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# Press Play

Engage Influential Black Audiences  
Through The Power of Audio





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# Overview

African Americans greatly influence the consumer market. Their relentless pursuit of innovation and cultural expression put them at the forefront of consumer trends.

**With a growing population of 48 million<sup>1</sup> and a spending power of \$1.2 trillion,<sup>2</sup>** this audience is essential for any brand looking to build and grow. In order to reach them, advertisers must understand Black consumer behavior and stay on top of the cultural trends that change how they behave over time.

*Press Play: Engage Influential Black Audiences Through the Power of Audio* explores the growing influence of Black consumers—a group of trendsetters and tastemakers shaping popular culture in the U.S. and around the world. This eBook combines Pandora's powerful research and analytics tools with Burrell's deep understanding of emotion and culture. It breaks down music and consumer trends, illustrating the evolving attitudes and behaviors of Black consumers to help marketers engage this powerful audience in a meaningful way.

## A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

As a Black Latina, I've seen unforgivable mistakes made by some of the world's largest brands. It's important to take the time to understand the deep roots of Black culture, and the pay-off will come: positive brand association, unwavering loyalty, unprecedented growth.

African Americans have led popular culture to unprecedented spaces. The latest chart-topping hits, fashion trends, dance crazes, and product trends all bear the fingerprints of a culture that is rich, innovative and constantly tuned into what's now, new and next.

As a marketer, you've probably seen and heard about the growing influence of Black consumers but haven't figured out the best way to connect with them yet. If you're looking for insights that will help you get a grasp on this audience, then you've come to the right place. In this eBook, we break down the influential power of Black consumers and give you the knowledge and tools you need to start engaging them.

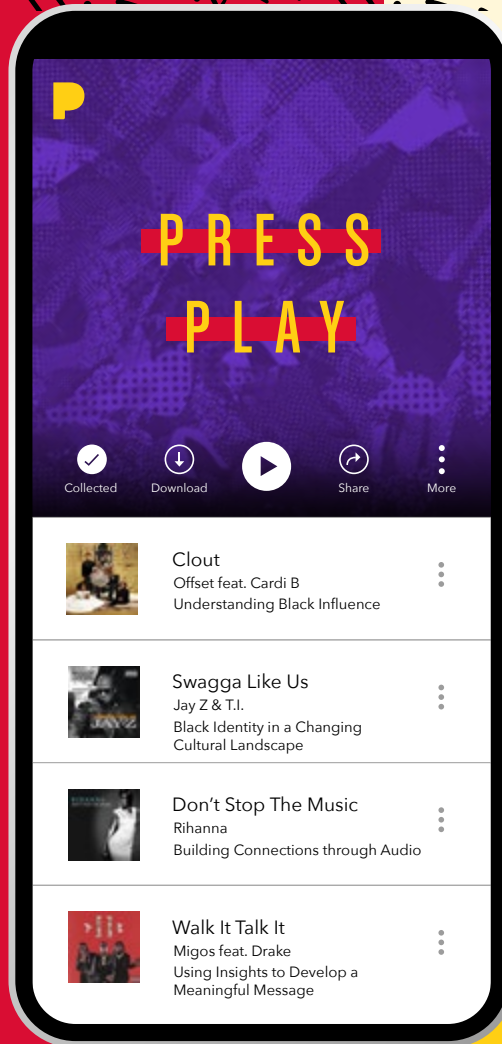
### NIDIA SERRANO

Director, Audience Marketing  
Pandora

Music is the gateway to understanding any consumer segment. It plays a subtle and overt role in our daily lives, influencing everything from our moods to our daily activities.

Given the power of music and its connection to our listeners, we leveraged music trends to understand the impact Black consumers have on popular culture and advertising. We surveyed over 8,000 listeners across every race and ethnicity and conducted over 810 minutes of interviews at major music events in Chicago, New York and Detroit. We also looked at trends across Pandora and SoundCloud, leaning on audience data to illustrate the evolving attitudes and behaviors of this influential segment.

Because we love music, we put together a playlist to deliver the latest insights and trends. So sit back, relax, and enjoy the journey.



