



Engaging Black Audiences

How brands impact, grow
and win with inclusion



Diverse Intelligence Series 2025

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Introduction

Black America continues to grow, and the outsized impact of their cultural and economic influence cannot be ignored or taken for granted. Black audiences lead media engagement across multiple channels—including digital platforms where global marketers are planning increased investment. At the same time, media and the societal landscape continue to shift. One thing is certain, brands' approach to Black consumers cannot be business as usual.

As more Black people embrace the nuances of their diverse identities, they expect brand outreach and targeting to better understand and reflect them in order to earn their business long term. The risks of not meeting these expectations can be high: 67% of Black Americans are likely to seek out new brands if a current provider doesn't align with the causes they care about.¹

Yet recent **headlines** have highlighted companies scaling back their diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) strategies—principles that ensure effective outreach and are backed by research to make companies **out-perform competitors**. These decisions can have long-term impact—for diverse communities and the brands trying to reach them.

Advertising is more than reach—it's connection. Creating connections requires advertisers to truly understand their consumers—who they are, what motivates them, how they consume media and what will push them to a purchase. And this is especially true for diverse audience segments balancing unique challenges and traditions alongside their consumer behavior.

The right data is critical to support customer-centric strategies that check our assumptions and lead with the facts. Measurement of real people amplified by large datasets will be essential for brands to understand audience identity, build connections with those identity groups, and ensure long-term brand health with their target consumers. Nielsen has included Black audiences in its media measurement for decades and is uniquely positioned to help brands understand how African Americans spend time with media, beyond traditional age and gender groups to more advanced audience profiles.

The insights in this report outline a call to action and a guide to win with inclusion. Those brands and programmers who invest in customer-centric strategies that amplify Black voices, embrace cultural nuance and support causes our communities care about will find an audience eager to listen—and willing to respond.



Charlene Polite Corley
VP, Diverse Insights & Partnerships,
Nielsen

¹Nielsen Attitudes on Ads Study, 2024

Media creates connection

In this year's report, we explore how Black audiences in the U.S. are leaning into media that emphasize the spoken word, invite conversation and create a sense of connection.



Digital trendsetters

Black audiences are engaging with social media and digital video platforms that encourage broader audiences to like, comment, subscribe and imitate.



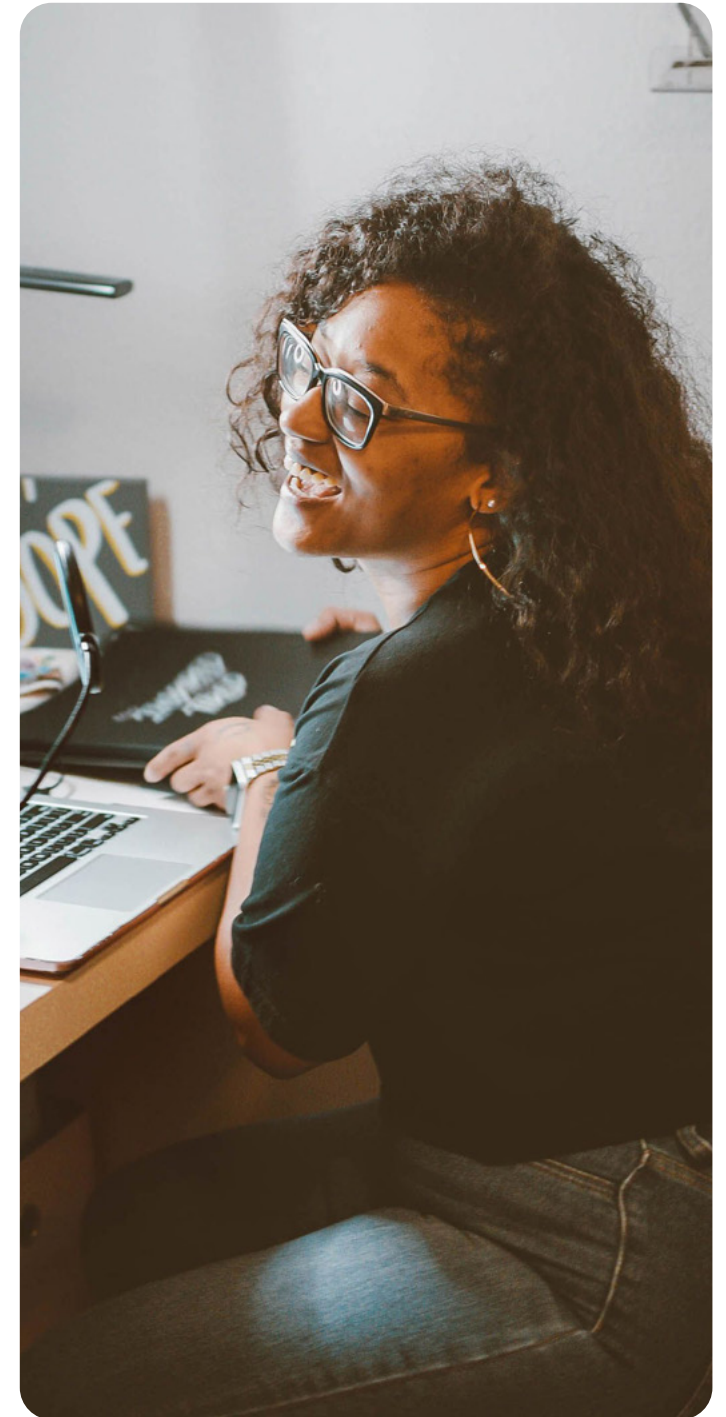
Avid listeners

Black audiences tune in to audio-based media like podcasting and radio that create personal connections to hosts (and the brands that support them).



