



culturebeat
PULSE



PURPOSE

In our world today, with myriad sources for information, the pervasiveness of social networks, and the fragmentation of media, keeping track of what matters can be difficult. More importantly, making sense of how the news and events coming from these sources may impact your brand and your marketing strategy is now more important than ever before.

CultureBeat PULSE is our humble initiative to bring you a consolidated, curated ensemble of relevant topics on multiculturalism and multicultural consumers. Our goal is to keep you well-informed on what's going on in our society and marketplace and, most importantly, why it matters.

In each edition, our multicultural research practitioners will bring you a mini collection of newsworthy events, conversations, and trends that are culturally relevant—with an informed point of view on why people from different walks of life, cultures, and ethnicities should matter to your organization, with the intent to serve as thought and conversation starters for the marketing community.

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MULTICULTURAL EMPOWERMENT: FAD OR A CULTURAL EVOLUTION HERE TO STAY?

By Ashleigh Williams, *Research Director, Qualitative Research*
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With the recent cultural and political climate, a heightened desire for positive representation has developed to counteract negative narratives. Across the nation, welcoming and embracing multiculturalism has become a priority in local communities as a crusade to help break barriers and shatter stereotypes. Programs like *Girls Who Code* and their multicultural subgroups (*Black Girls Code*, *Latina Girls Code*) advocate and encourage people of diverse backgrounds to engage in computer sciences and other STEM fields in which they are vastly underrepresented.

In 2006, Beverly Bond established a special awards celebration called *Black Girls Rock* to celebrate Black girls of all ages who are spearheading social change and making contributions to Black culture. The show filled a void for young Black girls who longed for positive representation and inspiration in all societal facets. Additionally, Girls Inc. (founders of *Black Girls Rock*) led the charge in establishing a women's mentoring program/camp to help pass on confidence in self-identity and to inspire activism among younger generations.

Some may think this movement bodes well in urban environments; however, this spirit of empowerment isn't just happening in communities with larger multicultural populations.

Montpelier High School in Vermont, with a predominately Caucasian student population, recently raised the Black Lives Matter flag in honor of Black History Month this past February to show solidarity with its small Black student population. This crusade also extends to social media with pages like *MTV Decoded*, a weekly video series that seeks to tackle race and pop culture topics to help change perspectives.

If movies like Marvel's *Black Panther*, *Crazy Rich Asians*, and *A Wrinkle in Time* are any indication of trends, it's evident that entertainment with a predominately multicultural cast cannot only survive, but thrive. *A Wrinkle in Time* breaks barriers by casting a multicultural protagonist in its lead role, bringing this story from the 1960s when it was written into present day. *Black Panther* was one of the first major motion pictures that featured a predominately Black cast with international appeal. And with the most recent release, *Crazy Rich Asians* featured a full Asian cast with a traditional love story line in an industry that many believe lacks an Asian perspective. These movies have been especially inspirational to younger generations, who look at their characters as role models and reflections of themselves.

OUR POV

REPRESENTATION MATTERS.

If you live, work, or run a business in a large metropolitan area, this may come as no surprise. So, ask yourself how you, in your role, are living this movement towards multiculturalism and impacting the way you embrace it so that your brand can survive the test of times.

If, on the other hand, your turf is in a small, suburban, or even rural community, familiarize yourself with the movement and act now so you are prepared to embrace it and grow with it, even if your local population is not largely diverse.

If you're a business owner or a decision maker, the fastest and most efficient way to embed multiculturalism in your organization is to hire multicultural talent and work together to openly talk about cultural/racial issues that matter from social and commercial angles.

MULTICULTURAL DOLLARS SPEAK VOLUMES.

Specifically, Black women are not only making their voices heard in social and politics arenas, they are also using their checkbooks to exercise their buying power. [Nielsen reports](#) that 60% of Black women agree they are more likely to purchase brands that support a cause they care about.

Overall: ask yourself if your brand, your services, your products are in tune with the cultural values that consumers and audiences of diverse backgrounds are willing to pay for...and if not, get ready to change, and change fast! It will help your business grow.



TRANS INCLUSION

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In early August 2018, over 45 Hollywood organizations, including Time's Up 50/50 by 2020, cosigned a letter calling on Hollywood to include trans voices in their works. The letter included tips on inclusion—casting trans roles authentically, engaging experienced and trained trans creators in the development process, and making all projects trans-inclusive even if their focus isn't trans people. The letter states that, despite all the progress Hollywood has made (popular movies and television shows have helped debunk harmful stereotypes about gays and lesbians and sped up the timeline for marriage equality), trans people have largely been left behind.