"From the Motown records I wore out on the South Side, to the "who run the world" songs that fueled me through this last decade, music has always helped me tell my story. And I know that's true for everybody here. Whether we like country, or rap, or rock, music helps us share ourselves. Our dignity and sorrows, our hopes and joys. It allows us to hear one another, to invite each other in. Music shows us that all of it matters. Every story within every voice, every note within every song."

**MICHELLE OBAMA**  
2019 Grammy Awards



# Clout:

## Understanding Black Influence

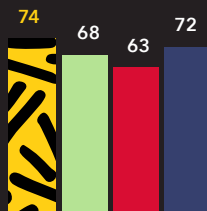
Though African Americans make up 14% of the U.S. population,<sup>1</sup> their culture resonates broadly with the rest of the U.S.

Their impact can be seen and heard across many facets of American culture—from music to fashion to sports and everything in between. Black consumers are responsible for driving a greater share of spend across a number of categories. According to Nielsen, **African Americans drive 85% of ethnic hair and beauty, 22% of women's fragrance, 21% of feminine hygiene, and 20% of men's toiletries category sales.**<sup>2</sup>

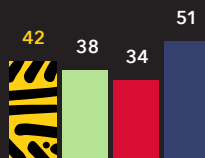
Not only are these consumers powerful on their own, they also have an innate ability to influence the masses. **They are 81% more likely than any other group to influence what others listen to and wear.**<sup>3</sup>

When they find a product they love, they are the first to spread the word. **In fact, 74% say they recommend products that have worked for them, 18% more than their non-Hispanic White counterparts.**<sup>3</sup>

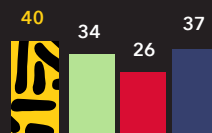
### Influencing the Masses



I like to recommend products that have worked for me



I post ratings and reviews online



My friends follow my product recommendations

56%

say people tend to listen to the music they recommend<sup>3</sup> (136 Index)

30%

say people copy what they wear<sup>3</sup> (181 Index)

30%

say their friends look to them for fashion advice<sup>3</sup> (135 Index)

26%

say people ask them to recommend new music<sup>3</sup> (130 Index)

25%

say their friends look to them to find out about new artists or songs<sup>3</sup> (133 Index)

# Young, Connected & Highly Engaged

With a median age of 34, African Americans are the second-youngest racial or ethnic group in the U.S.<sup>4</sup> This group is fascinated with technology and is closing a long existing divide in digital usage.

According to eMarketer, **84% of the Black population and 85% of the total population will be internet users this year.**<sup>5</sup> The difference, however, is that Black consumers have an above-average reliance on smartphones for internet access. With the world at their fingertips, they have a higher propensity to engage with content. They are streaming, podcasting, gaming and engaging on social media—leaning on open-source innovation to create, collaborate, critique and connect.

## Digital Usage Among African Americans



**52%**

use a music streaming service vs. 40% of Non-Hispanic White<sup>6</sup>



**12%**

listen to podcasts daily vs. 10% of NHW<sup>7</sup>



**73%**

identify as gamers vs. 66% of NHW<sup>8</sup>



**61%**

are social media users vs. 59% of total<sup>5</sup>

## WHAT'S TRENDING

### SOCIAL

#beforelletgochallenge  
#themarathoncontinues  
#teamnatural  
#Blackgirlmagic  
#Blacktravel

### MUSIC

Lil Nas X- Old Town Road  
Beyoncé- Homecoming  
Blueface- Thotiana  
Offset feat. Cardi B- Clout  
Megan Thee Stallion- Big Ole Freak

### PODCASTS

The Read  
The Breakdown  
Questlove Supreme  
Jesus and Jollof  
Code Switch

# All About Discovery

Black consumers move through trends faster than any other audience. Their lives are constantly in motion, so they use their creativity and innovation as an escape.

**90% of Black consumers are more likely than their non-Hispanic white counterparts to listen to music to stay on trend.**<sup>3</sup> They are among the first to discover new music and are constantly sharing what they find with their larger circle.



