

# THE BLACK MARKET:

**RE-EXAMINING AFRICAN AMERICAN SPORT  
CONSUMERS IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

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# THE INDUSTRY

The sport industry is altogether a robust, fervent and flourishing industry. Its structure, featuring live sporting events, sales and sponsorship, athlete representation, licensing and merchandise, and various construction efforts is highly valued around the world. Recent reports suggest the global sport industry has an estimated worth of \$620 billion [1]. Further figures indicate that in some countries, the sport business industry is growing faster than their respective GDPs [1]. And, though professional sports teams and leagues occupy the majority of the industry's worth, there are hundreds of additional sport organizations in the form of minor league teams, agencies, and start-up firms.

Yet, as the American sports structure continues to flourish, some entities have failed to capture a wide array of target audiences. That is to say, though the industry is continuously growing, many leagues and sports entities have yet to attain a full understanding of some target markets. Of particular interest in this study is the African American sport consumer.

Among market divisions in the United States of America, the African American consumer stands as a valuable market segment. The African American consumer represents a market that is both sizable and economically stable [2]. Scholars have not only attested to this target market's value, but assert this demographic as a meaningful market for pursuit in the sport industry [3]. In terms of purchasing power, reports suggest income rates for African Americans have grown substantially. In fact, as it relates to African American buying power in the United States, Cheryl Grace, Nielsen's Senior VP of Consumer Engagement said the following: "At 47.8 million strong and a buying power that's on par with many countries' gross domestic products, African Americans continue to outpace spending nationally" [2].


  


# THE INDUSTRY

It appears therefore that the African American market segment has the potential to be a productive and powerful consumer for any market, let alone the sport industry. When associating the above figures with the fact that African Americans constitute an estimated 13 percent of the U.S. population [4], it becomes clear that this consumer market is of notable significance for sports marketers in the United States of America.

It is for this reason NYU's School of Professional Studies' and the Preston Robert Tisch Institute for Global Sport has undertaken a research initiative intended to investigate African American sport consumers. And while African American sport consumers have been reviewed in the past, there is a call to perform an up-to-date, comprehensive examination upon sport preferences and consumption habits. In particular, there is a call to perform an intensive, wide-ranging study – one that is regionally inclusive, and comprehensive in scope, examining sport preferences across age groups, and comparing this market's preferences to their racial counterparts (e.g., Caucasians and other Minorities).

The objective of this investigation was to garner a “snapshot” on African American sport consumers. We intend to provide an understanding of sport fandom, measuring levels of sport identification, and passion in comparison to other racial groups. Further, the study provides an up-to-date exhibit on the segment's favored sports, and current engagement methods (i.e., preferred methods of consumption). In doing so, we hope to offer an informed representation of current African American sport consumption habits.





