UrbanTrends
COLLECTION
URBAN MARKETING 101

Sender
Credibility

Message
Content

Channel
Effectiveness

Receiver
Targeted

What's Culturally
Relevant and Effective?

Letter from the Editor

Welcome

to the second UrbanTrends Collection, one we call Urban Marketing 101!

Like our Entertainment Collection published late 2001, this issue brings together some of MEE's best information about trends in America's inner cities. This time, our focus is on marketing—whether it's social marketing around behavior change, or commercial marketing to promote a product or service. If you need a culturally-relevant strategy for reaching and influencing urban audiences, you'll find some great ideas in this issue.

To help you get "the big picture," we've arranged the articles into four categories, which reflect the basic elements of traditional communications theory: Sender/ Message/Channel/ Receiver (SMCR).

The Sender, whether individual or group, originates the message, and determines what information to share and with whom. Articles in this section identify a cross-section of credible senders for those hoping to reach urban populations.

The Message is simply the information the sender wants to communicate to the receiver, usually to motivate or to influence behavior. These days, there are many types of messages targeted to African Americans, either because we are over-represented in so many of the negative health statistics in this country, or because of our increasing spending power as consumers. We share some of the messages on issues that have an impact in our communities.

The Channel is how the message is delivered to the sender. It may include various media outlets, peer-to-peer outreach, mobilizing grassroots community organizations, or empowering parents and caregivers to communicate better with young people. Entertainment media is particularly powerful in our communities. Check out

the UT Entertainment Collection (Vol.10, No. 3-4) for a detailed look at why and how.

The Receiver is the final component in the basic model of communication. Assessing the message receiver—i.e., the target audience—from both a cultural and language perspective is important.

Overarching this SMCR model, of course, is the cultural context. When you deal with urban populations, the equation is "colored" by the fact that African Americans (and Latinos to a lesser extent) are from primarily an oral (versus a literate) culture. That means they interpret and process information differently from mainstream audiences.

Of course, there are marketing implications connected with this reality. By reading these articles, you'll see that generating positive "word-of-mouth" and including argument-counterargument scenarios are both critical steps in developing culturally relevant and effective messages. Because MEE's committed to sharing what we've learned with our subscribers, most of whom are "on the frontlines," this issue gives you the insight you need to do critically-needed work in our hardest-hit, and often hardest-to-reach communities. I hope you feel renewed and inspired to improve your results!

Peace,

Pamela Weddington
Vice President for Communications

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[Ed. Note-Some articles have been edited for space. Refer to the original UT issue (in box at the end of each article) for the full story.]

Leadership: Do Urban Youth Follow A Different Drummer?

The state of Black leadership is one of the most commonly misunderstood aspects of contemporary African American life. While the mainstream media often paints African Americans as a monolith under the guidance of a few selected political or social "leaders," in reality this is far from the truth. Even the common assumption that professional athletes take on leadership roles (even against their will) for African American youth is not truly accurate.

In 1999, MEE conducted eight focus groups at six Historically Black Colleges/ Universities (HBCUs) to talk to African American youth about their views on the current state of Black leadership. The students from Hampton University (VA), Morehouse College (GA), Clark-Atlanta University (GA), Cheyney University (PA), Bowie State University (MD) and Howard University (DC) were between the ages of 18 and 25.

We found that these African American youth were largely skeptical of high-profile African American "leaders," although they did find some positive aspects in them. Most students did not feel that national figures spoke for them, or for others their age. They were quick to point out that heading a national Black organization does not make one, a representative of the Black community, an important point that the mainstream media rarely grasps. Because of the distrust of mainstream media, the "word on the street" within their own community often determines their views and leaders. Many of the youth looked to their parents or other neighborhood adults for guidance.

[Ed. Note – In our 2002 surveys, we find that youth continue to seek advice and direction from the elders in "the village."]

As for well-known, national African American figures, these youth were pragmatic. They identified with and celebrated certain aspects of these individual's lives, but rejected any notions of them as representatives for all Black people. For instance, Jesse Jackson was lauded by some for his "intelligence and strength," yet youth were suspicious of the fact that he was one of the few figures ever called on by the media to explain "the Black condition." While the youth identified with

Louis Farrakhan's calls for Black economic independence and empowerment, they also were dismayed at the media's insistence on portraying him as "the" national Black spokesman because they disagreed with many of his other, more inflammatory statements.

Under recent leadership, more mainstream African American organizations, such as the NAACP, have made a more concerted effort to reach out to the hip-hop generation. There is still a lot of work to be done in order to overcome youth's inherent mistrust of any individual or group which is perceived as being too close to the traditional power structure. Perhaps a clue about how to galvanize African American youth can be found in our research. Rather than invoking national African American "leaders," go to local community centers and places where youth hang out. Often, you will find that the most important and influential leaders are right in youth's back yards. Many parents and youth service providers are unaware of the full extent of the influence they have on their sons and daughters. Some of the most effective youth organizing engages parents and concerned adults as intermediary message senders.

UT 8

Urban Radio Disc Jockeys: Still Powerful Message Senders

Over the years many have believed – with the proliferation of cable, satellite television, computer games and the Internet taking more of America's "entertainment time" – that radio would go the way of the dinosaurs. However, radio still continues to be a powerful medium. Radio has survived, and even thrived, in urban areas of the world, but it would merely be a "static" medium if it were not for the personalities that help to color and shape it. In particular, urban radio disc jockeys remain powerful "message senders" with their audience.