Loyal fans

Black superfans engage with sports commentary programming at higher rates than all sports superfans.





Black Americans:
**A defining influence
in the U.S.**

Millennial median age

33.5

Average age

52%

Under age 35

(U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2023)



Diverse households

12%

Speak a language other than English

10%

Include extended family

(U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2023)

Powerful population

48.2M

Black Americans

32%

Growth since 2000

(U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2023; Pew Research, 2024)



Economic impact

\$2.1T

Estimated buying power in 2026

2.4x

Growth since 2000

(Selig Center for Economic Growth)



Digital trendsetters

Section 1



Black audiences are driving trends across digital media

Digital media trends are a perfect example of Black America’s outsized cultural and economic influence.

As we’ve seen the **last few years**, Black Americans continue to lead engagement with media, including digital media. Knowing where and how to reach them is key. While all U.S. adults spend about an hour more than Black adults with the internet on a computer a week, Black audiences spend 31 hours and 56 minutes on apps and websites on their smartphones and tablets—two full hours more than the U.S. overall.

Given how much time this audience spends with digital media, it’s not surprising that Black culture drives much of today’s digital trends. **Internet slang** like “periodt,” “bae” and “cap” all originate from African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and have been adopted by many—particularly Gen Z—both on and offline. Memes often draw from iconic Black moments and influencers as well.

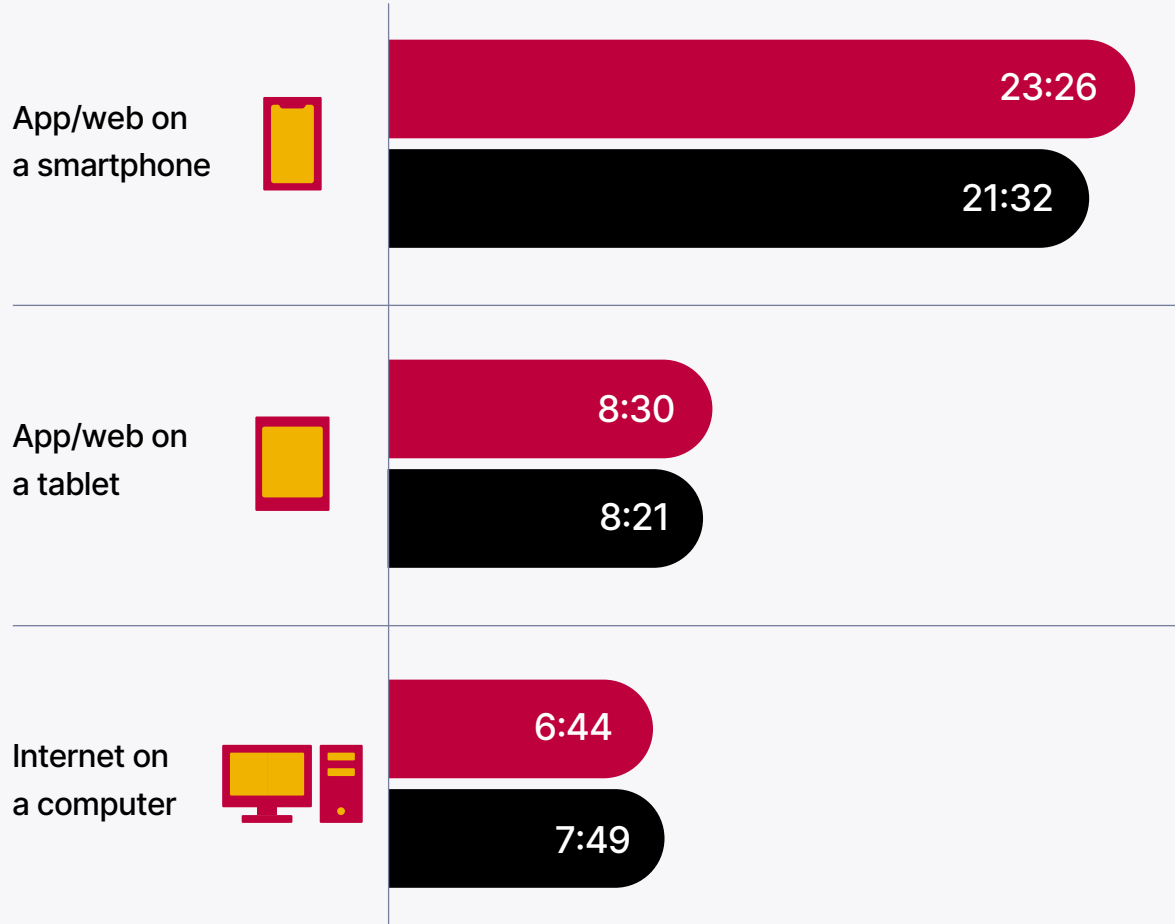
Many have critiqued how American culture co-opts these phrases and images—frequently without attributing their origins to Black culture. Navigating these concerns requires true understanding of this audience but is well worth the effort.