**54%**

enjoy listening to music from underground or up and coming artists<sup>3</sup>

106 Index



**31%**

are first amongst their friends to find out about new artists or songs<sup>3</sup>

118 Index



**37%**

like to offer recommendations about artists breaking into the music scene<sup>3</sup>

120 Index

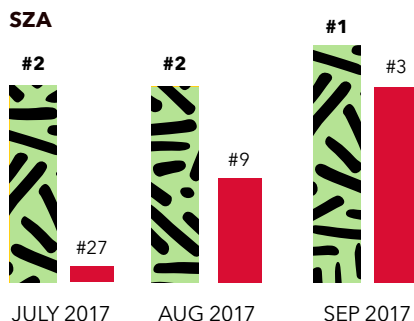
Streaming platforms have made it easier for artists to expose their music to millions of fans. Black listeners enjoy the thrill of discovering new music, but also love the convenience of getting recommendations from trusted sources. **66% of Black consumers like getting recommendations from others about new artists or songs, while 54% prefer to discover music on their own.**<sup>3</sup>

# Arbiters of Cool

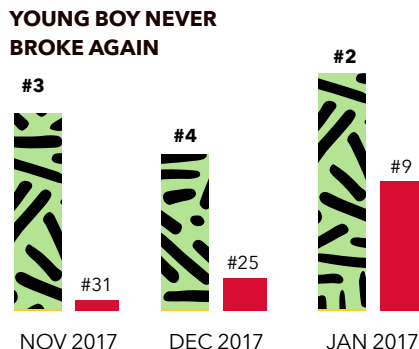
With unobstructed access to the world stage, emerging artists are reaching mainstream charts at faster rates than ever before. On Pandora, Black listeners have their finger on the pulse of music and discover new artists and songs before they grab the ears of other listeners.

## LEADERBOARD TRENDS

Pandora's leaderboard continuously proves that Black listeners are indeed the arbiters of cool. These trendsetters listen to emerging artists 3-4 months before everyone else. They engage with them at higher rates too, naturally propelling them to the top of the charts.



Black Audience Total Audience



## WHAT YOUR AUDIENCE IS SAYING

"Sometimes pop music is good for the moment, but cultural music is long-term, eternal, it never dies."

#EDSON  
Black Male  
25-34, NYC

"Culture is stuff you can't find on the mainstream radio. You won't hear a Common Sense or Slum Village song on the radio."

#OVINGTON  
Black Male  
45-54, NYC

# Swagga Like Us:

## Black Identity in a Changing Cultural Landscape

Black culture is fluid and multifaceted. It is the result of artistic expression—a way to depict the Black experience in an ever changing cultural and socio-economic landscape.

As with any other audience, it is important to recognize that Black consumers are not monolithic. Inside every Black person lies an amalgamation of ideas, experiences and values that shape each of their worldviews and set them apart from one another.

Despite the diverse mindset of Black consumers, Black culture is rooted in a strong

spirit of collectivism—a “culture of us” where individuals feel connected to and responsible for the members of their group.

**Today, 85% of Black consumers say they have a lot of pride in their culture and its accomplishments, 45% more than all consumers.<sup>3</sup>** This pride for all things Black is reflected in the clothes they wear, the things they buy, and the music they listen to.

**55%**

say their home has many things that remind them of their culture<sup>3</sup>

**55%**

say their personal appearance reflects their culture<sup>3</sup>

**39%**

prefer to listen to music that reflects their heritage and culture<sup>3</sup>

“The street style, the hip-hop and jazz music, the gold chains and gold grills, the soul food, the hyphy movement, the dreadlocks, the slang. There’s something about the way African Americans put a flare on everything. It’s magic.”

AKINTUNDE  
AHMAD<sup>9</sup>

# Hightened Sense of Pride

National and sociopolitical forces have led to a resurgence of Black pride. This growing sentiment is leading to a "culture of us" online where Black consumers are influencing media, news and even politics.