Urban DJs exhibit a lot of power behind the microphone, and have the opportunity to relate to and greatly influence their listeners: they announce everything from the weather, time and traffic to the latest celebrity gossip (most DJs, incidentally,

are considered celebrities by their listeners). DJs regularly interact with their audience and are powerful representations of the oral communications culture, which is so prominent among African Americans. Listeners can call to request songs, give their opinions or win prizes.

The urban radio DJ is very often someone right from the community; someone who shares the same background as his or her audience. This familiarity means that they are never perceived as "outsiders" but as peers. Urban DJs do much more than play tunes that listeners can nod their heads to. They also inspire, educate and motivate. Tom Joyner, for example, is not only one of the most entertaining and popular syndicated DJs in the nation, he has helped to initiate boycotts and has

voiced opinions against companies that he has felt do not hire African Americans or respect their buying power. In this manner, he has shown that he protects and respects the community, which makes him a powerful message sender.

The urban radio disc jockey is the consummate communicator, the "storyteller" or griot of old, viewed as a celebrity, authority figure and a "hip" member of the community passing information orally to a captivated audience. The special qualities that they bring to the communication process, including affordability, portability, high-watt talent and charisma, means that the urban radio DJ will remain "on the air" well into the new millennium.

UT 5

Peers vs. The Village - Who's Winning?

Many African American parents rely on extended family to help in the raising of their children. The extended family includes close friends, church members, co-workers, neighbors and other people who can positively affect the lives of youth. They often take on some of the same roles and responsibilities of biological family members.

The extended family concept can be traced back to cultural values and practices of the African ancestors. Many of us have heard the African proverb "It takes a village to raise a child." However, in recent times, many in the Black community have stepped away from the role and responsibility defined in that proverb. There used to be a time when adults reached out to children in need, no matter who they "belonged to." In a time where young people need adults more than ever, many adults have now decided to "mind their own business."

Through MEE's previous work in developing messages for hard-to-reach urban youth living in at-risk environments, we have developed a three-model framework. The core premise of this model is that (1) media is the "thing" that young people consume the most; (2) the peer group has the most influence over youth's attitudes and beliefs; and (3) adults have the most power, although currently unrealized.

For instance, society's current environment of drug and alcohol abuse and the media's pressure on youth to consume and participate in unhealthy behaviors are ever-present realities to today's youth. This reality is compounded by the rudimentary peer relationship issues that youth must cope with. Because this is the only "family" that gives them a false sense of value and worth, urban youth are willing to engage in at-risk behavior to maintain insider status with their peer group.

The family and community environment is the first place where young people's values and attitudes are shaped. This is when they begin to establish their morals, ideas and direction for the future. Once youth venture away from the family, they are often challenged by their peers. Because of the tremendous influence of their peers, it is sometimes difficult for youth to maintain some of the attitudes and values they have learned from their family and community. If there has been no guidance from the family or community, a young person's peers become a substitute "family."

UT 2

Mobilizing Urban Communities: Re-Building From The Inside Out

Urban communities face a myriad of challenges — concentrated poverty, a shifting economy, institutional racism, drugs and violence and poor schools and health care. Instead of waiting for outsiders to solve these problems, inner-city residents, with support, can come together to work for changes that improve their quality of life, socially and financially. In fact, most urban residents have come to the conclusion that it is futile to wait for any meaningful help to arrive from outside the community.

Even in the poorest neighborhoods, there are individuals and organizations that serve as resources that can be used to rebuild communities. The challenge is to harness those assets in a socially responsible and culturally relevant manner. Programs that validate the voices of the inner-city residents create empowered communities prepared to pool their energies to make a positive difference.

It all comes back to building positive word-of-mouth. When it comes to making decisions, people tend to ask their friends or family for advice. Once you educate and inform the opinion leaders in urban communities, they become advocates on behalf of your product or message. They in turn persuade any skeptical peers.

Community-based organizations (CBOs) are major players in urban campaigns. Most of them are committed to responsible access to and interaction with the communities they serve. Bringing together a broad range of community stakeholders with a shared vision of positive change will ultimately strengthen a community's long-term problem-solving capacities.

Keys to the Community

In order for grassroots marketing campaigns to make a real impact on urban communities, access to community gatekeepers is critical. The "keys to the community" include having credibility, building trust, gaining access, incorporating community involvement and providing value to the community.

The second key to the community – trust – says that the campaign designers are willing to listen before doing anything else. It also means that you always follow up and follow through with any tasks that arise during the planning and implementation process. Once the community is assured that you can be depended on to do what you promise, you will be much more likely to be invited to return for projects and activities down the road.

Finally, the campaign should "close the loop" or ensure that the community's needs are being met. The community should perceive your campaign, whether it is promoting a product or a behavior change, as an effort that brings added value to the environment. CBOs are already centers of community life, where members of the target audiences are accustomed to accessing a wide variety of services. By expanding upon already-developed trust and developing strong working relationships with CBOs, you can create a "win-win" scenario both for your campaign and for the community.

UT 10

Community Health Projects: Applying MEE Research

Reaching and Positively Influencing People of Color

Since 1990, MEE has been engaged in an array of research-based public education campaigns related to populations of color, particularly African Americans and low-income urban youth. The bottom line of these efforts is to positively influence residents in urban communities across the country and around the globe. Men and women of color faced many social, economic and moral challenges at the approach of the new millennium. Each campaign was designed to make a difference in facing some of those challenges and in improving the lives of the individuals they touch.

