



## CONSUMER CONNECTIONS SERIES

# Amplifying the Voice of the African American Consumer—5 Key Takeaways

# 1

### While some non-POC may have started to move on, the Black community is still hurting. Trauma is very real and current.

The emotions and feelings that members of the Black community are experiencing are still very raw. Although racial injustice is not a new experience for them, and a month has passed since George Floyd's death received national attention and outcry, Black consumers are still experiencing pain daily. With new incidents constantly and regularly happening, Black people find it difficult to focus, grieve, or heal. Every new incident can cause them to revisit past personal trauma they have tried to suppress.

A key cultural pillar of the Black collective is the reliance on community, also regarded as the "village,"

an approach that leads the community to be protective and always looking after their own. Now, more than ever, they are clinging to these values to help them through.

Our panelists describe a "Black Experience"; it causes them to seek comfort from their own community during trying times. It is a community consisting of family and friends who have shared the same struggles along with similar feelings and emotions that accompany those struggles. It is here where they can share their raw emotions of anger, sadness, exhaustion, and frustration.

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*Eight minutes and 46 seconds. Eight minutes and 46 seconds. He held his knee on this guy's neck. Not on his back. Eight minutes and 46 seconds, and you saw the spirit leave that dead man's body. You know, man crying for his mom who had died two years prior. Everyone knows if you cry for your mother at a certain age, you know it's your time to go. I mean, just the attitude like, "I'm going to do this in front of the world. I'm going to get away with that." I live here in Kentucky where Breonna Taylor was killed. They kicked in her door, shot this baby eight times.*

*Sometimes I feel like every Black person is representing every Black person, which is a very heavy burden to bear. Like when I step in a meeting sometimes, I'm not just representing myself in this meeting, I am representing all Black people. Should I feel like that? I don't know, but I feel like I do because when a Black person does something bad or wrong or whatever it may be, someone turns to me and be like, "Hey, Carlos, what's that about?" And I'm like, "Well, I don't know him. I don't know her."*

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# 2

## Educating others is a burden and a mission Black consumers feel obligated to uphold, as many are revisiting conversations with their non-POC counterparts.

In the wake of Americans re-examining their cultural biases and the systemic racism plaguing organizations that led us here, Black consumers are finding themselves rehashing or having conversations with non-POC for the first time. They find themselves actively approached by non-POC who, after witnessing the death of George Floyd, are more willing to have these tough conversations.

Our panelists feel like they have a duty to educate anyone who will listen in an effort to

change the collective mindset around injustice in the Black community. Most feel like they have no choice because the very lives of their family members and friends are at stake.

In some cases, revisiting these conversations with non-POC is a welcome change. Black people find themselves retelling their personal experiences to provide context for non-POC who have found themselves “awakened” by these recent tragedies.

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*Having grown up in Detroit, but then living in a very conservative part of Michigan, and now living in Washington D.C., which is a very progressive area, I have lots of different friends and people that I encounter. And one of the things that I have seen is for the first time in a while, some very conservative folks who would say things like, “Oh, racism doesn’t exist,” and, “That was years ago,” and, “Get over it.” I think for the first time more of them than I’ve seen before are in fact saying, “Oh, okay, wow.” And so I think that opens them up to hear the message now, and to me it’s extremely important, and I actually take it as my duty. So I’m actually taking this time to educate people based on my own personal experiences, but also recommending literature.*

*So we grew up, we go to school, and they teach us about the Boston Tea Party, but then say, “Protests and riots are bad.” there’s tons of literature out there now about systemic racism and things where it’s like, “So, now read some of this literature.” And this isn’t stuff written by Black authors. This is written by diverse sets of authors. So I’m taking this opportunity to say, “Now let’s all educate ourselves on the reality that one group of Americans really face.”*

*At this point, we don’t have a choice. And when they reach out to me, I use the opportunity to let them know, “I’m not okay, and this is why I’m not okay, and how do you feel about what’s going on?” And we have those conversations.*

*The ones who don’t know, those are the best ones to educate, because they’re not against it, but they need to be educated as to why so they understand. So once they understand, most of the people that I’ve come in contact thankfully are more than willing to...wanting to learn and understand, and know how we feel. But you know, there are some that don’t really want to hear, but that’s okay.*

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# 3

## Reoccurring events and arguments around “All Lives Matter” are a constant source of frustration and outrage. However, there is hope that this time is different.

