



SURVEY: BLACK CREATORS IN 2020 AND BEYOND

A Call for Diversity and Inclusion in Influencer Marketing

2020 has ushered in powerful moments that will shape how we perceive social media forever.

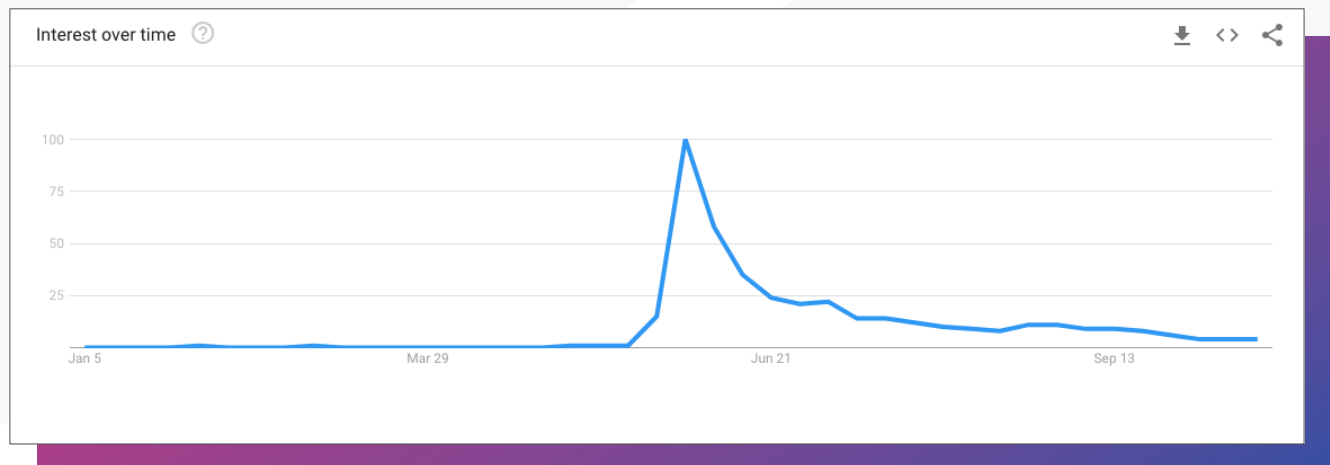
During a time when we were more digitally connected than ever (due in large part to the Coronavirus pandemic), many Americans experienced a long overdue awakening to the reality of systemic racism in our country. As the conversation around George Floyd's murder and police brutality took social media by storm, Black Lives Matter, a movement that began with a hashtag in 2013 — was transformed into a global network and a strong force impossible to ignore.

According to the [Social Media Analytics Center](#) at the [University of Connecticut](#), during the first 30 days, Black Lives Matter had been mentioned more than 80 million times on Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, and blogs across the web combined. In fact, #blacklivesmatter is the third most used social-issue hashtag in the last 10 years of Twitter history.



The entire social media sphere was flooded with information, reflective messaging and powerful speech calling for change. We witnessed content creators and brands alike quickly alter their posting behavior to adapt to the circumstances happening across the U.S. As a sign of support, a variety of empathetic communal initiatives took place to let Black voices shine. Many paused their activity on social media to let Black creators and organizations lead the conversation and inform [protesters](#) who took the streets of many American cities. Over the course of weeks, hundreds of people relied on social media as a means of communicating with one another and sharing safety tips during this time of public unrest.

After a period of silence and reflection, the need for action was evident. Communities started looking for more ways to support Black people beyond the online and off-line protests. The terms “Black-owned businesses to support” and “Black artists to support” saw their biggest spike in the last 5 years.



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This awakening touched virtually every industry including Influencer marketing. Discussion around diversity, inclusion, pay gaps and more started to take place as it became obvious we could do more to contribute to the change we all wanted to see in the world.



Measuring the Impact: Our Methodology

As 2020 comes to an end, we wanted to look back and measure the progress and better understand the work still left to do. To do so, we surveyed 31 Black creators to gauge their views and experiences working in the influencer marketing industry since Black Lives Matter's initial spotlight. When sharing their experiences, the creators all remain anonymous

What We Asked / What They Answered

Past Experiences with Influencer Marketing

Q. *Are Black creators receiving more opportunities? If so, how much did they grow this year in terms of brand partnerships?*

A. Out of the 31 influencers, 32% reported an increase of job opportunities (brand sponsorships). This 32% is mostly made up of creators that averaged 0 to 5 brand sponsorships a month.

How did 2020 shape their experiences with Influencer Marketing?