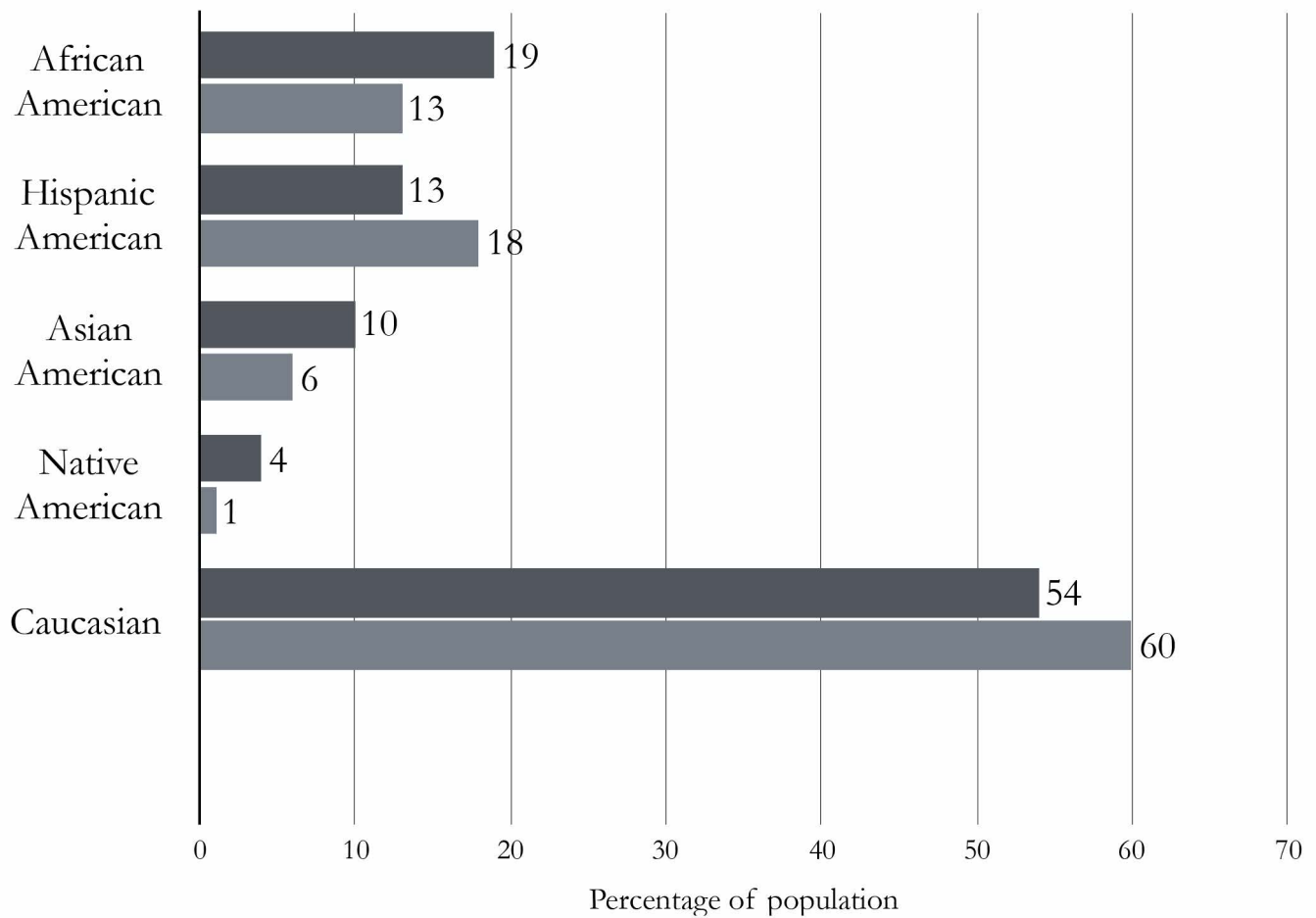




# UNSUNG HEROES

It should be commonly understood that African Americans are a worthwhile demographic for sport marketers in the United States of America. Outside of a financial perspective, equality amongst fan bases are a pressing matter for all sport executives. And yet, a number of sport institutions (both leagues, and teams) have yet to garner this group as enduring consumers. Aside from the financial indicators mentioned previously, we feel the investigation (and its associated metrics) will exemplify African American sport consumers as a target market ripe for sport marketing emphases.

The study takes into account a number of non-financial measurements, all of which are intended to adequately represent sport fandom. Specifically, a vast ( $n = 2,278$ ) and diverse sample was acquired, where the following metrics were assessed and reported upon: identification, passion, favorite sport, engagement methods - all of which are presented in this investigation for the African American sport consumer and their racial cohorts.





 = Percentage of sample  
 = Percentage of US Census

\*Sample size = 2,278

\*The sample for each demographic has been statistically verified, and thus represents a valid analysis

\*The sample size is intended to adequately represent the United States census [4]

# THE STUDY

**ID, PLEASE**







# IDENTIFICATION

Who we are as human beings is a hard question to answer. Identity is not only important for how we establish our self worth, but in many cases one's identity will have an influence on friend groups, living situations, and even purchasing behaviors. Because of this, scholars (both sociological and marketing) have studied identity at length. And while in some cases understanding identity can be a straightforward progression, there are other instances when understanding identity can be a complex process.

Such is the case with African Americans. African Americans are a distinct social group, dealing with a number of unique factors (both historically, and currently), all of which can influence the development of identification. Scholars suggest identity for African Americans is not only developed through social status, but is formed by cultural and historical experiences within America [5]. It is for this reason that shared experiences are particularly important for minorities and the development of identity. Having shared experiences allows group members to coalesce around a common occurrence, and in turn allows for individuals within the group to reinforce their identity. As such, if certain unique experiences are tied to aspects of identity, then it is likely that individuals will want to partake in these experiences on a frequent basis.






# IDENTIFICATION & SPORT

Of the many experiences which are tied to the current conversation, sports stands out as a particularly relevant experience. Sports can represent aspects of particular cultures, and can serve as a common occurrence in which certain groups can unite around. Nelson Mandella was once quoted as saying “sport has the power to change the world...it has the power to unite people in a way that little else does” [6]. It is no surprise that sport is seen by many as a supremely important part of society. Individuals care for sport to the point where they will not only identify strongly with a sports team, but will sometimes consider themselves as part of a sports team in order to justify a greater sense of self identity.