## THE NEW REVOLUTIONARIES



**18%** have marched in a protest (102 Index)

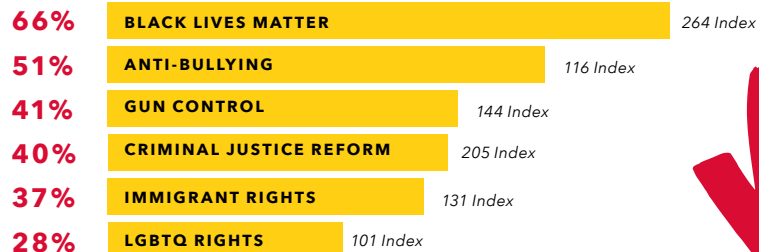


**46%** have donated time or money to a movement (104 Index)

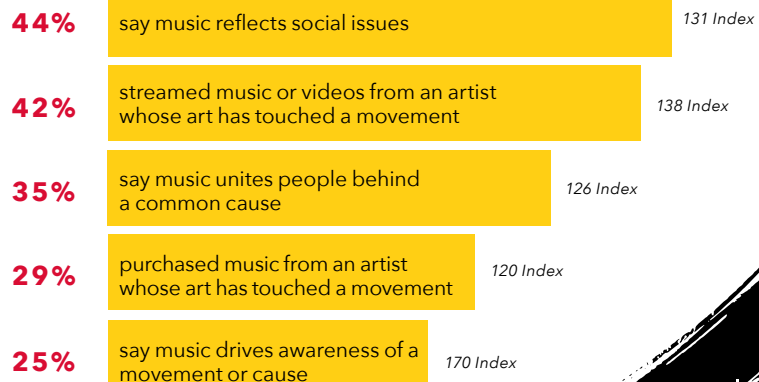


**41%** purchased items or brands supporting a movement (118 Index)

## ISSUES THAT MATTER



Music helps awaken their spirit and sense of pride. Black consumers are leaning on music to cope with today's social climate. Music awakens their socially conscious spirit, with **44% saying music reflects social issues and 35% saying music unites people behind a common cause.**<sup>3</sup> This audience is drawn to music that touches movements in a meaningful way and support those artists by streaming and buying their music.



## WHAT YOUR AUDIENCE IS SAYING

"This is America taps into multiple mindsets. It shows us what's going on right now. I don't care about foreign policies. I care about what's going on here."

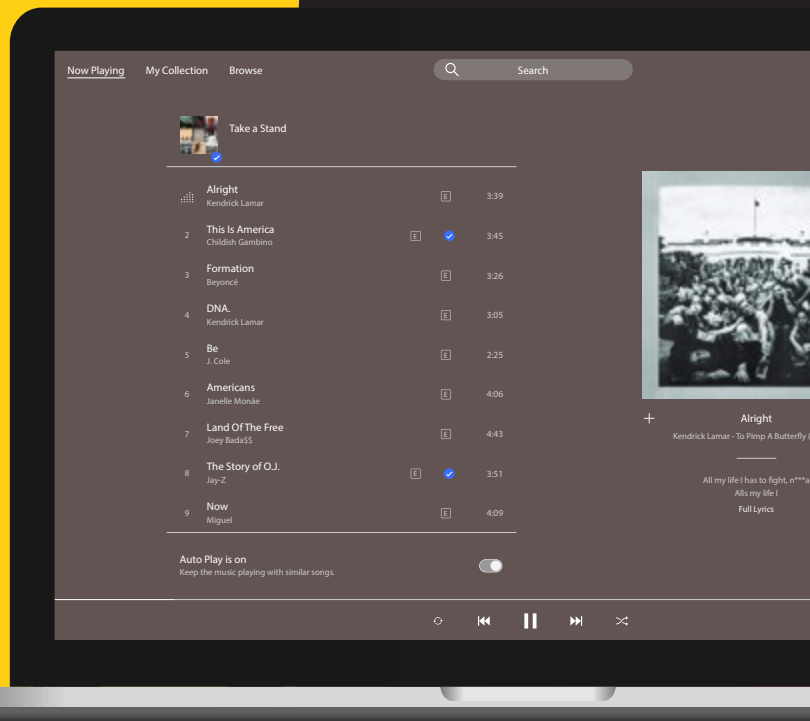
### OVINGHTON

Black Male  
45-54, NYC

"I really like Common. He does a really good job of being part of the spotlight and doing the work. He's definitely an activist. He's outspoken about things he believes are important."

### TAYLOR

White Female  
25-34, NYC



# All Blackness is Not the Same

Black consumers value authenticity and originality. They are unique and expressive, challenging the status quo with enough confidence to stand up, stand out and move the masses.