MEE has designed and implemented multi-level public health education campaigns for intervention practitioners serving African American and Latino youth; low-income women; gay, bisexual and heterosexual people of color; and men who have sex with men (MSMs).

Critical Success Factors For Communicating With At-Risk Urban Populations

MEE focuses on how urban populations see their world and the world around them. When dealing with urban audiences and African Americans, message designers cannot underestimate the significance of "how you say it." Developing a cultural and communication environment that relates to the target audience on their terms is the key to an effective market strategy.

MEE's Approach To Community Health Marketing

In community health projects focusing on public education and awareness, MEE's communication research is used as the basis for creating and conducting successful campaigns that inform residents, create awareness and empower communities. These campaigns feature key components of our unique marketing approach: 1) they augment or altogether bypass traditional communications channels, taking messages directly into the community where the target audience lives, socializes and receives services; and 2) they reflect the oral communications culture that describes how many people of color process information and new ideas.

Our public health campaigns combine both traditional and non-traditional forms of communication to deliver the key messages. Campaign components include one or more of the following: 1) peer-to-peer communications, using MEE's Peer Group Leadership Model; 2) radio advertising and promotions; 3) partnering with community-based organizations for outreach and support of community-based events; and 4) dissemination of information and materials via community action teams (CATs).

MEE's HIV & Reproductive Health Rights Campaigns

MEE has designed and implemented HIV/AIDS prevention, testing and treatment campaigns for communities of color. This depth of experience with both youth and young adults has shaped communication and media projects funded by Agouron Pharmaceuticals, Inc., GlaxoSmithKline, the City of Philadelphia's AIDS Activities Coordinating Office (AACO), the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

MEE also researched, designed and implemented culturally-sensitive, public education campaigns in Philadelphia and Oakland, CA to increase awareness of emergency contraception (EC) options among low-income, single, African American females, ages 18-30. The pilot campaign is based on the theme "the right to know." Many women we talked to were surprised and angry that healthcare professionals had failed to present all the available choices for preventing unplanned pregnancies.

UT 4

The Health Of Our Community: Physical Activity And Nutrition

Most Americans talk a good game about health, yet statistics show that our actions many times do not mirror what we say. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that the number of overweight children has more than doubled in the last three decades, with 12.5% of Americans between the ages of 6 and 17 being overweight or obese. Data for adults reflect that many Americans are also heavier and more out of shape than ever.

African Americans are disproportionately affected by certain diseases and conditions related to this reality, including diabetes and high blood pressure. As with all populations, their level of physical activity, along with their eating habits (and possibly some genetic predisposition) determines their susceptibility to these diseases.

MEE has conducted focus group research on African American adolescents and college students to determine their eating habits and attitudes towards physical activity and nutrition. The research focused on developing effective strategies to promote behavior change in young people who may be more likely to adopt lifestyle changes that can benefit their health.

MEE's research revealed that today's Black youth and young adults, like their White counterparts, are not getting enough exercise and are not eating nutritiously. Black males, for example, tend to consume most of their meals outside of the home, usually from fast food restaurants found at or near school. This same trend occurred among college students, who remarked that they were "surrounded" by fast food restaurants on and around their campuses.

Other findings included:
- Many urban youth pick junk food for a snack, as opposed to fresh fruit, even though they know that fruit is a healthier alternative.
- Few participants said they ate breakfast at home. A significant portion said they skipped breakfast altogether because they do not have enough time, want their sleep or are not that hungry early in the morning.

Research participants who were not on school or community teams claimed to play basketball, football or baseball regularly with friends. Other than sports, it was rare to hear a participant discuss any type of physical activity for exercise or fun. None walked, ran, swam, played tennis or rode their bike with any regularity (especially once they had access to a car). Once they passed the age of organized school sports (around age 18, unless recruited for college or the pros), most would drop them altogether, with no other physical activity to replace it.

Many barriers keep African Americans from exercising. They include both excuses and myths about exercise. For example:
- Some African Americans believe that exercise is only for young people or for the rich who have more time and energy and money to afford health club memberships.
- With all they have to deal with as urban residents, along with their family and other responsibilities, Black women, in particular, report that they just do not have enough time to exercise. Plus, for some, rest is considered more important than exercise, when they're already juggling so many things in their lives; they report that they are too tired to exercise or believe that exercise makes you more tired.
- Some say that they already get enough physical activity from caregiving, housekeeping and workday activities.

Innovative programs that reflect the lives Black people are living today will be most effective in changing their health outlooks. There is a lack of culturally relevant health messages designed to raise awareness among people of color about the benefits of healthy eating and physical activity. More programs need to be designed which incorporate some form of physical activity into their lives. The key is to develop activities which people enjoy and feel comfortable doing, such as using traditional African or hip-hop dance classes to get people to start moving.

UT 9

Risk Factors for Teen Dating Violence

Teen dating violence (TDV) is a public health problem that receives little attention in the adult world. It is a difficult phenomenon to grasp because for the most part, it is understudied and rarely reported. We do know, however, that intimate partner/teen dating violence is a reality for today's young people. According to a poll by Children Now/Kaiser Permanente, 40% of teenage girls ages 14 to 17 reported knowing someone their age who has been hit or beaten by a boyfriend. A U.S. Department of Education report estimated that there are 4,000 incidents of rape or other types of sexual assault in public schools across the country each year.

