other countries. Statistics from 2015 show that approximately 6.9 percent of the adult U.S. population identify as multiracial, with 11 percent of the total identifying as Black-White biracial.

Despite such wide diversity, the Black population shares certain commonalities. Black people take great pride in their racial identity and place family and community at the center of their lives. The group especially enjoys partaking in cultural activities that feature Black creators or participants, whether music, dance, art, literature, television, movies, or sports.

Black consumers are notable tech-lovers, with 98 percent of the population owning a smartphone. The group loves to consume media across all channels, and enjoy watching live TV, gaming, and streaming audio, particularly radio and podcasts.

Black people are also avid users of social media, especially Twitter. Familiarly known as “Black Twitter,” a large percentage of the Black Twitter population enjoy using this platform to share and discuss topics of interest to the Black community, from social justice issues to exciting brands to cultural experiences.

**"Black people take great pride in their racial identity and place family and community at the center of their lives."**



# CultureScapes™





# Understanding Cultures

African Americans are fiercely proud of their culture and heritage and are keenly aware of the enormous influence black culture has on American society. From jazz to hip-hop, fashion trends to dance moves, slang to soul food, African American culture has a “cool factor” that other groups repeatedly gravitate toward.

That said, black culture is more than artistic innovations and forms of self-expression produced by the community, but a shared experience of being Black in the U.S. In this sense, “black culture” encompasses traditions and customs, family and friendship dynamics, humor, perceptions, problems, understandings, and even axioms that are common in, or unique to, the Black community.

African Americans place a high value on brands that authentically represent and celebrate the Black cultural experience. Eighty percent of African Americans say that they relate better to ads that connect with their culture, and 66 percent say that they are loyal to brands that authentically reflect their race or ethnicity. But using hip-hop or the latest slang in your marketing isn’t going to cut it. To truly reach this market segment, the brand must understand cultural authenticity from the Black perspective.

The best way to ensure that your marketing campaigns resonate is to have African Americans on your marketing team who can provide you with unique insights and cultural guidance. But even with such guidance, the rest of the team should take the time to listen to and engage with the Black community. Only with true knowledge and understanding can brands produce respectful, authentic, and resonant messages.



**"Eighty percent of African Americans say that they relate better to ads that connect with their culture."**



MindScapes™





# Understanding Consumer Behavior

Black American's consumer behavior is primarily influenced by their cultural experience. African Americans are conscious of the physical image they project, as they value communicating a sense of cultural pride and self-expression. To this end, Black people outspend relative to their population on beauty and grooming products, fragrances, personal soap, and women and girl's apparel. In the category of ethnic hair care and beauty aids, African Americans carry a whopping 85 percent of the market.

The demographic is 20 percent more likely to pay extra for a product that is consistent with the image they seek to convey and likes to shop at high-end stores, such as Saks Fifth Avenue and Nieman-Marcus. In contrast to the general population, Black Americans prefer to shop in-store rather than online and find the experience relaxing — at least during non-pandemic times.

With respect to groceries, African Americans are increasingly seeking to buy local foods, although the definition of "local" varies across categories. A large majority (76 percent) are concerned with pesticide use in food production and antibiotic use in animal production (71 percent) and have expressed concern about the rising cost of food due to trade tariffs.

African Americans like purchasing from brands that align with their social values. Fifty-eight percent of Black adult consumers expect the brands they buy to take a stance on social issues (16 percent higher than the general population), and 37 percent affirm they'll buy from that brand if the brand does take a stance.

On the path to purchase, Black Americans respond strongly to positive images of African-Americans in advertisements — especially if the ad offers the endorsement of a celebrity in the same ethnic group.

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# Know Your Market





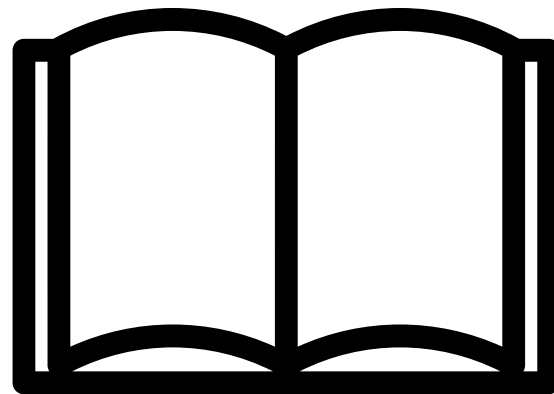
# Emergent Demographics

As with any demographic, marketers should take no shortcuts when trying to learn about African American consumers. Identify which segments of the African American community your services or product serves best, and then take a deep dive into that community's unique concerns, needs, and desires.

