

# FORGET STATEMENTS. CONSUMERS WANT DEEPER SOCIAL-JUSTICE COMMITMENTS FROM BRANDS.

An Ipsos POV in Diversity & Inclusion

By Manuel Garcia-Garcia, Barry Wahren, Malinda Midkiff, Elizabeth Espinosa



GAME CHANGERS





## Key Points

- Brands face challenges to make sure they address racial injustice.
- To be effective allies, brands must communicate and act boldly, even in a hyperpolarized political climate.
- A major challenge is to avoid getting lost in a sea of generic messages.

Nearly all Americans want to see significant changes in the world when it comes to sustainability and equitability, according to Ipsos research conducted in late 2020. And American consumers would like to see brands representing this change. But what does that mean on a practical level for brands—especially ones who are having trouble translating allyship into concrete action?

Even before the pandemic disrupted our lives, societal impact was a top driver of brand trust globally. Over the past several years, Ipsos research as shown that brand trust not only depends on the quality of products and services, but also on whether brands have a positive impact on society and deliver on the principles companies communicate.

In 2020, racial equality emerged as one of the most important social values to consumers in the United States. As a result, it is critical that brands build trust in this regard. Over half (54%) of consumers expect brands to take a stand on equality issues, particularly among young (18–34, 65%), Hispanic (64%) and Black (62%) consumers.

It is key for brands to deliver on what they communicate, but the first step is to get the communication right. While 67% of ads in Ipsos' database represent people of color, we find that about one third of consumers feel there should be more representation. Also, when brands represent the diversity in our society, it needs to be portrayed the right way:

## Racial and ethnic diversity in the people/characters featured



33%

I would like to see **more of this**. There's not enough of it.

52%

I am seeing the right amount of this.

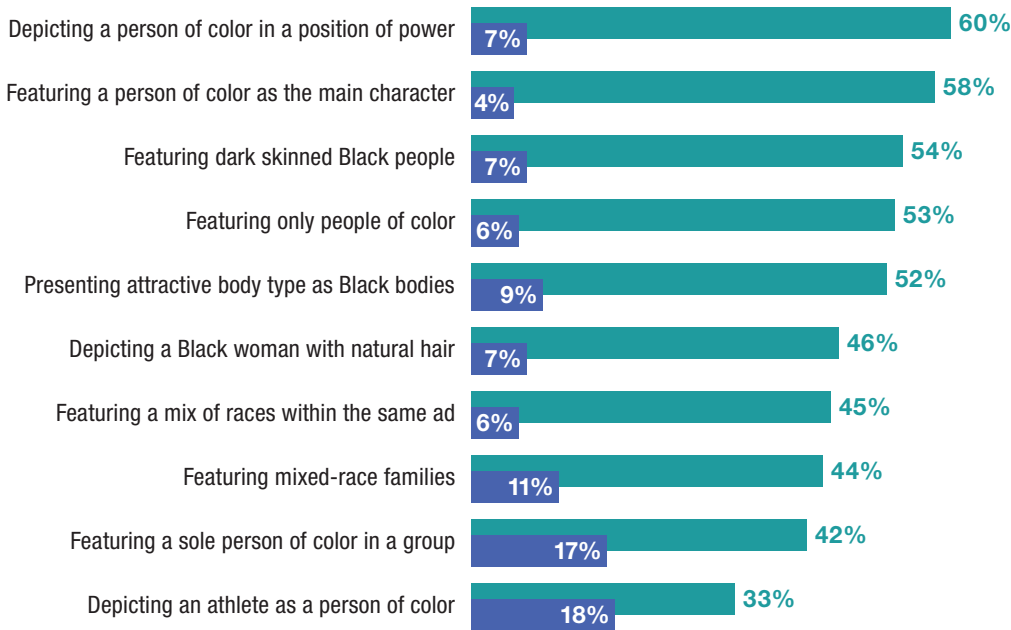
15%

I am seeing too much of this. **It's overdone.**

- Black consumers would like brands to defy stereotypes and go beyond basic representation.
- 60% of Black consumers and 38% of Gen Pop consumers would like to see people of color depicted in a position of power more often.
- Other areas for improvement in communications include featuring a person of color as a main character, including dark-skinned Black people, presenting black body types as attractive and depicting Black women with natural hair.



## When portraying people of color in advertising, Black consumers would like to see...



Want LESS    Want MORE

However, authenticity is critical. The best creative executions go beyond representation to integrate authentic contexts and stories. If you're a company taking steps to show authenticity, one key move involves integrating cultural fluency throughout your creative development process by bringing diverse voices into the planning phase.