There is a need to increase awareness of and responsibility for the problem of teen dating violence at all levels of the community. In order to be successful, however, that awareness must filter down to the individual teen and his/her peer group, because within urban youth culture, it is peers that sanction and establish the norms of acceptable behavior. It is only when peers make non-violence in dating relationships the "standard," that it will gain final acceptance.

In its comprehensive study *In Search of Love: Dating Violence Among Urban Youth*, MEE examined the cultural and communications dynamics of urban Black teens, ages 16-18, that allow, support and even encourage violence in male/female dating relationships. It viewed race, culture and communication as central factors to understanding male-female dating interactions during the teen and young adult years. In follow-up interviews with youth service providers in Atlanta, MEE found that providers believe that a lack of coordination between agencies and a lack of

HIV Testing –
Why It's Such a Hard Sell

resources for detailed tracking cause TDV victims and/or offenders to be lost within the system. Overall, providers felt that the problem of TDV is not taken as seriously as it should be by their agencies or the community in general, with the underlying sentiment being a level of denial by many adults and leaders in the community.

Awareness trainings, such as those MEE has been conducting for youth service providers, health professionals, educators, probation officers and program directors can help expose TDV more widely as a public health issue. In addition, various ways of "how you say it" must be explored. MEE, for example, is developing a full-length, fictional script and film treatment, "Looking for Love," which will disseminate positive messages to young people on their own self-defined, market-driven level. The goal is to speak to the target audience in its own language and in a matter that makes them comfortable in confronting the sensitive issues within their own communities.

UT 9

Despite the fact that the overall number of AIDS cases is down across the United States, the number of HIV infections is rising steadily among certain populations. Initially thought of as a disease affecting gay White men, today's reality is that HIV has overwhelmingly spread within communities of color, affecting men, women and children.

The first step in helping to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS is to know one's HIV status–either positive or negative. However, for most people, HIV testing means having to think about and deal with deeply personal issues –intimate relationships, sexual behavior and even one's own mortality. The challenge is to convince members of the most affected communities that choosing to get tested, regardless of the results, is beneficial to their health and the health of their community.

MEE has been researching these issues for a number of years, attempting to identify some of the major obstacles to HIV testing within at-risk populations. We have found several reasons that it's such a hard sell to convince people to get tested:

• Prevention efforts centered on scare tactics have backfired and led to a fearful public that sees little value in testing. People are in denial or have become fatalistic in that they believe testing will only confirm a possible death sentence: "If I don't know, I don't have to deal with it."

• They fear a lack of anonymity and/or confidentiality during testing. When people of color walk into a facility perceived to be "White," there is a feeling of exposure. In addition, there are fears of facing racism and homophobia at testing facilities where staffs have not developed cultural sensitivity to inner-city clients. People want to go where they feel they will be treated with respect.

• They fear losing their partners, family and friends if they go in for testing, or if they test positive. They look around and see that there is very little social support in minority communities for HIV-positive people. They fear having to disclose a positive HIV status to people they care about.

• Many minorities have a deep-seated mistrust in the medical community — grounded

in the history of such things as the infamous Tuskegee experiments and fears of genocide.

• Traditions of pride and machismo, common to men in the African American and Latino community, mean that honest discussions between sexual partners about sex, adultery and STDs, are out of the question — a situation that often discourages women from getting tested and prevents early discovery of their HIV status.

• With MSMs (men who have sex with men) of color, HIV testing campaigns targeted for the gay community are not successful, because these men, who often are married or still have relationships with women, tend to identify primarily with their ethnic/racial affiliation and, in many ways, think like a "typical" heterosexual male.

In spite of these and other barriers, the need for HIV testing has now become paramount, due to the severity of the HIV/AIDS epidemic within African American and Latino communities. However, HIV testing efforts will be futile without active community "buy-in" and involvement, in which testing becomes a socially acceptable norm for every sexually active individual. Too many testing promotion programs make assumptions based on Eurocentric worldviews and on cultural or social class values not reflective of the life situation of urban people of color.

Yet, there is room for hope. Testing positive no longer means a "death sentence" because antiretroviral therapies are allowing HIV-infected people to live longer, healthier lives. Those who test negative have a second chance to begin practicing safer sex and to eliminate the behaviors that may have been putting them at risk in the first place.

In either scenario, testing can help put a stop to the ravages of this deadly disease by: 1) helping to stop the spread of the disease by those who may not know they are infected; 2) enabling those who are already infected to obtain drug treatment as early as possible in the disease's progression; and 3) helping pregnant women receive treatment in order to protect their unborn children.

UT 7

Marketing Channels
- What's Effective?

It is becoming common knowledge that to reach the lucrative youth market in the United States, responsible for over $153 billion in sales in 1999, marketers must first gain the allegiance of urban African American youth. Since 1990, African American consumers have increased their buying power by more than 50%, spending $572 million in disposable income in 2000 alone. Recent studies show that African Americans will continue to outpace White households in the purchase of cars, home furnishings, appliances, clothing and telephone and computer services. Retailers and marketers, both public and private, who want to be poised to take advantage of the more than $600 billion minority groups are expected to spend in 2002, must become educated about which media channels are most effective in reaching African Americans and other minority groups.

Taking It to the Streets

Fast rising companies like sports apparel retailer "And 1" are generating word-of-mouth publicity through street teams that connect with youth in ways that other traditional forms of advertising cannot. "We found out early on that kids are not watching TV 24-7. They're on the street," says Phil Colon, president of Urban Latino, an urban youth magazine.