In 2024, global marketers planned to dedicate 63% of their budgets to digital channels, a significant increase from approximately half of their 2022 budgets². Understanding how Black consumers are using digital media can help advertisers not only create connections with this community but also identify potential future trends.

² Nielsen Annual Marketing Report, 2024

Figure 1.1
Weekly time spent with digital media
Hours: Minutes

- Black
- Total U.S.



Source: Nielsen Audience Measurement Data, Q2 2024

Don't underestimate social media's impact

When we look deeper at how Black Americans spend their time on smartphones, they're spending the majority of it with social media—8 hours and 49 minutes a week. This follows trends among the wider U.S. population. However, Black adults of all ages spend more time than their peers with social media apps, with those 18-34 spending almost an hour more per week.

The dialogue that social media platforms offer through video and comment sections can help users build community with others who share similar experiences and find authentic representation.

While marketers' move toward digital isn't new, it's being driven by growing usage and effectiveness. In our annual marketing study, 79% of global marketers view social media as extremely/very effective.

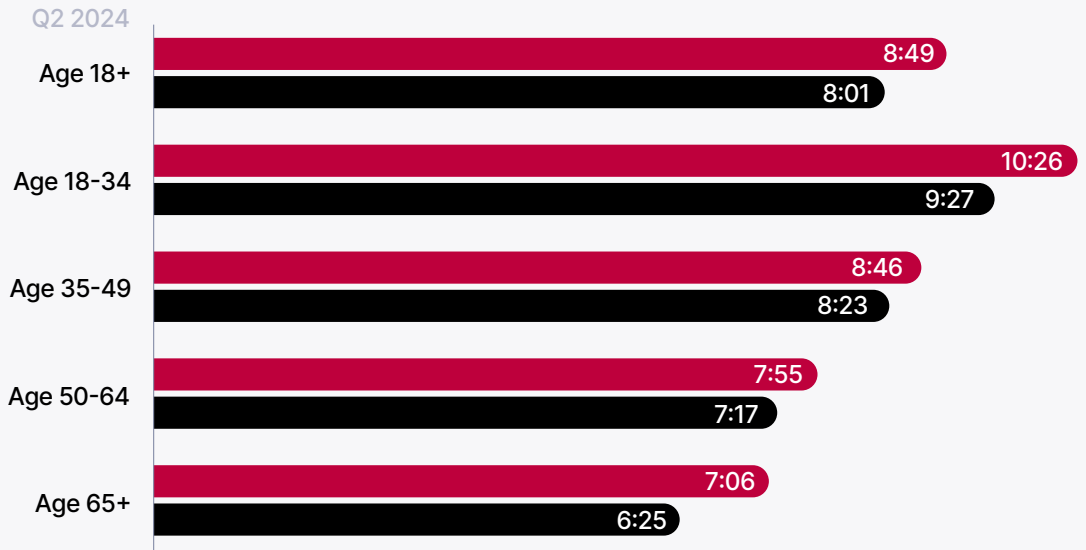
And Black consumers seem to agree; 63% say they're more likely to evaluate a new brand based on a social media ad or content, compared with 58% overall³. And several social platforms rank among the top five sources for recommendations and advertising to buy products in a recent survey.

³ Nielsen Attitudes on Ads Study, 2024

Figure 1.2

Weekly time spent with social media on a smartphone

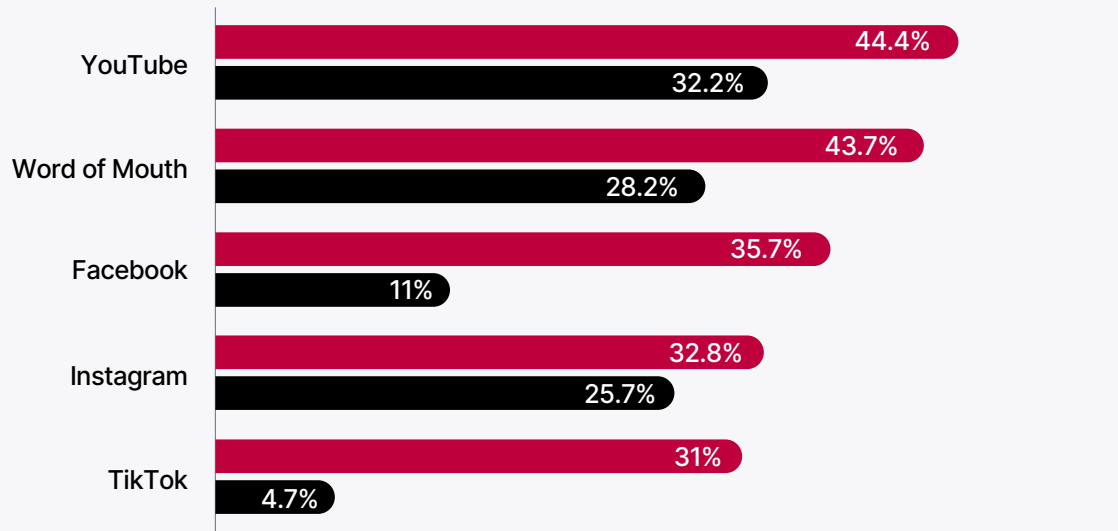
Hours: Minutes



Source: Nielsen Audiences Measurement Data, Q2 2024

Figure 1.3

Top five sources for recommendations and advertising to buy products



Read as: 44.4% of Black Americans report buying products based on recommendations or advertising from YouTube
Source: Nielsen Black Diaspora Study, powered by Toluna, 2023

Streaming continues to gain share

In addition to digital channels, Black Americans are power TV viewers. Black adults spend 46 hours and 13 minutes per week, compared with 34 hours and 57 minutes for the overall U.S. population.