## THE NONCONFORMISTS

Challenging  
the Status  
Quo

**32%** say conformity makes them uncomfortable

98 Index

Unique

**41%** say they like to wear clothes that no one else has

158 Index

Expressive

**73%** say music reflects their personality

117 Index

**76%** say the clothes they wear reflect their personality and sense of style

107 Index

Those who wrestle with the experiences of the limiting mainstream continue to create spaces that speak to their individual interests and needs. Subcultures like Afrofuturism, "BLERD" culture, and SoundCloud Rap are gaining momentum, using their creativity to show that there are many ways to be Black.

## AFROTURISM Playlist

A future filled with arts, science and technology seen through a Black lens

1. **DOOR OF THE COSMOS** | Sun Ra
2. **ELECTRIC LADY** | Janelle Monáe feat. Solange
3. **THEESATISFACTION** | Earthee
4. **NEXT LIFETIME** | Eryka Badu
5. **FRONTLINE** | Kelela
6. **VIDEO GIRL** | FKA Twigs
7. **W'ANI ABA FT. BISA KDEI** | M.anifest
8. **GREEN APHRODISIAC** | Corinne Bailey Rae
9. **PENDULUM** | FKA Twigs
10. **DJANGO JANE** | Janelle Monáe

## BLERDS Recommended Podcasts

Black nerds interested gaming, technology, and comics

1. **FOR COLORED NERDS**
2. **FAN BROS SHOW**
3. **BLACK GIRL NERDS**
4. **PLANET BLERDOM**
5. **BLACK & READ**
6. **BLACK COMICS CHAT**
7. **CHARACTER CORNER**

## SOUNDCLOUD RAP Playlist

Lo-fi sound recording techniques feeding the raw energy of music and popular scene

1. **SHOTTA FLOW** | NLE Choppa
2. **SANGUINE PARADISE** | Lil Uzi Vert
3. **ROBBERY** | Juice WRLD
4. **MURDER ON MY MIND** | YWN Melly
5. **BROKE BOI** | Playboy Carti
6. **WORTH IT** | YK Osiris
7. **THAT'S A RACK** | Lil Uzi Vert



# Don't Stop The Music:

## Building Connections Through Audio

African Americans rate music as one of their strongest passion points. Music is a mood enhancer, a daily companion, and one of the oldest and most natural ways to tell a story.

As a brand, you can harness the power of music and any form of audio—from voice, to music, to advertising—to jump-start your consumer's imagination. Using this advertising tool and strategy will help you give your audience the personal and memorable experiences they seek.

Even though music overall is a connection point for African Americans, we saw a few trends in particular that stood out: genre, music festivals, star power.



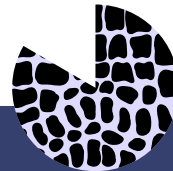
**66%**

inspires me<sup>3</sup>  
114 Index



**57%**

helps me focus<sup>3</sup>  
107 Index



**83%**

elevates my mood<sup>3</sup>  
101 Index



**71%**

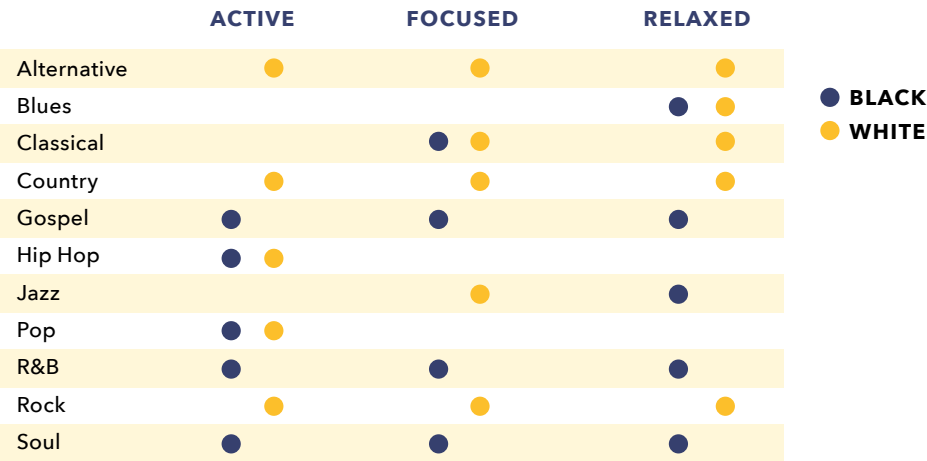
motivates me<sup>3</sup>  
106 Index

# Music Sets the Mood

With 68% saying music connects them to their culture,<sup>11</sup> you can reach Black consumers with culturally relevant messages throughout their day.