Radio Remains On Top

The very social nature of teens makes radio a very natural and effective choice. "We'd use radio for support because if kids aren't at home, they are out in their cars listening to the radio or on the street listening to their Walkmans," Colon adds. According to Arbitron, 54.5 % of the total African American population can be reached by advertising on urban contemporary, hip-hop/rap and Black adult contemporary radio formats. Latino populations are also avid radio listeners. Often they will listen to the radio throughout the day, with an entire family listening to the same station, on average 26-30 hours a week. This is more than 13 % above the amount of time the general population spends listening to radio.

Graffiti advertising is one way for corporations to reach inner-cities and their ethnic populations. Spray paint is the new medium in marketing. Many graffiti artists, like Nicer, Bio and BG183 of TATS Cru, started out "painting" illegally, but are now commercial street illustrators for major companies. The TATS Cru has moved from spraying trains, which they term "rolling canvases," to achieving commercial success as legitimate artists supported by such sponsors as Coca-Cola, Reebok and Seagram's Chivas Regal.

(New York Magazine)

UT 1

The "Digital Divide" Narrows

Cyberspace, the next frontier, is also opening its doors to African Americans and people of color. Despite the "digital divide" coined by former President Clinton, almost five million African Americans are online. Of those, almost half are under the age of 30; they also tend to be wealthier and more educated than their offline counterparts. As household income increases, so does the percentage of racial and ethnic minorities who own computers and have Internet access. Given the government's pledge to bridge the gap between the technological "haves and have-nots," advertisers would do well not to underestimate the potential impact of a diverse population of Web surfers as we go deeper into the new millennium.

(marketmedia.com, tbwt.com, Business and Industry, Advertising Age)

UT 6

Music is the future for ethnic marketing. Music events are becoming increasingly popular as corporate sponsorship vehicles for targeting ethnic groups. Music is a unifying force and a means of drawing upon the passions of diverse ethnic populations. Leading advertisers such as American Airlines, AT&T, Miller Brewing Co., Sears and Visa USA will spend $10 million dollars each on the sponsorships of multicultural events this year, and that number should increase by 20 percent by next year.

(Advertising Age)

UT 1

Music and African Americans

From gathering around the fire to the rhythmic beat of drums in an African village, to the Negro spirituals sung by slaves toiling on Southern plantations and the marchers in the '60s Civil Rights Movement; from the Motown Sound to the hip-hop generation, storytelling and music have always been major components of African and African American culture. Music serves as a guide to consumer decision-making, an interpreter of social issues and a gauge of community attitudes within the African American community.

UT 3

MEE's Ethnic Marketing Model

In today's urban market, it is not enough to have an outstanding product or service. If you don't market that product/service in a way that urban audiences can understand and appreciate, then all your efforts will have been in vain. Effective campaigns must be based on the Oral Communications Culture model, to which most urban populations subscribe. With a decade of organizing and marketing experience, MEE has determined five key stages to an effective marketing campaign for urban populations:

Stage One: Introduction and Exposure

The first step is to introduce your message/s to the target audience. Since urban populations are overwhelming consumers of television and radio, these two media are highly effective in achieving this first step. Your initial effort should present your key message in an interesting, yet straightforward manner. You only have one chance to make an initial impression and this first message will serve as the foundation for later messages to build upon.

Stage Two: Repetition

The repetition of your message on television or radio means that your key points will be given time to sink in and will garner greater name recognition once you advance into your campaign's later stages. Another good medium for message repetition is transit advertising/public transportation outlets. As with radio, transit ads give your message a chance to be seen in a public and social setting, thereby increasing the chance of awareness, interest and word-of-mouth. Street teams or grassroots marketing are more proactive ways to generate word-of-mouth and allow the marketer to target precisely the audiences they want.

Stage Three: Initiate Discussion

It is crucial to invite dialogue and discussion with your target audience around your product/service in order to begin the oral communications cultural process, which thrives upon debate. Community-based organizations (CBOs) are a good

tool for transmitting messages, because of their credibility within the community. Sponsored programs affiliated with CBOs almost guarantee that your message gets through to the local population.

Stage Four: Enable Dialogue

For a message to be given genuine credence by an urban population, it is vital to allow that audience a dialogue with the message sender. This is done by allowing for repeated argument-counterargument interaction between the message sender and the community. In doing this, you build respect and positive sentiment for your company and campaign. This dialogue can be sustained through key centers in urban communities.

Stage Five: Mainstream Reinforcement

Once the community has had a chance to voice its thoughts and feelings about your product/service, it is best to reflect that feedback in a final effort which uses mainstream sources. Examples include the minority press, public service announcements (PSAs), churches and other public forums. By incorporating community feedback, marketers make the target audience feel both legitimate and important, which is vital in building consumer loyalty. Such a strategy suggests to your audience that your organization actually is interested in its welfare, and will gain your company favor with a population not used to such sentiments from either the public or private sector.

These five stages are the best way to ensure that your marketing campaign resonates with the urban audience you are trying to reach. Significant opportunities exist for companies willing to take the extra steps necessary to communicate with urban populations on their own terms. Developing a relationship built on respect and trust promises to be a profitable one for astute enterprises.

Word of Mouth

In understanding that African Americans process information differently from the mainstream, MEE has repeatedly designed campaigns for African Americans that generate "word of mouth" from inside the community. For many African Americans, messages that originate in the dominant culture are automatically suspect, yet being perceived as an insider is no easy feat.