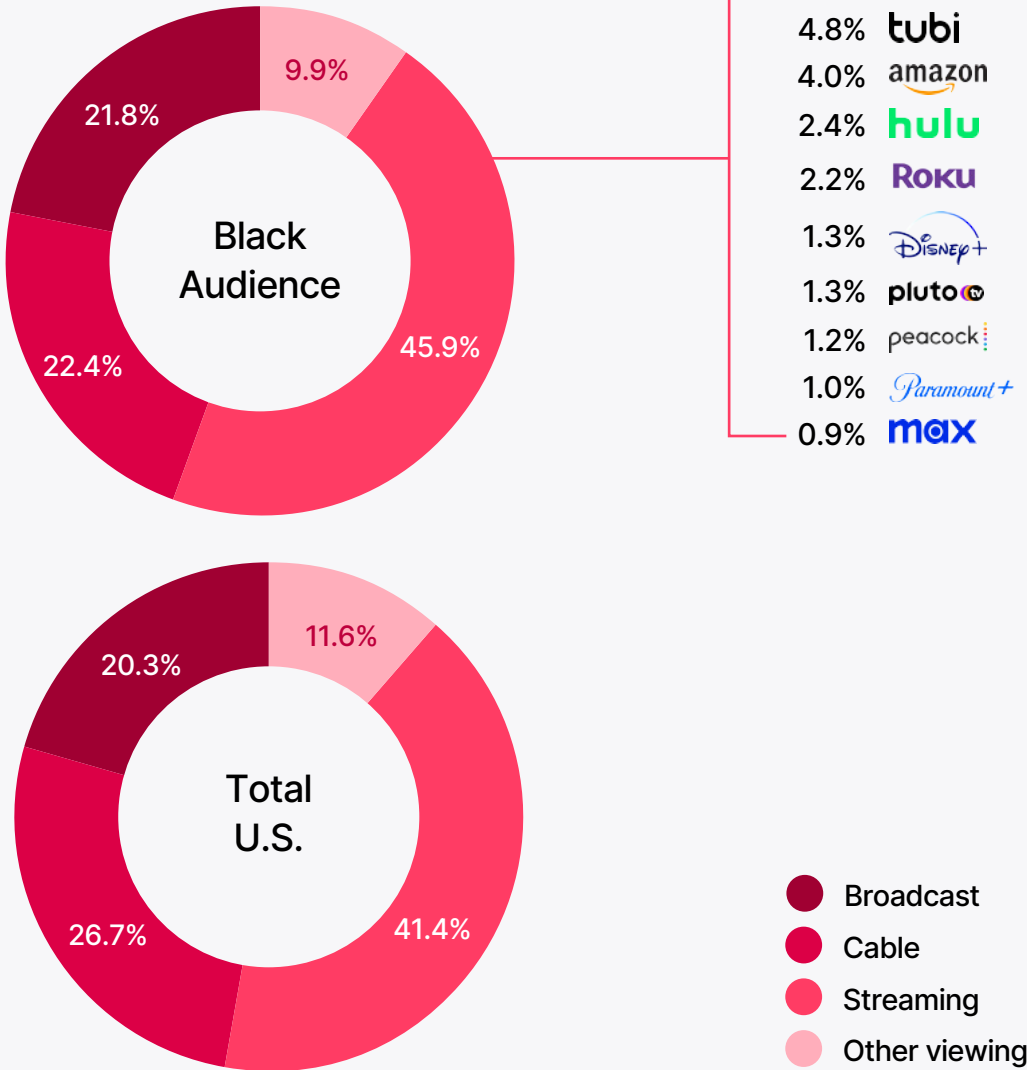
When we look at how Black adults are splitting their time with television, streaming is gaining share year-over-year. YouTube is claiming attention and influence as the No. 1 streaming platform among Black audiences with 13% of their total TV time, compared to 10% for U.S. viewers overall.

YouTube reaches 63% of Black adults⁴, and recommendations from the platform outpaced word of mouth among many Black consumers. From *Gracie's Corner* to Club Shay Shay, the options are vast. With diverse-owned content networks like Culture Genesis offering curated channels for underrepresented creators and multicultural audiences—this platform offers many the sense of curated community and representation that Black consumers are seeking across media.

While streaming makes up a larger share of Black audiences' total TV time compared to the overall U.S. population, broadcast and cable make up a larger share of Black viewers' TV time than other audience segments such as *Asian* and *Hispanic Americans*. While ad-supported streaming is growing, much of it remains subscription based. Traditional channels remain a powerful way to reach Black consumers through advertising.

⁴ Nielsen Media Impact, July 2024

Figure 1.4
Share of total TV time
July 2024



Source: Nielsen Audience Measurement, July 2024

Opportunities to connect

Given the time this community spends with digital media—and the influence they have—Black consumers have become digital’s “general market.” How can you create authentic connections with this community to get ahead of today’s digital trends?