Probably the biggest spark to this letter has been trans actors speaking up about the difficulties of securing roles. Earlier this year, Scarlett Johansson was cast to play Dante “Tex” Gill, a trans man, in the upcoming movie *Rug & Tug*—just a year after Johansson played a Japanese character in *Ghost in the Shell*, which received a lot of backlash for this whitewashed casting. This sparked an outcry over how cisgender (people whose gender identity matches the gender they were assigned at birth—not transgender) actors are disproportionately cast as trans characters, ultimately leading to Johansson stepping down from the role. Trans actors almost never get cast to play cisgender characters; so, to see one of the limited roles available to them, a trans character, going to a cisgender person begs the question: is Hollywood trying to erase trans people even in a movie explicitly about them? The letter also explains how this is especially harmful given the recent administrative erasures of trans people—the military ban, allowing health insurance companies to deny medical care, and the lack of protections for trans youth in schools—and the myriad routine

challenges facing this community, such as higher rates of unemployment, poverty, bullying, job discrimination, murder, and suicide.

Yet, unfortunately, this is not a new problem; media has struggled to get it right in the past, and this call to action is just the latest criticism directed at the lack of diversity in Hollywood over the past few years. Women, people of color, and lesbians and gays have all made it clear that more authentic stories about their lives need to be told in film and on television. So, when we see more diverse media in our entertainment options, it's important to remember that they aren't just part of some cultural fad—they're the result of people pushing Hollywood to have their stories told and calling for more authentic representation of their lives and experiences.

- A few years ago, the lack of diversity at the Oscars sparked the hashtag #OscarsSoWhite and a broader social media movement to make the entertainment industry more diverse. The criticism grew so strong that the Academy has taken steps to make their membership more diverse. We've also started to see more recognition of diverse characters and movies.
- *Ghostbusters* and *Ocean's Eight*, remakes of classic movies with women starring as the leads, have been hits. Women, people of color, and LGB people have also broken into the superhero genre—a genre typically dominated by straight, white, male characters—with the TV shows *Supergirl*, *Legends of Tomorrow*, *Black Lightning*, and the upcoming *Batwoman* character (as well as the movies *Black Panther*, *Wonder Woman*, and the upcoming *Captain Marvel*).

- The number of LGBTQ+ movies have increased in recent years as well. *Brokeback Mountain* was groundbreaking when it came out in 2005, but it was years before the next big movie about LGBTQ+ people—*Milk* (2008). Now, it seems like there is at least one every year with *The Imitation Game* (2014), *Freeheld* (2015), *The Danish Girl* (2015), *Carol* (2015), *Moonlight* (2016), *Call Me By Your Name* (2017), and *Love, Simon* (2018).

This comes at a time when so many people feel they can engage in a dialogue with Hollywood about the importance of diversity and inclusion and empowering marginalized people through the stories that Hollywood tells. Social media has been a powerful vehicle for this; people can band together with trending hashtags, like #OscarsSoWhite and #LGBTFansDeserveBetter, that receive so much support that they are difficult to ignore. In Hollywood’s defense, while change may be slow, we can definitely see that Hollywood is listening and taking steps to make changes.

Let’s call it what it is: Hollywood is a business trying to make money. Some people in show business are starting to see that prioritizing the stories of cisgender, heterosexual white men is no longer the safe option it was in the past. People want more diverse stories, and bringing more diverse people into the creative process has helped Hollywood create better films and TV shows—it’s helped them be a better business.

OUR POV

In many ways, Hollywood has been at the forefront of numerous aspects of human life and imagination. Creative folks introduced us to the idea of intergalactic travel, video phone calls, watches that are also phones, devices that let humans fly, etc. So why has it been so hard to stay current when it comes to gender equality?

Hollywood is a collective brand, and collectively they have much to do to get with the times. Now we challenge you to think about your company’s and brand’s take on sexual identity and gender equality: where do you stand? And most importantly: how well equipped is your brand to fairly represent and connect with *all* consumers? What can your brand be doing to embrace multicultural voices and avoid any backlash such as Scarlett Johansson’s *Rug & Tug* casting? An easy first step is hiring multicultural talent and engaging them throughout all parts of the business. By listening to multicultural voices, you can start to embed multiculturalism in your organization and effectively market your brand to multicultural consumers, including the often-overlooked LGBTQ+.



THE MEGHAN MARKLE PHENOMENA: "EVEN THE ROYALS DO IT...WHY DON'T YOU?"

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As market researchers, we understand that how someone self-identifies plays an integral role in how they interact and make decisions in their everyday environment. However, cultural dynamics can be complicated and multi-layered.