Part of the process for generating "word-of-mouth" includes an understanding that when engaged in an argument, you debate the person, not the idea. The persuasive process is interactive, with opinions floated and developed through give-and-take conversation and debate. Ideas that withstand the various perspectives of the peer group are deemed to have earned legitimacy and, therefore, will be shared by others. By engaging in serious debate, the participants bring respect to the issue.

An initial challenge of any communications campaign, therefore, is to get a conversation started and provide a relevant connection, making the message worthy to address and eventually embrace. MEE has learned over the years that a media campaign must continuously and actively work to engage its audience in a way that projects respect, invite the audience as a group to initiate discussion and promote reaching a shared understanding and agreement on the validity of the messages presented.

UT 8　　UT 5

Key Cultural Insights For African Americans

MEE's research has revealed a number of insights on African Americans that provide a keen understanding of their values, attitudes and social cues. Knowing and understanding these key insights is important for any communicator who wishes to design effective messages, products or advertising for this audience. By not having an "insider's view" of African American culture, and by not understanding the motivations and "what lies beneath" their behavior, many message designers fail in their attempts to reach and influence this group.

For more than 10 years, MEE has worked with a variety of African American populations. We thoroughly understand the importance of having an "insider's view" of the culture, and have an acute understanding of the communication style that Black audiences primarily subscribe to. MEE has successfully incorporated the following cultural insights in both our public health and private sector work:

Spirituality

Spirituality and religion have always played a significant role in the lives of African Americans, and of women in particular. No matter how bad things are going or how hard life gets, most African Americans feel like they can always count on a "higher power" for support and sol-ace. This belief in the power of prayer has been passed on from generation to generation, along with other rituals such as the use of natural family remedies in medical and personal healing. Some African Americans put such faith in spiritual healing, that it has more value in their lives than medicinal healing. The medical condition can be near fatal, yet they strongly believe that, like a popular gospel song rejoices, "He may not come when you want Him, but He's always right on time."

Acknowledging the Power of Tradition

Most African American families have a strong woman who serves in the role of the family matriarch. She passes on the oral family history and the family traditions. She invokes reverence and respect from all members of the family. She may not be a woman of advanced education or age, but she possesses wisdom beyond her years and is willing to impart that to her family. Her wisdom is based on her various personal experiences and the impact that they have had on her life. The African American family comes to its matriarch for her honest advice and personal guidance in all issues. For the African American family, she represents stability during periods of change and perseverance, strength in times of adversity and dependability through their times of need.

Relationships

The African American family often moves beyond modern-day concepts of the traditional nuclear family with a mother, father and two siblings. The African American female's support network goes outside of the immediate family to include girlfriends, boyfriends, close friends, neighbors and all people genuinely interested in guiding a child on his/her journey to becoming a socially responsible adult. Many families consist of so-called "aunts" and "uncles" that are of no blood relation to that particular family, but who exhibit all of the care and concern that is natural to biological families. This extended family often becomes a part of a child's immediate family, taking on the same roles and responsibilities of biological aunts and uncles. This concept of an extended family is a true manifestation of the African proverb that teaches, "It takes an entire village to raise a child."

Self-Pride/Self-Image

With the anthem "Black is Beautiful," a whole movement began in the African American community of appreciating, delighting in and being fulfilled with one's own beauty. It was no longer about one skin color being more attractive than another or one hair texture being better than another. It was now about all of our many individual differences being unique and beautiful.

Many African American women believe in accentuating their natural beauty through cosmetic and fashion expressions. It is not at all uncommon to walk the streets of one neighborhood and see, in the span of a few minutes, several African American women of different hues, wearing hairstyles from dreadlocks to wraps, and in clothing from traditional African lapas to the latest from fashion designer Donna Karan. African American women take great pride in the image of themselves that they present to the world.

Communicating With African American Women

African American women make the vast majority of day-to-day buying decisions in their households. Marketers who target them need to understand the best persuasion techniques for effectively influencing those decisions. Whether it is a product, a message or a service being touted, here are a few communication rules to remember.

Needed: A New Communications Style

Focusing on low-income communities of color requires a new communication style. Any strategy should be founded on a keen understanding of the unique communications realities of African American women. Word-of-mouth is a big part of the acceptance/approval process within this ethnic culture. Black women interpret marketers' messages through their unique worldview, which incorporates dealing with the daily realities of racism, sexism, poverty, etc.

The Power of Peer Influence

Peer leaders can bring credibility to a message, product or service. Identifying women in the community who are seen as "peer leaders" and enlisting them on your behalf can be a very smart move. When you utilize women as spokespersons who talk and look like those you are trying to reach, you are on the right path toward making sure that your message is heard and accepted. Peer leaders can bring together other women who are willing to share their relevant experiences. Whenever possible, they should be incorporated as your key message senders.

African American women welcome the opportunity to join with their peers to discuss subjects of interest. In fact, walk into any hair or nail salon and within minutes, you can find out what is on the minds of African American women. Almost no subject is off limits in these female-only, closely bonded environments. Here, women share their dreams, their disappointments and their frustrations in an open and nonjudgmental setting. Even in MEE focus groups, women report feeling enriched by the deeper dialogues they have participated in, regardless of the subject matter.

MEE has used events such as invitation-only house parties, community forums and support groups to bring women together to learn more about complex issues. These types of events are great opportunities for identifying potential peer leaders for the next round of message dissemination. It's often easy to see who has that special "something" that inspires confidence and trust among her peers.