You can be a companion when they're doing chores, working out, or getting ready for a night out. You can inspire them while they're working, studying, or just winding down. You can also be a trusted friend, motivating them when they're feeling sad or need support and encouragement.

Music is as an all-day soundtrack that allows you to seamlessly integrate your message into moments that make sense for both your audience and your brand. Below are top genres played throughout the day to facilitate different moods:



## WHAT YOUR AUDIENCE IS SAYING

"Artists like Jay Cole and Tupac are motivating, they're really motivational speakers. There are different types of motivational rap...some try to get you to get your money up, but others talk about family."

### DOMINIQUE

Black Male  
18-24, Detroit

"It's a part of my everyday life. It's everything. It makes me laugh, cry—depends on the song."

### LAUREN

Black Female  
18-24, Chicago

# Music Festivals

Music also has the power to move and connect people.

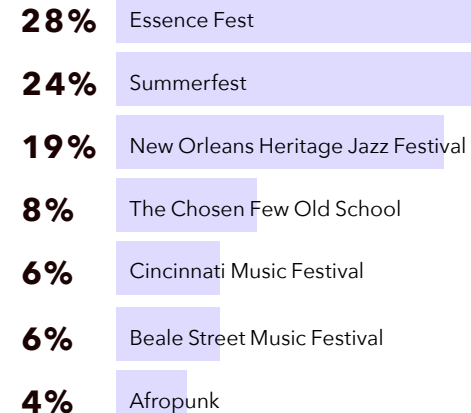
This happens in a physical sense at concerts and festivals where they can connect their close circle and are able to be themselves.

Music festivals are where Black subcultures coalesce. They offer festival-goers unrestricted access to the artists they know and love. Because most music festivals feature an all-white lineup, this audience gravitates towards festivals that cultivate Black creativity and showcase Black talent. With a mix of old and new school music, Black festivals let them enjoy their favorite artists while they discover new artists they'll love.



For the past 25 years, Essence has been one of the top Black music festivals. Known as "the party with a purpose", festival-goers move through a range of music, film & TV as well as food & wine experiences. Given its popularity and relevance, Essence Music Festival ranks #1 with Black listeners, **attracting 28% of our audience at a rate of 7x vs other users.**<sup>3</sup>

Festival-goers keep the party going on platforms like Pandora and SoundCloud as 52% stream music or videos from artists who've played at the music festivals they've attended.<sup>3</sup> If music festivals are already a part of your advertising strategy, extending your message to music streaming platforms like Pandora and SoundCloud can help you extend your reach. They also provide additional ways in which to further engage your audience long after the festival ends.



# Star Power

Celebrity endorsements can help boost the appeal of your brand.

According to Nielsen, African Americans are **96% more likely** than their non-Hispanic White counterparts to consider making a purchase if that product or service is endorsed by a celebrity.<sup>14</sup>

Music artists in particular have qualities that can be both aspirational and relatable, and you can leverage these strong attributes to build trust and drive brand loyalty.

Overall, Black musicians are among the most well-known, influential and marketable personalities and trendsetters across the entertainment

landscape. They have the ability to command consumers' attention and are the key to making your brand stand out. Beyoncé is one of the top trendsetting artists and one of the most influential: when asked who would prompt them to buy a product if they mentioned a brand in their lyrics, the most popular answer was Beyoncé.

Queen Bey is also seen as a fashion icon and entrepreneur alongside the likes of Rihanna, Jlo, Janelle Monae, Solange and Cardi B. These talented women are known for making a statement, motivating their fans to be bold, fabulous, and stand out.



pay more attention to an ad when it features a music artist they like<sup>3</sup>

109 Index



like when brands partner with music artists on advertising campaigns<sup>3</sup>

149 Index



are more likely to buy products with ads featuring music they like<sup>3</sup>

126 Index



like to share information about brands that partner with musicians<sup>3</sup>

170 Index

## WHAT YOUR AUDIENCE IS SAYING

"Beyoncé influences our generation. She headlined Coachella. Younger millennials are obsessed with her."