Tap new tools—with caution

Explore using AI and dynamic creative optimization tools to get the right inclusive creative to the right places—especially with Black-owned and Black-targeted publishers.

A note of caution, however, a **Nielsen study** found 60% of Black respondents felt concern about AI-generated content, images and ads targeted toward their community⁵. And their concerns might be founded, with burgeoning AI language models ascribing **significant bias** to AAVE speakers.

Consider deeper partnerships with Black creators

Consider the impact of deeper partnerships across channels with creators—their reach and influence extends beyond social media. A Nielsen **Brand Lift study** found 77% of creator fans felt connected to brands featured in creator content.

And these connections can help drive purchase decisions. In a recent survey, 17% of Black consumers said they’re likely to increase purchases based on influencer/creator posts, compared with 10% overall.⁶

Balance your digital and traditional media mix

Don’t dismiss traditional channels in the rush toward digital. Many Black consumers are still spending significant time with traditional channels. And digital channels can have challenges of their own. In the U.S., the average on-target rate for digital ads is just 64%.⁷

Make sure your media mix is tailored for your business goals—what’s effective for one brand might not work as well for another. Focus spending on the channels that deliver the most ROI for your specific objectives and KPIs.

⁵ Nielsen Attitudes on Ads Study 2024

⁶ Nielsen Black Diaspora Study, powered by Toluna, 2023

⁷ Nielsen 2023 Digital Ad Measurement Benchmark data



Avid listeners

Section 2

The power of podcasts

Black listeners outpace engagement with audio—from podcasts to radio.

For many, this year's **election** highlighted the ability of podcasts to reach audiences and influence listeners through conversation. Podcasts offer audiences less scripted content that can seem more authentic, and as anyone can start a podcast, they also offer valuable opportunities for representation and community building.

For brands, however, navigating the fragmentation that comes with the ability of anyone with a mic to start a podcast can be daunting. But the payoff can be worth it. U.S. listeners spend 18% of their daily time with ad-supported audio with podcasts, as seen in **The Record** for the third-quarter of 2024.

Among Black listeners, podcast ads continue to drive strong brand recall, motivating listeners to learn more and make purchases. In fact, 73% of Black podcast listeners were able to recall a brand name after ad exposure compared to 70% overall.⁸

⁸ Nielsen Podcast Brand Impact Norms Database, Q2 2024

Men on the mic

Black men in America today are a complex group, redefining **family traditions**, facing systemic challenges and airing their frustrations. Media that lets them take control becomes a proxy for community and provides this demographic an opportunity to feel heard and seen through it all.

3x

more likely to be impacted by influencers

2x

more likely to post comments on social media

29%

rely on podcasts to stay informed

50%

of Black men 50-64 are online radio listeners

45%

get news online



Source: Nielsen Scarborough USA+ 2024 R1

Radio’s reach (and influence) remains strong











Black adults are long-time radio listeners, and radio remains a strong channel to connect with this community. Radio averages the same weekly reach with Black adults as connected TV—with each media reaching 27.4 million Black adults in an average week.

Like podcasts, radio also creates a sense of community and connection that can be powerful for the brands that invest in this channel. A recent Nielsen survey found Black listeners are 2x more likely to want to try a brand’s product advertised on local radio.⁹

Some advertisers are already spending big with radio. When we look at the top 10 spenders on Black-owned radio, the majority increased their spend in the first half of 2024.

⁹ Nielsen Attitudes on Ads Study, 2024

Figure 2.1
Top 10 ad spenders on Black-owned radio

Rank (H1 2024)	Advertiser industry	Ad spend change 2023 - 2024
1	 Business & consumer services	17%
2	 Entertainment & amusements	26%
3	 Retail	6%
4	 Drugs & remedies	3%
5	 Auto, auto accessories & equipment	23%
6	 Insurance & real estate	18%
7	 Toiletries & cosmetics	92%
8	 Publishing & media	-5%
9	 Household equipment & supplies	256%
10	 Travel, hotels & resorts	-20%

Source: Nielsen Ad Intel, Spot Radio Spend for 34 Black-owned AM & FM stations in PPM Markets, Q1-Q2 2023 and Q1-Q2 2024

Opportunities to connect

Audio is a powerful medium to create connections with Black consumers. But its increasingly fragmented nature can be daunting to navigate. How can you connect with Black listeners?

Don't shy away from audio in your media plans

With lower spend requirements, both podcasts and radio can be effective additions to your media mix. Our norms databases show that ads in podcasts can boost brand awareness by as much as 11 percentage points.¹⁰ And a recent study with a radio network using **Nielsen Media Impact** found that moving just 20% of existing media mix to their stations delivered the same level of reach in one week that the previous plan delivered in one month.

Partner with favorite hosts

When it comes to audio, hosts play a key role in developing connections with audiences. A recent Nielsen survey found 54% of Black listeners are more likely than overall listeners to buy when their favorite podcast hosts mention a brand's product, and 50% say the same about their local radio hosts.¹¹

Consider this: 22% of Black Americans report mistrust of financial service providers.¹² But 63% of Black podcast listeners felt Financial Services ads they heard from hosts were a brand fit.¹³

Consider the reach of Urban radio

It's important to understand where listeners are tuning in. Hip Hop and R&B formats alone make up 8% of listening across ALL audiences and 50% among Black listeners. Urban radio's reach is also up 2% year-over-year, and 2024 was R&B radio's best year on record for share of audience.