Who Decides In Single Parent Households

We know that poorer African American households are often single-parent homes headed by a woman. We also know that African Americans, in general, are heavy consumers of certain media and products and that they consistently exhibit a high degree of brand loyalty. Therefore, African American women are now increasingly targeted in the marketing of certain products. They make daily decisions about many products related to their family and to household necessities. In many cases, if you want your product to have an influence, you must educate and appeal to the mother or grandmother of the household.

Generational Influences: Passing Values Down

Because of their extraordinary influence within their families, using mothers or family matriarchs to help craft messages or to serve on advisory panels during the creative process can be a very smart move. These women are a key source of information for young women about sexual health and reproductive issues. Even in adulthood, women continue to look to their mothers for guidance and nurturing. Having some of these "advisors" participate in your research and planning process can provide a unique window to the hearts and souls of today's African American woman.

From product research, we know that African American women are doing the regular food shopping for their families. There may be generational gaps between what mothers and their children would choose for colas, for example, but what Mom buys when she goes to the grocery store is going to be the determining factor in what the younger generation drinks, at least when they are at home. Thus, playing on the mother's preferences can provide a big boost to sales.

Low-income African Americans are attracted to products that they believe are pitched to people like them – the "regular" guy/girl, as opposed to the privileged or professional class. In the cola wars, for example, African American focus group participants overwhelmingly felt that working class African Americans drink Pepsi, while Coca-Cola targets the mainstream or higher classes. When they went to the store, they made the purchase they felt reflected their daily reality.

Designing Your Messages

For print materials, keep your message concise. This audience does not like to have to figure out the "message behind the message." In an environment where too much is often said behind one's back or between the lines, straightforward, honest presentations are appreciated and embraced, even when "the truth" may not be an easy reality.

In addition, using simple language is important for both print and radio ads. In health-related campaigns, always deliver information in laymen's terms, using simple words and phrases and avoiding medical jargon. For print materials, bold and vibrant colors are a must; using bullet statements and short sentences. Include pictures and voices of "real" people who look and sound like your target audience. Otherwise, the message will be tuned out, turned off or dumped with the trash.

UT 5

Saluting The Hip-Hop Nation

"Rap is something you do, hip-hop is something you live and I live it. It's like a tribe of people who relate to one another. We bop our heads the same way, to the same beats. We wear a certain kind of clothing and we go to the same kind of places. Hip-Hop is music, Hip-Hop is graffiti, Hip-Hop is dancing, Hip-Hop is MC-ing, Hip-Hop is spoken word. It's what Be-bop was to Thelonious Monk." **–Erykah Badu, Electronic Urban Report**

We couldn't have said it better ourselves. Hip-hop music, fashion and attitudes have gone mainstream. Need proof? You can actually register now for college courses on hip-hop and you can mail your letters with a hip-hop stamp from the US Postal Service.

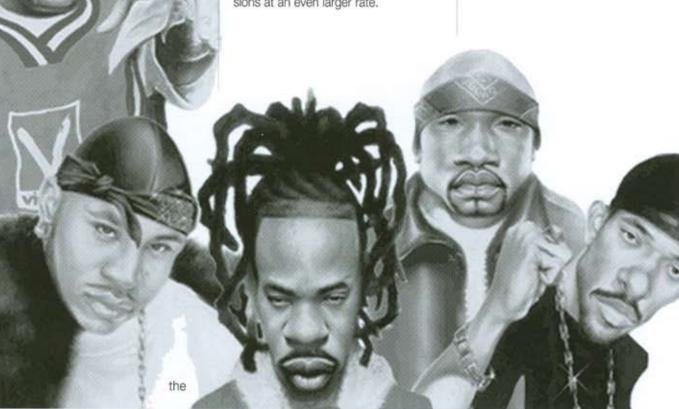Generation Y, also known in the mainstream as the "Millennial Generation," Echo Boomers or Generation Net was born in the 1980s and beyond. At 60 million strong, they are the biggest group since the Baby Boomers and may turn out to be the largest teen population in US history. While most adults are still trying to figure out exactly what it is they "stand for," it's inevitable that young hip-hoppers will, just like the Baby Boomers and Generation X-ers before them, make a big impact on our society.

Important to the cultural and economic trends of this country, many in this "new generation," regardless of race, embrace the hip-hop phenomenon continuing its emergence as a critical market for mainstream success. Even the youngest members of the hip-hop nation are media-wise, sophisticated and influential trendsetters. They are discriminating and active consumers at even earlier ages than previous generations, spending billions of dollars of their own money each year on videos/movies, music, clothing and food. On top of that, they influence household spending and buying decisions at an even larger rate.

With all of this mainstream acceptance (and even co-option) it has become imperative for suppliers and retailers to learn about and reach out to "hip-hoppers." Main Street and Wall Street may not want to emulate them by walking a mile in their shoes, but they sure would like to sell them footwear to make the trek, and with good reason. This population will represent the bulk of the market for many products and services. While the sales potential is enormous, this customer base is not as easy to target as the Baby Boomer or Gen X consumer. Determining the shopping habits of hip-hop customers takes authentic, culturally sensitive research.

UT 6

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Why Do Urban Youth Set The Cultural Trends?

We believe that, as with any potential target audience, it is crucial to "get inside the heads" of urban youth before you can successfully market to them. That is why our campaign design process includes looking at both the traditional, internal culture and the external variables, which impact young people in America's cities.