Follow relevant African American social media influencers, read or listen to pertinent blogs, websites, and podcasts popular among your target group. Engage with the community through polls and questionnaires to hear voices in the community, identify gaps in the markets, and understand mistakes that competitor brands have made with respect to this group. Most importantly, engage with group members in a thoughtful, genuine way to develop authentic connections and understand perspectives within the group.

Again, do not underestimate the importance of having African Americans on your marketing team. African American marketers can provide critical insights, steer you away from tone-deaf ideas, and help the brand produce resonant campaigns that foster authentic relationships.

**"Engage with group members in a thoughtful, genuine way to develop authentic connections and understand perspectives within the group."**



## Education

- 88 percent of Black people have a high school diploma; 26 percent over age 25 have a Bachelor's degree, and 7.8 percent have graduate degrees.
- Between the academic years 2000-2001 and 2015-2016, the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to Black people increased by 75 percent.
- Black women are the most educated demographic in the U.S., in terms of associate and bachelor's degrees, yet earn less money for doing the same work as white peers.





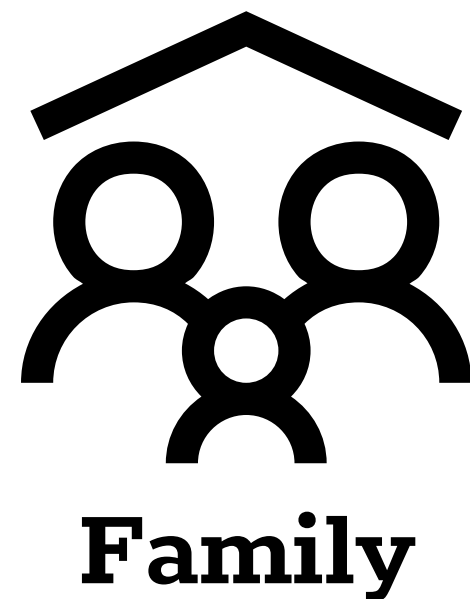
# Emergent Demographics Cont.

- African-Americans are living longer than before but are still more likely to die earlier than whites.
- African-Americans live with diseases more common at an older age, including high blood pressure, diabetes, and stroke.
- In 2017, 89.4 percent of African Americans had health care coverage, compared to 93.7 percent of white Americans.
- In 2018, 8.7 percent of Black adults sought mental health care services compared with 18.6 percent of non-Hispanic white adults.



## Health

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## Family

- 41 percent of Black children live in a 2-parent household.
- 51 percent live in a single-parent household, 16 percent of which are headed by fathers.
- From 1990 to 2019, the percentage of unmarried Black women increased from 37 to 47 percent; the percentage of "never married" Black men decreased from 51 percent to 43 percent.



# Ongoing Impacts





## The Call for Justice

In 2020, the murder of George Floyd set the nation reeling, kicking off months of protests from coast to coast. Many businesses opted to take a stand and spoke out against police violence and racism.

The majority of African Americans, along with nearly 60 percent of U.S. consumers, have said that they expect brands to take a stand on social justice issues. Seventy-three percent of African-American say they saw companies acting as a “force for good” during the protests.

At the same time, African Americans are skeptical about brands that appear to voice concern about social justice issues only when a high-profile occurs. Even if the company means well, making “one-off” comments about social justice can give the impression that the business is exploiting a tragedy for a marketing opportunity. Taking a superficial approach to serious matters can have the opposite effect on your audience than the one you intended.

If your brand wants to take a stand on social justice matters, be prepared to make a long-term commitment. Slogans and hashtags mean nothing without action behind them. Identify where your brand can make a difference to the African American community, whether making regular donations of money or products to a relevant cause, establishing a scholarship, or working directly with people in the community. Your good works will speak volumes.

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# Ready to Engage with the Black Community?

EMS is an innovative pioneer in conducting marketing research studies among multicultural and difficult-to-reach population segments. EMS also has a rich and diverse staff that can provide services that include special language capabilities. Our mission is to provide our clients with creative and innovative marketing research solutions utilizing our best research practices. We operate at the highest level of integrity in the area of survey research, data analysis, and management support services.

## Connect with Experts

Connect with us online at [ebonysystems.com](http://ebonysystems.com)  
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## Sources where not noted:

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