*In fact, Asian-American voices from the Ipsos U.S. Syndicated Online Communities also raised the issue of representation, not only in ads, but also in the boardroom.*

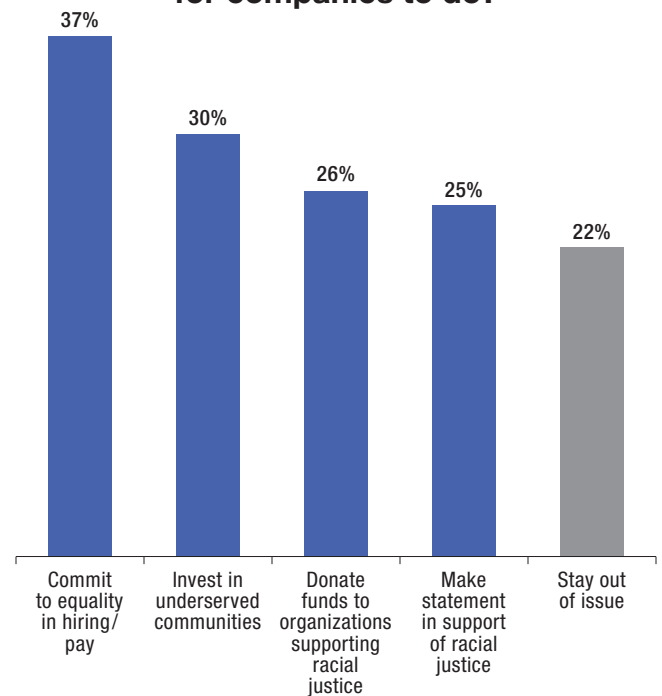
Additionally, it is not enough to speak out about racial inequality—consumers want to see brands take action. Over half of consumers would like to see brands call on political figures to enact change. In social media conversations tracked by Ipsos, authenticity emerges as a key attribute driving positive response. Ben & Jerry's, well-known for decades of brand development around social activism, was quick to make their stance known on supporting the BLM movement. This led to brand mentions spiking in June 2020 and an influx of consumer support online.



The social movement in the spring of 2020 presented brands with a chance to become allies with consumers who care about racial issues more than ever. But society is no longer ready to settle for messages stating a company's support for justice. At this point, consumers need companies to back the cause with tangible actions, such as committing to equality in hiring and pay, investing in underserved communities or donating funds to organizations supporting racial justice.

The opportunity in hand is not an easy one. In order to stand out, brand messages need to be unique to the brand, highlight concrete actions, and align with brand equity. Brands that previously expressed support for an issue will be more likely credited as authentic. Brands must also define which actions they are taking to make a positive impact, even if includes admitting mistakes from the past and publicly taking corrective actions.

**In the wake of protests around George Floyd's death and broader racial injustice, which of the following would be most effective for companies to do?**





There is also risk for corporate America when taking a stance in a hyperpolarized country like the U.S. Ipsos finds that while 60% of consumers would be more likely to consider a brand that is aligned with their own views, half said they would stop using a brand they disagree with. Not all consumers want to see brands engage in actions aimed at transforming culture.

Political conservatives are more likely to resist the notion of change and feel brands should not be active in the Black Lives Matter movement.

Moderates are skeptical about brand intentions when companies support Black Lives Matter unless they display authenticity.

Liberals are most critical of brands that could arguably be linked to systemic inequality, Ipsos data shows.



Brands, like citizens, should be allies because it is the right thing to do. However, while brands benefit from these moves, they also avoid the potential high risk of not being allies. Not demonstrating support could make the brand outdated, or even worse, not aligned with the majority of consumers' views. 61% of Americans prefer brands that help them "make a difference in the world" when purchasing their goods or services; 85% of Americans

believe that it is possible for a brand to support a good cause and make money at the same time.

While consumers in all groups understand challenges brands face with social matters regardless of political leaning, there is agreement that if a brand is going to communicate a position against racial injustice, they need to act.

## About Ipsos

At Ipsos we are passionately curious about people, markets, brands, and society. We deliver information and analysis that makes our complex world easier and faster to navigate and inspires our clients to make smarter decisions. With a strong presence in 90 countries, Ipsos employs more than 18,000 people and conducts research programs in more than 100 countries. Founded in France in 1975, Ipsos is controlled and managed by research professionals.

## Contact

### **Manuel Garcia-Garcia**

Global Lead of Neuroscience,  
Global Science Organization, Ipsos  
[manuel.garcia-garcia@ipsos.com](mailto:manuel.garcia-garcia@ipsos.com)  
Phone: 929-313-3609

## What's Next:

1. Don't just communicate, act.
2. Represent all people in advertising and avoid stereotypes.
3. Integrate authentic context and stories.
4. Bring diverse voices to integrate cultural fluency into communications and branding.
5. Weigh the risks of taking a stance, but don't ignore the risk of not taking a stance.