Q. When working with a new brand, have you added new layers of vetting to uncover their stance regarding BLM before making your decision?

A. Out of the influencers that shared their brand vetting process, 86% reported adding new layers to discover the brand's stance on Black Lives Matter. Here are some of the insights they shared with us:



"I first go to their social media platforms and then their website to gauge and determine if they are using black creators across all of their marketing. I look to see if they have opted to or not to make acknowledgement of the injustices/the movement in some concrete way: ie making donations, raises funds for grants, special campaigns, increased exposure and selection of Black Influencers/creators, etc."



"I just check to see what their ownership, governance, and staff looks like. I definitely check to see their public positioning and also consult with other creators."



"There are certain questions we ask in terms of their beliefs, as well as their visual response on the recent issues against Black people."

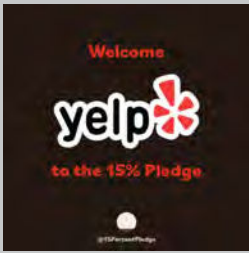


"Look through their instagram to see what the diversity looks like. Only take on brands who I would have worked with before the BLM movement"



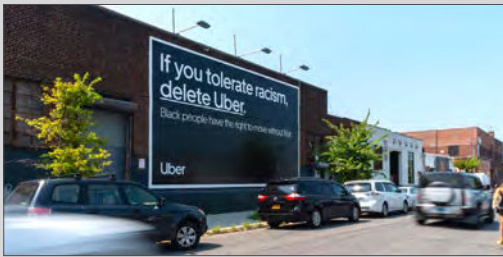
"I search through their Press pages, Instagram feeds, following lists (And mutual accounts following them), tagged photos in case they're being called out, etc. Besides the first and last point, the rest is the same."

"The 15% pledge is powerful"



The 15% pledge is a movement calling on major retailers to commit a minimum of 15% of their shelf to Black-owned businesses, in relation to the fact that 15% of the U.S. population is Black.

"The 15% pledge has been my favorite way of seeing what big name brands are doing when it comes to racial equity right now."



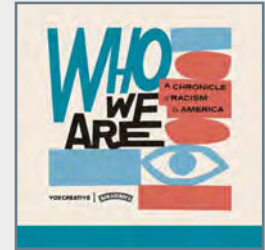
"Uber's ads."

"Actively adding BIPOC to the highest positions possible. Ensuring their are BIPOC consistently and constantly featured on their social media platforms, as well as their website. Partnering with BIPOC for every campaign(s)."

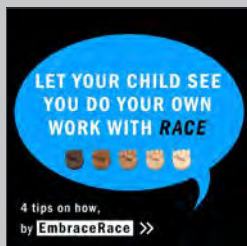
Q.

What are the most meaningful examples, in recent memory, of brands taking a stand to support Black lives and the social justice movement?

"Haven't seen much to be honest. It's been a lot of performative actions. "We stand in solidarity with our black creators" well show us. Show us more than a black square. Work with more black creators, do the work in finding them because there are so many of us. Present us with the same opportunities and the same opportunities and budgets the white influencers you all work with get."



"I've taken notice of a few brands who have made concrete efforts to support the BLM/social justice movement by creating grants, special campaigns, activations, and sharing their platforms with influential Black voices to share their stories. Netflix, Ben & Jerry, and Proctor and Gamble excelled in these areas."



"I was impressed by a campaign we did with Old Navy. It was originally going to be a campaign to promote their Americana collection for 4th of July, but the brand completely changed course and ended up doing a whole campaign showing how different families (including us) talk about race."

"Gucci's diversity council (not in light of BLM but occurred due to an instance of offense before it)" - Gucci's diversity council is their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion as a company.



What this Means for the Influencer Marketing Industry

Social platforms are experiencing record-levels of activity as users seek to vent their feelings and share useful ideas to better manage their lives, specifically around key phrases like #StayHome. On Twitter, conversations containing #StayHome have spiked since February 15th.