While images of people from all nationalities from across the globe joining together provide a sense of hope that progress is being made in the hearts and minds of non-POC, it often feels like it’s a catch 22: there is hope for real change, but on the flip side, Black consumers are exhausted from the continuous spiral of seeing injustices play out in their communities, and there is a strong perception of indifference from the government and others to take action.

Because emotions are still high, Black consumers are especially sensitive when it comes to observing where people stand on racism and police brutality. They are taking notice of who is making an effort towards change and who remains apathetic or silent. In taking inventory, Black consumers are drawing a line in the sand, purging those who display a disregard in their lives and social media circles. This can include family, friends, social media influencers, and even brands/companies. It’s increasingly clear that lip service is not enough.

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*I was scrolling through Facebook one day, and I saw (an old friend's) posting a picture in her police uniform saying, "All lives matter. All jobs matter...So I had to take the entirety of my day to try to explain to her that a job is not an ethnicity. It's not a protected group. It's not a minority. It's not a racial group. It's not a class. It's a job. You signed up for it, you take the uniform off at the end of the day, and you go on about your life. However, you cannot take your skin off and have people perceive you in a different light, have people not weaponize your skin as a threat. That's just not feasible. So you need to drop this rhetoric of, "All lives matter. All jobs matter." Because the Black Power, the Black Lives Movement is not saying that no other life matters beyond Black lives. We're saying that until Black lives are shown and demonstrated to matter, to be appreciated, to be celebrated, then we cannot have the conversation about other lives mattering, because what we've seen is we're the only lives that don't matter right now, so that's what we're talking about."*

*Yeah, I've unfollowed quite a few, not only celebrities, but like I said, friends, because I feel like you are one of my closest friends, and I think not saying anything is saying a lot...I have to also let my kids know, "You watch this person, you follow this person, you listen to this person, so you think you ought to wear these clothes, and they don't support you and our Black community." So yeah, I did the same thing. I unfollowed friends, family, celebrities.*

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# 4

## There's no turning back for Black consumers, and they are pushing for brands to make genuine changes as a way to communicate true brand authenticity.

Black consumers are seeking brands that show action behind their words. The Black community has noticed over the past month a parade of brands and companies that have produced a “textbook” response that seems to be duplicated and only “customized” with a change of a logo, ultimately rendering their efforts trivial.

Moving forward, they demand internal and external strategies within each brand/organization claiming to be aligned with the Black community, expecting proof and corresponding actions. Words are just not enough. Companies that only take a calculated risk such as a commitment to a one-time

donation, or who communicate in spaces they exclusively inhabit (such as BET, OWN) aren't a sufficient sign of “ally-ship.”

Ben & Jerry's response has been seen as a shining example of what companies and brands should strive for in their efforts to commit to support the Black community. Unapologetically taking a stance, Ben & Jerry's co-founders not only pledge their dollars towards the cause, they denounce racism, have been seen on the front lines of protests and even been arrested. Their efforts are valued even more based on the presumption that their core audience is comprised primarily of non-POC.

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*I'm seeing a lot of companies and a lot of executives and upper-level management of these Fortune 500 companies, et cetera, are saying, "I'm pledging this much to the Black Lives movement," but then there are no specifications, there are no details as far as how this will be implemented, where this will go. You know, we're just not frankly sure how much weight that holds if I'm making sense. And it all looks like it has the same message too. All it looks like is the company's name changed... they swap out the logo. I mean, you're a Fortune 500, you can give... a million is nothing to them. But they didn't even, yeah, they just changed the name of the company. I don't feel like that's really coming from somewhere, I guess, at heart.*

*I don't eat ice cream, but Ben & Jerry's had the wokest response of this whole movement. But I think what Ben & Jerry's did...and what I've been recommending that we do...is say their names, but I don't mean that in a cliché way, I mean that in the 'don't tiptoe around the subject so that your message may be balanced enough so that no one is uncomfortable,' be straightforward...Say where you stand. I don't know if everyone saw Ben & Jerry's response, but Ben & Jerry's went bold. They said names, they said, "This has been a problem forever." I would assume, I don't know for certain, I would assume that the highest percentage of Ben & Jerry's customer base is not Black people. So that's the type of thing where it's like show your integrity, be real.*

*If you want to make real change, then you pass the mic, you pass the baton, you put someone in power who's actually part of the community. Reddit had a great response where one of the founders stepped down. He said, "You know what? Actually, as a white guy, I don't feel like I should be sitting on this platform where most of the people that use it are not white. Give my position to a Black person," and he stepped down.*

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# 5

## Black consumers remain skeptical that brand/company support will last. They feel it's important for brands/companies to know their lives "are not a hashtag."