### TAYLOR

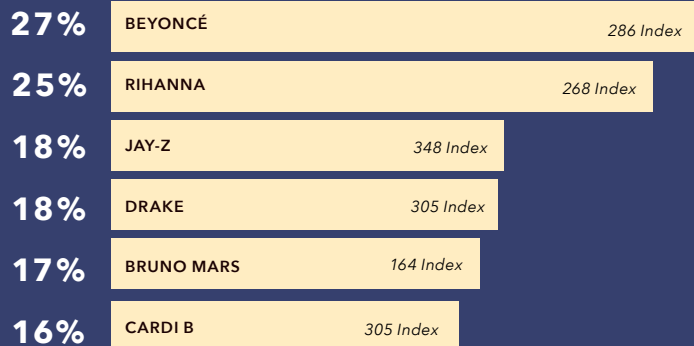
White Female  
25-34, NYC

"Rihanna—the way she carries herself, her fashion/style, she has a 'she is who she is' attitude—not trying to intentionally be a role model to anyone else—no false image."

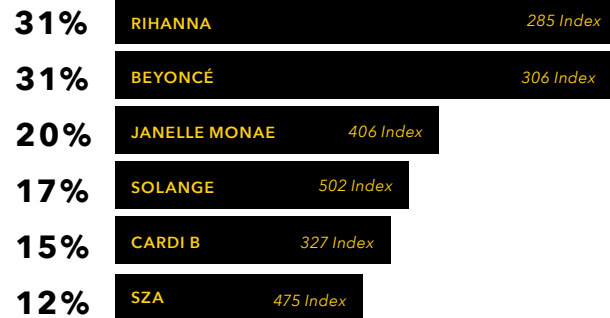
### MICHELLE

Black Female  
25-34, Detroit

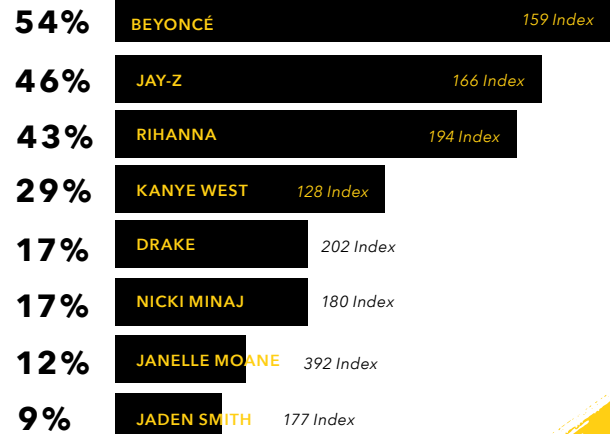
*Which of the following artists would prompt you to consider buying a product if they mentioned the brand in their lyrics?*



*Which of the following artists would inspire your sense of style as it relates to fashion, beauty, hair or jewelry and accessories?*



*Which of the following artists do you associate with owning a business or creating a product?*





**Campaigns targeted to Black consumers guarantee reach against this audience and exceed engagement benchmarks by over 70%.<sup>12</sup>**

## **Walk it Talk it:** Making Meaningful Connections with the Power of Audio

So what does this all mean? Because of the role music plays in Black culture, utilizing music to connect with this audience works. Here's the proof: **81% of Black consumers connect with ads with music relevant to them and are 25% more likely than other consumers to buy products with ads featuring music.**<sup>3</sup>

At Pandora, we have personally witnessed the impact Black consumers have on ad campaigns, especially if those campaigns accurately reflect the Black cultural experience in the U.S.

We've established music is important, but what are specific tactics can you use to bring emotion and meaning to your ad campaigns?

# Do's

## Respect & Empower the Culture

- Understand Black culture and its history.
- Ensure there is Black representation throughout the marketing process.
- Understand and respect the issues your audience cares about.
- Decide where your brand fits on specific social, cultural, and political topics and take action.

## Make an Authentic Connection

- Tell stories that truly resonate and connect them to their personal cultural experiences.
- Show non-stereotypical portrayals of Black life and culture.
- Be real about the issues, but be positive.