Urban youth are a powerful consumer market. They make a big impact in two ways. Based on their relative market size, they disproportionately influence entertainment consumption patterns in this country. While African Americans make up about 12% of the nation's total population, they buy 25% of the movie theater tickets sold. In addition, as trendsetters for larger mainstream markets, they strongly influence buying patterns among teens across the spectrum. For example, rap music was born in America's toughest inner-cities and continues to be created overwhelmingly by urban African Americans. Yet three out of every four CD's sold are purchased by suburban white youth.

Teens of all cultures, who are innately rebellious, can relate to the angst, frustrations and values of urban youth culture. Whether they live in the mall-centered suburbs or small towns in rural America, the lives of many teens are touched by difficulties: the break-up of nuclear families, violence, drugs, alcohol, child abuse, racism, AIDS and declining options for educational and financial success. These non-urban youth look at the environment that their urban counterparts must survive in and can feel a similar struggle in emotion, if not in their experiences.

For many product categories and social issues, urban audiences truly define "cool." If your message hits the mark for this audience, it will greatly increase your chance of broadening your appeal to a much wider audience.

A few general tips:
- Use scenarios that feature the experiences of the "average" youth. For example, campaigns which show characters engaged in activities on college campuses will leave behind a substantial number of youth, for whom the post-high school education is either an unfulfilled dream or seen as a waste of time. Yet, most young people have attended high school. Even those who have gone on to college remember what their high school days were like. By finding the common denominator, which reflects the lives of both the regular guy/working class and the upwardly mobile, you have increased your chances for success.
- Focus on relationships, especially intimate ones. As more young people become disenchanted with society in general, they focus their attention on the "people they can count on" — their friends, their boyfriends/girlfriends and family.
- Create campaigns by and for youth of color. Today's youth want to see themselves and their lives reflected in messages intended for them. Include the "insider's" perspective provided by youth themselves, when devising communication strategies.
- Use the music and high-energy production that appeals to youth. Music remains a universal language for communicating with young people.
- Create a consistent, positive corporate presence in the community. No matter how many catchy, creative national ads you run, your product and company won't be seen as authentic unless it touches youth in the communities where they live. Grassroots activities and sponsorship of community programs create an ongoing sense of goodwill and "buy-in."

These tips are first steps in the right direction. However, because we believe in effective, yet socially responsible marketing, we must include this caveat: don't take this group for granted or your efforts will backfire. Since they are already suspicious of mainstream media messages and are savvy enough to see through attempts to co-opt their culture, without careful research and preparation on your part, a botched campaign could leave you in a worse position than when you started. Authenticity and respect for the culture are keys to success in reaching this audience. Anything less will be rejected out of hand.

UT 3

Segmenting And Targeting Urban Youth –The MEE Perspective

Urban youth have historically proven to be a hard-to-reach population. For a marketing or social service professional without adequate experience and background, it is difficult to communicate with them in a way that resonates with their real thoughts, feelings and dreams.

In order to be successful message designers, we need to develop a model that helps us understand the mechanisms by which their worldview has become defined. Based on years of experience in working with young people from all walks of life, MEE has developed a pioneering model that does just that. Through thousands of hours of research on the issues that impact the behavior of urban youth in the 90s, we've learned that to successfully segment and target this market, you must go beyond the traditional profiles of age, race, sex and income. In addition, we know that in order to influence positive behavior changes, it is crucial to first understand motivations for the behavior that currently exists.

Therefore, our new model melds a historical perspective of the target's traditional culture with a series of external variables which have a daily impact on young people we seek to influence. Both elements are crucial in understanding the current manifestations of urban youth culture. MEE continues to do the research and the work that will provide a comprehensive understanding of young African Americans and other underserved markets. There is a need for better information on the complex economic, cultural, social and psychological issues which impact the decision-making process of these markets. All factors contributing to today's realities must be effectively blended in order to create useful and effective marketing campaigns and intervention programs.

Let's explain the model in terms of a current phenomenon which has not only crossed over from its urban roots into mainstream America, but impacts international markets as well–rap music and its surrounding subculture of hip-hop.

History

The African American culture has traditionally been one of oral communication. Storytelling held an exalted place in the Motherland, with the griot (African keeper of tribal histories) always being given a place of honor and respect in the community. Another crucial element of "telling stories" came through the drum, an instrument used to communicate both intimately and across wide spaces, often in times when verbal communication was impossible. Both of these traditions have been passed down through the African Diaspora.

Current Context

Today's urban youth have many stories to tell, both within their communities and to the larger society, which many feel have written them off. They face many stark realities, which make daily survival an often daunting challenge: violence in their schools and streets; lack of foreseeable economic opportunities; drug use destroying families and neighborhoods; the changing face of American families; and the diminution of the "African village" concept that forces them to deal with adult issues well before their time.

The Manifestation of the Phenomenon

The way that many of today's stories are getting told is through hip-hop music, especially rap. The hip-hop culture is the best manifestation of urban youth culture in America. Its popularity has resonated with an ever-broadening segment of the population and many of its icons have been appropriated and misappropriated by mainstream society.

While some of the misappropriation has been intentional by those who wish not to understand but to destroy, ignorance has played an even bigger role. Too many who are seeking to communicate with urban youth fail to invest the time and energy to really know who they are talking to. Only by understanding the issues addressed in this model can one define and develop effective communication strategies to influence the behavior today's urban youth.

UT 2

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