Black Consumers can see right through the marketing/PR "fluff" and assess which brands are genuinely committing vs. those looking to cover their profits. While this newfound support is nice to see, Black consumers hold frustrations against brands/organizations who showed indifference or opposing stances in the past. In some cases, frustration turns into outrage towards these companies who jump on the bandwagon now that "Black Lives Matter" is "trendy."

Black consumers demand consistency and support over time, long after the news coverage fades. Specifically, when crafting a statement, apologies go a long way with this audience. Admitting any past wrongdoing and honestly assessing internal business policies and practices is seen as a step in the right direction. Only time will tell if this push for change will last...and Black consumers will be vigilant.

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*I'm a businessperson. Companies exist to maximize shareholder value, so if they had a rationale that made sense, stick with it...But think about the NFL for example. The NFL shift on it actually ticked me off more than their initial position against Kaepernick's protest, right? Peacefully protesting, using his First Amendment right, and he got blackballed from the league. And they said, "Well, this is what you do." But now all of a sudden, now that this is a trend, it almost feels to me like the NFL paid attention to the trend, and I think a lot of companies are doing this. "Okay, what percentage of our target consumers are leaning that way, and that's how I'm going to make my decision." It's based on no integrity, right?*

*I was watching my social media timeline kind of vigilantly within the first week of protesting, and I was looking to see are these influencers that I'm associated with, are they saying things? Are they speaking out? Are they going beyond a black square that literally does nothing for anybody? Are they making a statement? Are they making a donation? Are they using their platform to the fullest extent to speak out against this? Otherwise silence is silence. So I was looking for that, and I gave them probably a 48- to 72-hour window, and if I didn't see anything, then it's as simple as I'm not following you, I'm no longer supporting you, because it's clear to me that you're not supporting me or people who look like me or the advancement of this issue.*

*I think they should make a commitment to educating their employees, you know, have diversity programs. One of the things, which is I guess unfortunate/fortunate is that we spend a majority of our time at work with the people that we work with. We see these people every day.*

*Appoint Black people to governing positions, positions of leadership, positions of power. It's one thing to give money, but that's not anything. (...) We've seen with the distribution of these economic bailout checks, basically, the COVID relief funds. Here's \$1,200, that's basically what a million dollars is to a Fortune 500 company. It's a \$1,200 stimulus check in the midst of a pandemic. And what we are seeing is [that] racism is a pandemic [and] that is there's no cure for it besides literally stepping away from it and abandoning these walls that you've built in your head around the issue.*

*Don't just do it now because it's like just saying, "Oh, we want to look good to the consumers." It should be an ongoing thing representing your employees, your company.*

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### **C+R's Take:** History is being made. It's time to pick a side.

The Black community is moving full steam ahead for change and view this issue as being pretty cut-and-dry. Inaction is a choice and a statement in itself. They believe brands/companies either fall on the side of change/justice or choose to remain indifferent to the Black experience in this country. During such a critical moment when the spotlight is on this issue, it's important to take heed to these dos and don'ts:

- 1. It's not a stance unless there's risk.** Black consumers are well beyond caring about statements or "empty promises." They want to see proof behind what your brand/company stands for in the form of action
  - Consider ways your organization can get involved in the nearby Black community or local level. Don't be afraid to go out there and get your hands dirty.
  - Embrace the uncomfortable, and make your message bold. Use language that makes it clear where you stand.
  - Don't just broadcast your message in public spaces where only Black consumers can see/hear it. Take some risk, and make your stance known to your non-POC consumers.
- 2. Don't just throw your money at the problem. When the news coverage stops, continue working. Change must be instituted at all levels within the organization, both internally and externally.**
  - Bring POC into the development of these strategies and communications to the outside world to get it right the first time.
  - Assess where you are at when it comes to diversity in your organization at all levels including (and especially) at the top.
  - Consider conducting internal racial bias training.
  - Consider new ways to recruit Black employees into the organization.

Be clear where you are investing your dollars and what your money will be used for.



Curious to hear more? [Click here](#) for the full recording of the panel discussion.