## Research & Rely on Insights

- Tap into the underground music culture. As trendsetters, Black listeners will lead you right to the biggest up and coming artists—be the first to support them and build trust.
- Shift tactics toward a mobile-heavy strategy. Think podcasts, games, and streaming audio.
- Integrate into the lives of African American listeners with relevant messaging during different activities throughout the day, and have your ad match that activity. Something slow and soothing on a relaxing Jazz station, or upbeat and energetic on a Hip Hop station.
- Keep a pulse on Black subcultures, festivals, and influencers.

71%

connect with ads that reflect issues affecting their community<sup>3</sup>

66%

want to see ads with people who look like them<sup>3</sup>

65%

want to see their lifestyle reflected on an ad<sup>3</sup>

40%

purchased items or brands supporting a movement<sup>3</sup>



You've seen the backlash from some, let's call them, not-so-thought-out brand campaigns. Tapping into such a powerful culture can be intimidating—but it doesn't have to be. Our Don'ts checklist is a simple way to cover your bases and avoid some of the mistakes we've seen brands make over and over again.

## Don'ts

- **AVOID THE AUDIENCE ALTOGETHER BECAUSE YOU'RE SCARED.** By doing this, you're missing out on millions of loyal consumers and brand growth.
- **JUMP INTO AN IDEA.** Take your time and do your research. Be thoughtful about your message and how you're saying it.
- **EXPECT RETURNS FROM JUST ONE COMMERCIAL.** It takes time and dedication to build trust, but it will happen over time.
- **TRY TO BE COLIN Kaepernick + Nike on your first try.** We're all for making big brand statements and standing behind a powerful message, but be realistic (you're not Nike). To start, try subtle nods to African American culture using music or fashion.
- **ASSUME ONE PERSON REPRESENTS THE ENTIRE CULTURE.** One person does not represent any culture, because every culture is made up of different generations, backgrounds, etc. Make sure you have a wide representation of a Black audience and a wide range of opinions.



# Your Audience is Listening

In a world of content options and competing brand messages, music cuts through the clutter like no other media can.

You can place your message in a music environment and make a 1-to-1 connection with an audience that's ready to listen to what your brand has to say.

Tapping into Platforms like Pandora and SoundCloud give Black users the ability to do both; that's why our listeners rate the platform as their leading source of music discovery.

**Black listeners spend 18 hours a month listening to music on Pandora.**<sup>12</sup> Pandora, in combination with SoundCloud gives you access to 15M Black listeners, almost half of all Black listeners online.<sup>13</sup> We have their ear as they browse through our broad catalogue of music and their hearts as they listen to the music they love.

**15M**

Pandora +  
SoundCloud MUVs<sup>13</sup>

**46%**

of Black listeners online listen  
to Pandora + SoundCloud  
every month<sup>13</sup>

**82%**

PANDORA

**62%**

FRIENDS

**56%**

SOCIAL MEDIA

**56%**

FAMILY

**43%**

OTHER MUSIC STREAMING

**28%**

DJs

**28%**

PARTIES/CLUBS

**28%**

MUSICIANS

**22%**

MUSIC FESTIVALS

**19%**

MUSIC BLOGS/WEBSITES

**18%**

OTHER FESTIVALS

**9%**

BLOGGERS/INFLUENCERS

**4%**

OTHER

# Pandora x SoundCloud

## Methodology

### QUANTITATIVE

8,140 Respondents

#### Ethnic Breakdown

71% White/Caucasian: 5,810 Respondents

15% Black African American: 1239 Respondents

12% Hispanic/Latino: 979 Respondents

2% Asian: 190 Respondents

#### Gender Breakdown

44% Male, 56% Female

#### Age Breakdown

7% 18-24

23% 18-34

60% 18-49

66% 25-54

27% 55+

### QUALITATIVE

3 Cities: Chicago, Detroit, NYC

4 Festivals:

- o Pitchfork Music Festival- Chicago

- o MoPop Fest- Detroit

- o AfroPunk- Brooklyn

- o Silver Room Block Party- Chicago

810 Minutes of interviews

27 People: Mostly Millennials, with an equal mix of men and women

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