Among Black listeners aged 18-49 the format gets 52% of all radio listening. This is **significant reach** with a key demographic many advertisers are eager to engage.

¹⁰ Nielsen Annual Marketing Report, 2024

¹¹ Nielsen Attitudes on Ads Study, 2024

¹² Nielsen Scarborough USA+ 2024 R1

¹³ Nielsen Podcast Brand Impact Norms Database, Q2 2024

Section 3

Loyal fans



Fueling growth in women's sports

There's been growing fan momentum around **women's sports** in the U.S. for a few years now, and basketball has been at the center of it. The WNBA, Team USA and women's college basketball all set **records in 2024**.

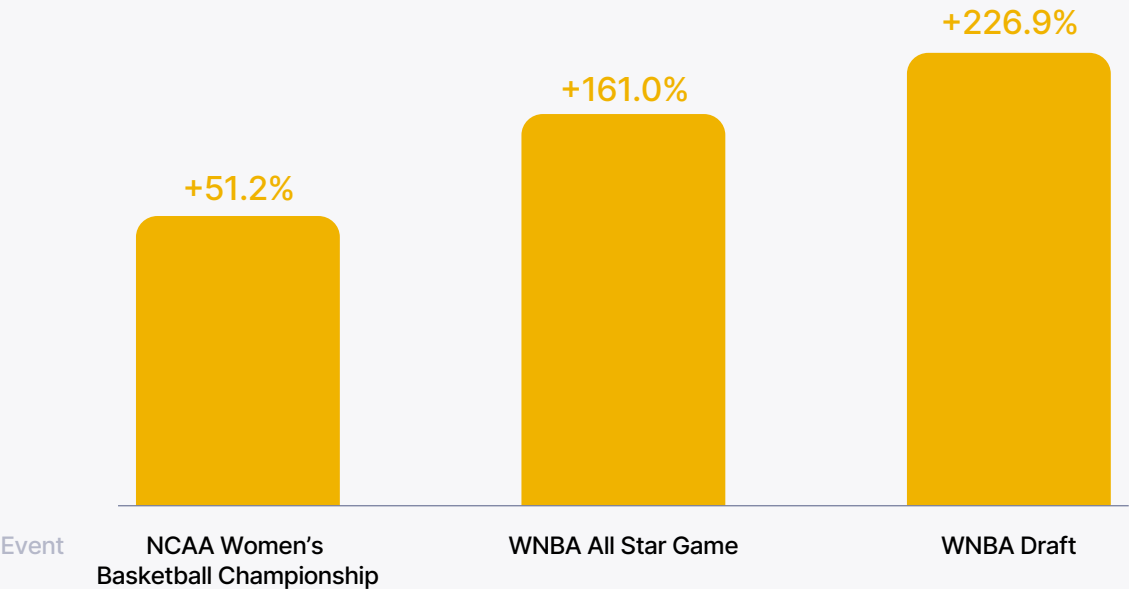
Star athletes like A'ja Wilson, Angel Reese and more have made a name for themselves in college and are driving Black fans' enthusiasm and interest in the sport. In fact, Black fans are 4x more likely to be very interested in the WNBA.¹⁴

With Black talent often at center court, Black viewers are also increasingly tuning in to watch when it comes to women's basketball. Over the last year, Black viewership has grown for several key women's basketball games.

¹⁴ Nielsen Scarborough USA+ 2024 R1

Figure 3.1
Growth of Black viewership for women's sports

Black viewership growth between 2023-2024 (%)



Source: Nielsen Nielsen National TV Ratings, Big Data + Panel, Persons 2+



Sports sponsorships drive engagement

Black sports fans are enthusiastic fans and that extends to the brands that sponsor the sports they love. **Nielsen Fan Insights** found that 51% of Black sports fans would recommend a brand sponsor—making them 3% more likely than all sports fans.

And their enthusiasm carries through to the point of sale. Black fans are 7% more likely than all sports fans to buy a brand after seeing its sponsorship activations. This is good news for brands that are trying to navigate the rising popularity of women's sports.

How Black fans engage

Not only are Black sports fans supporters of the brands that support them. They're also eager to share after they've seen a brand's sports sponsorship activation, more so than total U.S. sports fans.