Take the Royal Family. It's not a stretch to say that Americans have a love-hate relationship with the royals. While some marvel and view them as a source of escapism, enjoying a glimpse at how the well-to-do live, others connect the royals to the bureaucracy of the past that our country endeavored to distance itself from. However, the recent joining of Meghan Markle and Prince Harry in matrimony has sparked a revival of interest in the royals, especially with Americans who are intrigued by this modern-day love story/fairy tale. In fact, this union has sparked acute interest given that its widespread popularity has helped modernize old traditions by giving them a new spin that aligns with today's modern society—particularly the melding of cultures.

Not surprisingly, much of this interest is driven by Meghan's nationality in combination with the unorthodox union that differs from tradition due to her U.S citizenship and the merging of two cultures. This romance ignited a cultural phenomenon, especially in the African-American community, due to her biracial heritage.

In addition, many viewed their wedding as "unapologetically cultural," not watered down (and true to self in its celebratory nature). This event was a demonstration of modern-day dynamics through the joining of several multi-cultural dimensions. It was saturated with royal tradition, but also afforded a glimpse into the African-American culture through the gospel choir, violist, and incorporation of Negro spirituals into the program.

Conversely, Meghan Markle's rise to notoriety for her romantic relationship with Prince Harry has been somewhat controversial from the start. Her connection to the royal family also brought to light the presence of prejudice to this day (racist remarks from the media about her "tainted bloodline," for instance).

More importantly, Meghan Markle raised the question and dialogue around what it means to have a dual cultural identity, and how to balance identity between two cultures from biracial parents. This controversy and dialogue prompted a deeper examination of the royal family's bloodline which uncovered an African descendant, reflecting the newfound desire for many people to examine their ancestry to help shape how they self-identify.

It's a constant tug-of-war between how others perceive us versus how we see ourselves. Defining elements or terms that shape identity include:

- How the world identifies us...**Race**, the categorization of people into groups based on shared physical traits, stemming from a common genealogy or ancestry.

However, this may not be how we define ourselves...

- **Cultural Affinity** is a state of empathy or proximity one has with a particular culture or group of people through social experiences, emotions, interests, and consciousness/awareness. One can have an affinity with more than one cultural group.
- In addition, **Ethnic Identity** is a personal, social, psychological construct of how people identify themselves in terms of their belonging to a larger cultural group, and how that group relates to others, including language, arts, customs, social norms, religion, etc. Ethnic identity can overlap with race or be distinct from it. Affinity can play a role in how someone identifies themselves.

Those who are biracial may struggle with these dynamics and labels. Often, they ask themselves, "Which cultural group/s am I a part of?" Most often, they choose to forego labels placed on themselves by others by defining what's right for them. With the forthcoming birth of the new royal family member, it will be most interesting to see how the dialogue and definitions sift globally.

This new multicultural generation that the Duchess and Duke of Sussex's child will be a part of is the physical manifestation of what diversity is. A combination of cultural perspectives that interact with each other to provide harmony and hopefully build more empathy when it comes to the human experience.



OUR POV

- There is currently a gap with speaking to a bicultural audience who will become the majority sooner than you expect.

The U.S. Census estimates America's whites **will become a minority in 2043**. The Multiracial American population is growing at a rate **three times as fast as the population as a whole**. In addition, how people self-identify is shifting, with many people redefining how they view themselves differently due to DNA ancestry testing.

- How can companies speak to the duality of cultures?

A majority (55%) say they have been subjected to racial slurs or jokes, and about one-in-four (24%) have felt annoyed because people have **made assumptions about their racial background**. While we want to be cognizant of cultures, be cautious in using stereotypes, given that people move in different cultures and some of these stereotypes are inaccurate or compete with one another.

2018-2020: THE YEARS FOR BRANDS TO BE BOLDER THAN EVER

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Picture this: you are out and about—maybe at the store with your child, maybe at a coffee shop waiting for a friend to show up, or maybe on the train on your way to work when, suddenly, you are approached by a total stranger and harassed (and I mean really harassed) because your hair is too long, or your shirt is too blue, or because you breathe through your nose. Ridiculous, right?

Most would agree that it takes an irrational individual or a twisted reason to engage in such behavior. Sadly, 2018 has seen this picture repeat itself time and again, and it has happened to perfectly decent and innocent people because they were “too black,” or because they spoke another language, or because their attire looked suspicious, or—more astonishingly—because they were not “white enough.”