Industry Making Progress on Diversity:

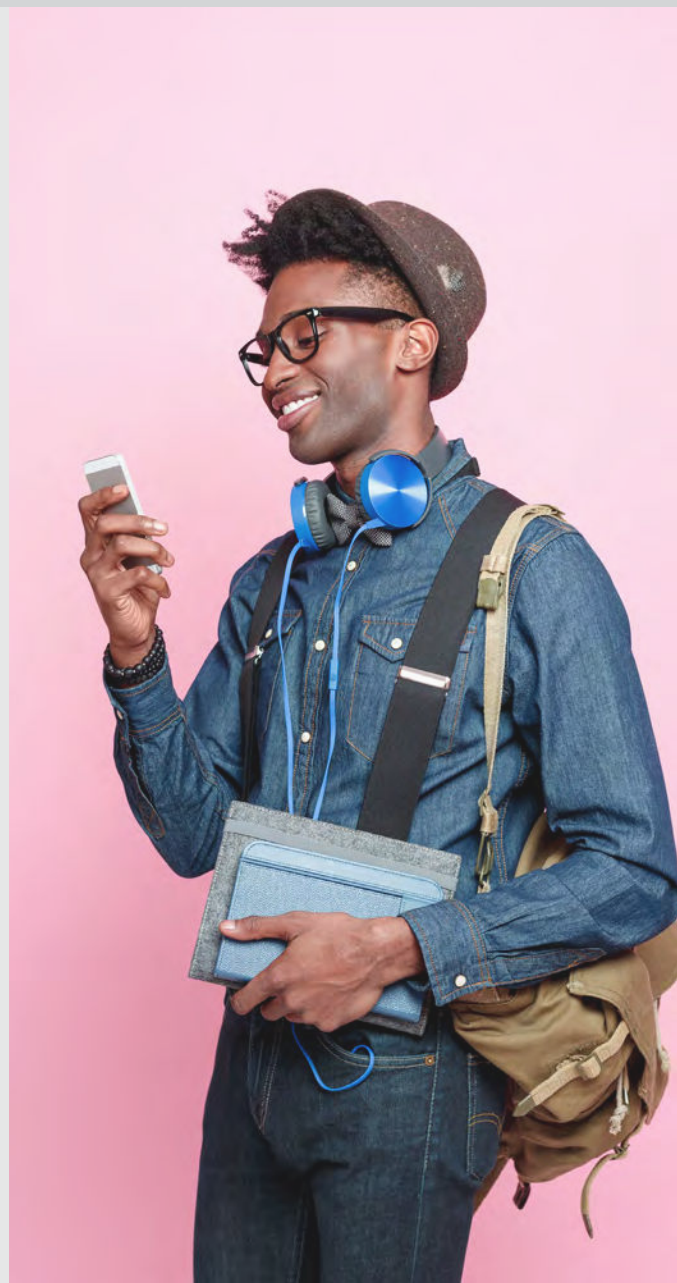
Despite a global pandemic that disrupted influencer marketing (we reported a decrease of sponsored posts during the start of quarantine orders in the U.S.), Black creators have seen an increase in job opportunities in the past months.

The Vetting Process isn't Exclusive to Brands:

Contrary to popular belief, influencers don't accept every brand partnership that is offered to them. Creators will turn down brand collaborations if it feels like it is not the right fit for their audience and their community. Black creators are not the exception and they have extra layers to consider. According to our survey, Black creators look for diverse representation across a brand's social presence and look for consistent diversity and inclusion efforts.

Inclusion and Accountability:

Black influencers are holding brands accountable beyond social media platforms. Survey respondents said that they also look for company news, inclusive website imagery, and the makeup of the company's leadership to follow up efforts made towards inclusive marketing.





“ Marketers have long realized that a brand’s values are an increasingly important factor to consumers and this has only become more true since the popularization of BLM. As influencers become more adept at doing their own research and “vetting” brands, it’s safe to say consumers are too. The best way for brands to stay ahead is to spend ample time listening to their consumers and putting trust in their diverse influencer partners to speak authentically to their own audiences to the benefit of the brand’s creative and bottom line.”

Gabriela Leverette

Creative Project Manager



Maggie Reznikoff

Director of Account Management

“It’s been refreshing to see an increase in accountability and commitment to equal representation in marketing and advertising. Has there been progress? Yes. Is the job done? Absolutely not. While I do expect to see a continued emphasis on diversity and inclusion in 2021, its imperative that diversity isn’t treated as a box that needs to be checked. It’s not enough to make room for diverse voices, ideas and opinions - it’s about exploring and celebrating them. We will continue to see brands who get it right, and others who fumble, but one thing is clear: how brands choose to act right now will set the tone for their future.”

Openinfluence

Open Influence's Brand ToolKit

Making the influencer marketing industry a supportive space for Black creators is a shared responsibility between audiences, brands, and agencies. Moving forward to 2021, we can't forget about the commitment that we made to the Black community.



Resources for Inclusive Brands



A Call For Diversity and Inclusion in Influencer Marketing



Stand for Something: The Role of Influencer Marketing in BLM Movement

If you'd like to learn more feel free to contact us at any of our social channels or drop us an email at social@openinfluence.com. We'd love to hear and learn from you!

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