35%

talk about the brand with their friends and family

29%

go to the brand's website

17%

more likely to post about the brand on social media

8%

more likely to connect with the brand on social media



Source: Nielsen Fan Insights, May–October 2024, USA

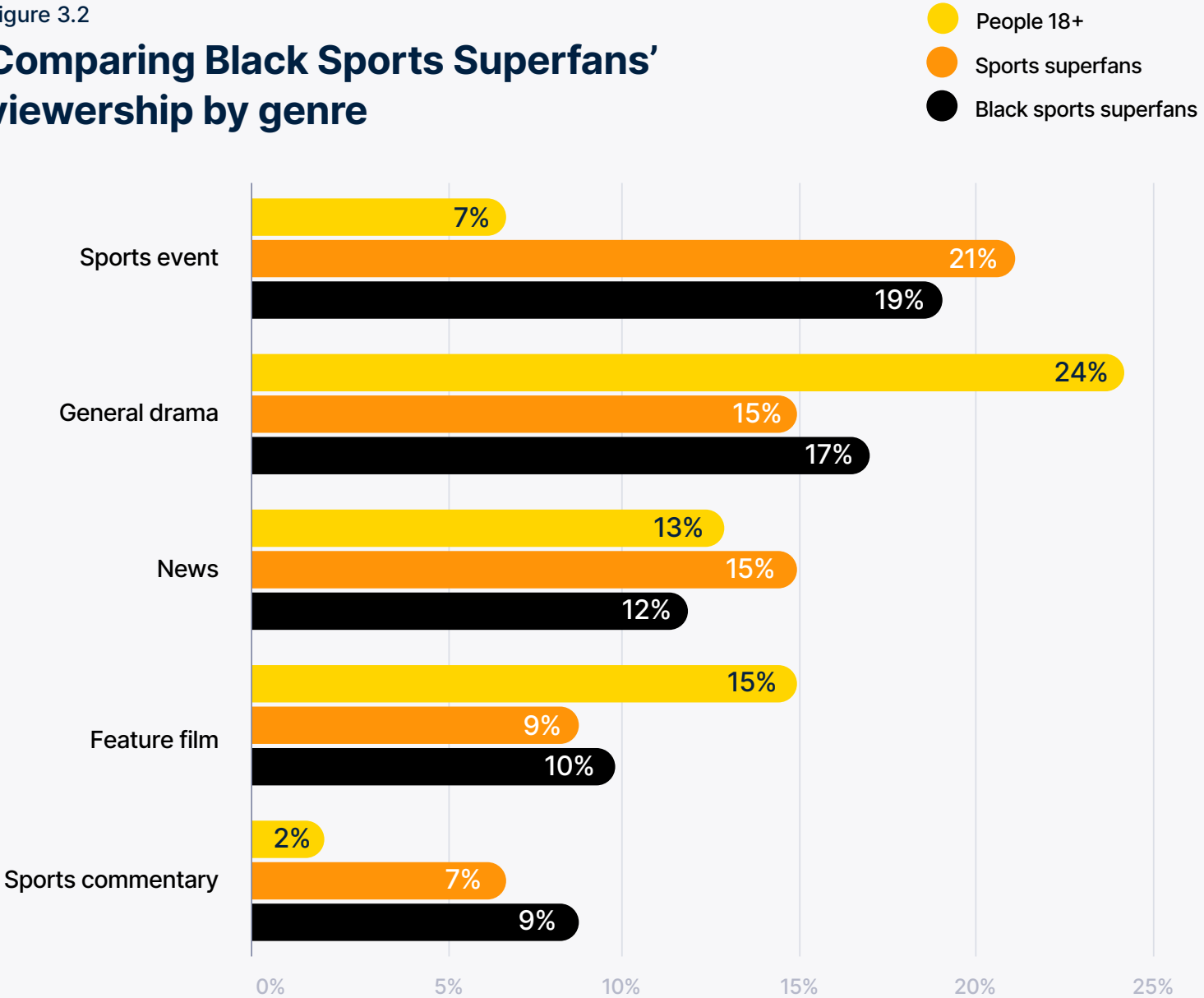
Black Sports Superfans lean in to sports commentary

To better understand how Black sports fans are spending their media time and how brands can engage them beyond the game, we looked at an **advanced audience** of Sports Superfans, who represent the heaviest viewers of sports programming. By looking at media habits beyond traditional age and gender groups to more advanced audience profiles, marketers are able to create marketing strategies tailored to their target audience.

Like overall Sports Superfans in the U.S., Black Sports Superfans have a strong preference for sports-related content. But while Black Sports Superfans underindex the broader Sports Superfan segment for watching sporting events, they're the most likely to tune in for sports commentary.

Sports commentators can change the **viewing experience**. And similar to some digital and audio content, this genre creates the sense of community and connections Black Americans seek out through their time with media.

Figure 3.2
Comparing Black Sports Superfans' viewership by genre



Advanced Audience: Sports Superfan (Heavy N Tile 1- Sports Events Summary, Q1)
Source: Nielsen National TV Ratings augmented by Streaming Content Ratings and NPower, Q1 2024

Opportunities to connect

Sports content is a key driver of media engagement and media investment among Black audiences. How can you create connections with Black sports fans?

Invest in women's sports

Focus your investment on growing and amplifying women's sports stories—especially for Black athletes whose contributions can often go unsung. Add genuine value to the fan experience through consistent and authentic sponsorship across women's sports.

At 52%, Black fans are 5% more likely than all sports fans to believe that brand sponsors are socially responsible.¹⁵

Tap Black athletes and commentators for ads

Black athletes, **journalists** and commentators can be powerful brand partners to reach Black consumer segments eager for representation.

Black consumers remain the most likely to buy from brands that feature someone from their identity group in their ads, with 45% agreeing compared to 32% overall.¹⁶

Measure holistic performance

Outline clear goals and objectives and remain patient and committed to holistically measuring results.

True connection and impact takes time and requires a measurement framework that captures the entire partnership across tangible and intangible values.