News and accounts of such occurrences have been all too common this year and are, undeniably, on the rise. Either you hear or read about it in media, know someone who experiences something similar, or have the unfortunate experience to live it yourself. In the land of the American Dream, minorities and, consequently, everyone (since minorities are on the verge of no longer being the minority), is living a reality that seems more like a nightmare. We have become more divided as a society and appear to be living in an era of emboldened intolerance. FBI statistics further prove this disturbing reality. Their recent release of hate crime statistics for 2017 show a staggering increase in hate crimes—17% over the prior year’s figure. That’s the third year in a row evidencing an increase. Shouldn’t it be going the other way?

The cowardice of intolerance has many faces, unfortunately, and some would say it is an equal opportunity offender: of the 7,106 incidents reported to the FBI in 2017 (operative word being “reported;” imagine what it might look like with all the unreported instances!).

- 58% were race, ethnicity, or ancestry related.
- 22% were the result of religious bias.
- 18% stemmed from sexual-orientation or gender-identity bias.
- 1.6% resulted from disability bias.

In the face of this intolerance, the CultureBeat® team joins the many voices that call for better standards in our society (better moral standards, greater empathy, more involvement in advocacy, and more action from everyone) to get our society moving forward, not backward! In the simplest of terms, we advocate for the golden rule as a vehicle to have sincere and strong relationships with your customers.

When we say everyone, that includes companies and brands. Yes, your brand too! In doing a lot of qualitative research with consumers of myriad backgrounds, we know that what is going on in our country is having a direct impact on people of all backgrounds. We hear it, and we sense it. And it should not be a surprise to you and those focusing on strategy in your company that consumers expect your brand(s) to be part of this movement toward a better society. Consumers expect this because your brands are important players in our society, and you can have a powerful impact.



And, we believe that for your brand to succeed and thrive, you should take a stand for respect, tolerance, empathy and inclusion! We dare you... because we know you can do it.

Nike is a great example of a brand taking a stand. Earlier this year, Nike took another bold step when they made Colin Kaepernick's journey a centerpiece of their advertising campaign. It worked for Nike because they know their customer base and know their audiences are aligned with the athlete's sentiment. Sure, some people took offense to it, started burning their Nike apparel and trying to boycott the brand, but the brand's ad had millions of impressions and [reportedly registered a huge sales increase](#). To be clear, we are not suggesting that the success of the campaign was because it was controversial, but because Nike stood true to their principles and sincerely took a stand.

Consumers surely related to the principle behind it and were able to connect with the sentiment.

By contrast, not taking a stand and taking actions to make your company wiser, more inclusive and more empathetic to your consumer base could potentially come with a price tag (both financial and in terms of brand engagement). Consider the backlash Starbucks faced when it [was accused of being "a little too late" in training their employees on identifying and dealing with bias](#). Surely, Starbucks will recover from it, they did the right thing acknowledging their oversight and trying to correct the course.

But what if you're not the marketing behemoth that is Nike? What if you can't close shop to train your employees after a disastrous bias-based incident? There's still a lot you can do!

What we are advocating for is getting to know your consumers intimately. Walk in their shoes; bring their views and beliefs into your boardrooms; and make them an integral part of your business strategy. If you don't know your diverse consumer base and how to connect with them, how are you planning to succeed with them? There are a lot of other things you could start doing to understand multicultural consumers—simple, yet impactful, ways to be bold and become better at advocating and living empathy, tolerance, and inclusion:

- Be proactive, not reactive! Define a strategy for diversity now, before disaster knocks on your door.
- Procure diversity, inclusion, and internal bias training from an expert consultant for your entire company, from top to bottom (nobody, from your CEO to your interns, is immune to bias!)
- Hire employees of a different background, either racial, religious, or of different gender identity or sexual orientation.
- Pay everyone a fair salary—what they deserve because of their value, not because of their gender.

- Give women the same chance you give men to be leaders in your company.
- Encourage volunteering so your staff gets to see the realities of others.
- Participate in diversity and inclusion training programs.
- Connect with your consumers.
- Take a stand!

How do all these initiatives tie to your brand? Simple: it is way more difficult to understand diversity and your diverse consumers without having diversity within your organization!

At this year's ANA Multicultural Marketing and Diversity Conference, a speaker said, "*It is mathematically impossible to grow without growing multicultural audiences.*" We believe this to be true. Most importantly, we hope every marketer embraces it!

The next few years are yours. We dare you to be bold and take a stand.



culturebeat

The multicultural research division of C+R Research.

CultureBeat, C+R Research's multicultural research division, helps brands understand how different cultures, ethnicities, and lifestyles—and the dynamics that intertwine them—influence their consumers.



latinoeyes[®]

LatinoEyes[®] is the research consultancy division of C+R Research that specializes in U.S. Hispanic and Latin American consumers and shoppers.

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