¹⁵ Nielsen Fan Insights, May-October 2024

¹⁶ Nielsen Attitudes on Ads Study 2024

How Nielsen can help

With representative data you can trust, Nielsen offers a range of tools and services to help you understand how consumers spend time with media, so you can make the right marketing decisions that will resonate and drive measurable results.



Unlock key audience insights

Go beyond age and gender and reach audiences that matter most to you. Seamlessly integrate first- and third-party audiences into your media plans and measurement strategies with **Nielsen Advanced Audiences**.

Understand your consumers—what they think, how they spend their time, shopping patterns and more—with **Nielsen Scarborough**.

Understand and grow fan bases, learn how to connect and discover opinions on sponsorship with **Nielsen Fan Insights**.

Feel confident in your cross-media decisions

Confidently build audiences, plan and measure across channels, and connect to business outcomes—all in one place—with **Nielsen ONE**, your solution for enabling impactful campaigns in today's fragmented media industry.

Gain deep insights into the competitive media advertising landscape and discover how to differentiate your brand from competitors with **Nielsen Ad Intel**.

Understand your business impact

Measure the impact of ad exposure on brand health metrics. Maximize your upper funnel campaign performance by measuring, understanding and shaping audience perceptions with Nielsen **Brand Impact**.

Understand the behaviors of podcast listeners so you can reach the right consumers and drive ROI with Nielsen's **Podcast Solutions**.



Conclusion

Black Americans are seeking culture and connection in the media they consume. Data-driven strategies are essential for marketers to do more than just reach Black consumers, and rather, connect with Black people to earn their business long-term.

Key takeaways



The right data partners and an inclusive approach to cross-media data are essential. In today's rapidly shifting media landscape, the right experts to navigate the data while meeting business outcomes is more important than ever. Reaching consumers in the market for your product is one thing, connecting with them is another. Ensure your approach to audiences and campaign creative puts people at the center—especially across platforms where Black consumers lead engagement.



Think beyond the generic ad buy to reach audiences wherever they're tuned in. Black consumers have an outsized impact on culture and lead media engagement across key channels for brand ROI. Overwhelmingly, Black audiences express a desire for more understanding and accuracy in how they're represented in campaigns and content. You need enough flexibility in your creative and budget process to meet Black America where they're tuned in from streaming to digital creators or their favorite radio show.

Methodology

Nielsen National TV Ratings

Television data is derived from Nielsen’s National TV Panel that is based on a sample of more than 42,000 homes and over 100,000 real people that are selected based on area probability sampling. Nielsen Big Data + Panel in National methodology brings together our panel methodology with 45 million big data households and 75 million devices from Comcast, Dish, DIRECTV, Roku and Vizio, combined with and validated by our gold-standard National TV Panel.

Nielsen Streaming Content Ratings

Audience measurement data that details how consumers are spending time with programs and episodes viewed through the top streaming platforms.

Nielsen Streaming Platform Ratings

Audience measurement data that details the amount of time consumers spend streaming and on which platforms.

Nielsen Ad Intel

Ad Intel provides the most complete source of cross-platform advertising intelligence available today. With intuitive software, review-and-compare ad activity across media, company, category or brand, plus historical data. Nielsen monitors gross advertising expenditure in major media at published rate card values.

Nielsen Scarborough

Nielsen Scarborough USA+ 2024 R1 Total (Jan 2023 - Apr 2024). Scarborough measures the unique shopping patterns, product usage, demographics, lifestyles and cross-media behaviors of the American consumer at a local, regional or national level, giving the ability to profile over 2,000 measured categories and brands.

Nielsen Brand Impact

Nielsen Brand Impact shows how campaigns influence consumer mindsets. Brand Impact captures digital, traditional and hybrid touchpoints for comprehensive coverage.

Nielsen Fan Insights

Nielsen Fan Insights (NFI) brings together a unique combination of data sources delivered in a single connected platform. The dashboard provides a comprehensive view into sports fans’ interests, media behavior, brand attitudes and purchasing habits.

Nielsen Media Impact

For national planning, Nielsen Media Impact uses respondent level data from Nielsen’s Total Media Fusion, which includes TV, VOD, SVOD, digital, digital-place based, print, radio and cinema. The digital video data in NMI is sourced from Nielsen’s Digital Content Ratings (DCR) data set. This analysis includes video content on web/app through a computer via the Digital (DCR) panel and measures video reach on a mobile device on content with a syndicated DCR/tag.

Nielsen Attitudes on Ads study 2024

Survey of over 2,000 Android and iOS users fielded by Nielsen Electronic Mobile Meter (EMM) Panel weighted for age, gender, race, ethnicity and income for Android and iOS users mobile phone users.

Acknowledgments

Sandra Sims-Williams
Katharine Olsen
Brian Campbell
Charlene Polite Corley
Patricia Ratulangi

Stacie de Armas
Pedro Rodriguez
Jon Miller
Mei-Ling Lu
Drew English

Alana Leverette
Arica McKinnon
Cecilia Jato Bitz
Laura Kutscher

About Nielsen

Nielsen shapes the world's media and content as a global leader in audience measurement, data and analytics. Through our understanding of people and their behaviors across all channels and platforms, we empower our clients with independent and actionable intelligence so they can connect and engage with their audiences—now and into the future.

Nielsen operates around the world in more than 55 countries. Learn more at www.nielsen.com and connect with us on social media (Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram).

Audience Is Everything®