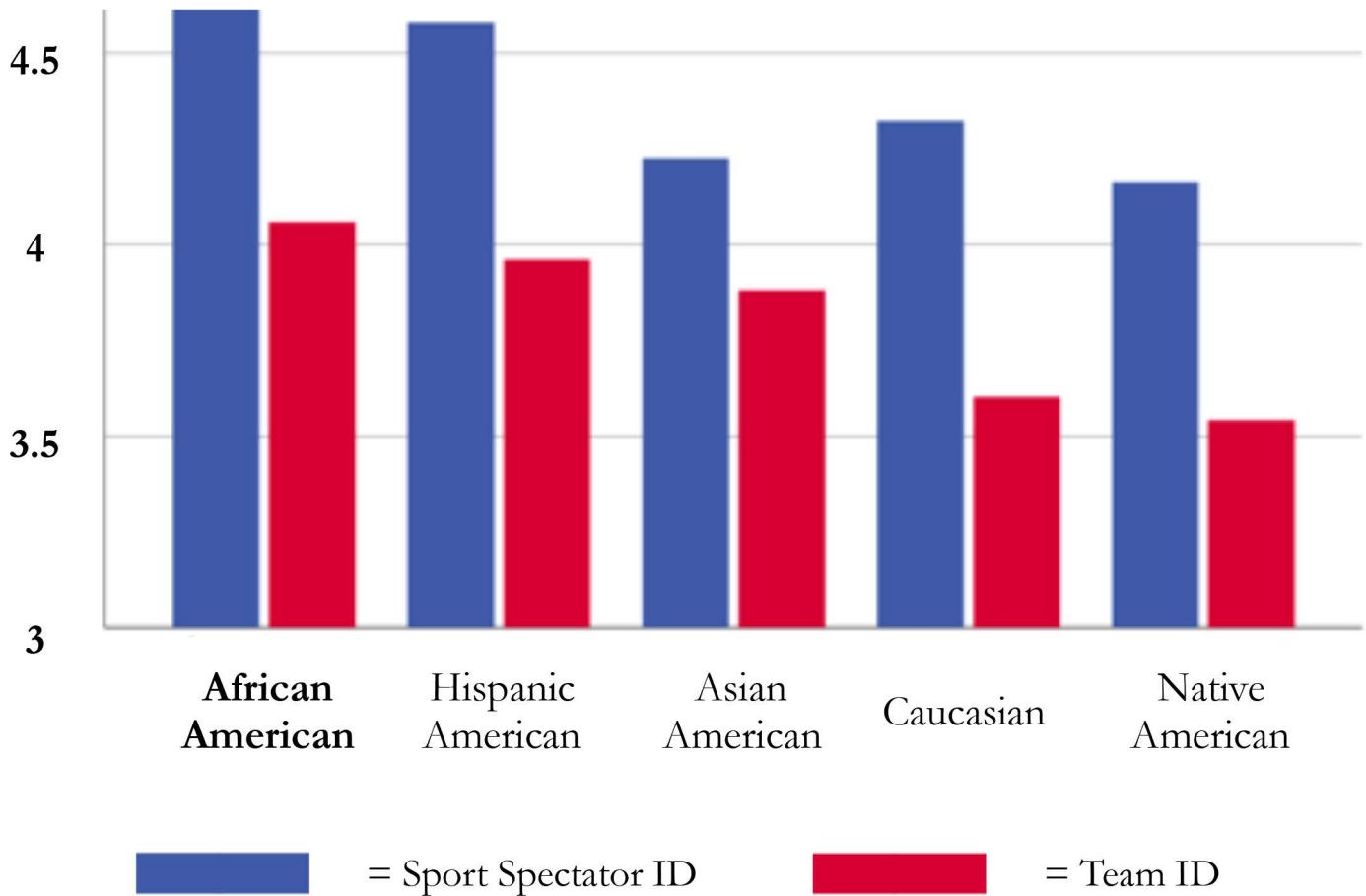
Thus, we have *sport spectator identification* - a concept which helps us understand the degree to which individuals identify themselves as sports fans [7]. Being a sport fan is important for the sake of identity because it often allows individuals a sense of belonging. This then helps individuals claim a greater degree of self-identity. As the degree of identification with being a sport fan increases, so too will occurrences such as game attendance, merchandise sales, and overall sport consumption [7].

Associated with the concept of sport identification is *team identification*. While similar, these two concepts differ in that ‘team identification’ is how individuals may consider themselves as “part of the team.” Here, individuals identify themselves as sport consumers, and have a need to share common characteristics with their favorite team (or, in some cases when an individual favors an individual sport over a team sport, individuals would seek to share common characteristics with their favorite athlete) [8]. If, for example someone with high levels of team identification heard an insult about their favorite team, then this person would take the insult as personal affront. It is not uncommon for individuals with high levels of team identification to use the terms “we” when describing their favorite sports team or athlete.






\* Where Sport Spectator ID & Team ID are measured on a 5 point scale



# RESULTS

For the current investigation, we specifically measured sport spectator identification levels and Team ID levels (both on a 5-point scale) for African Americans, and compared these numbers alongside of their racial counterparts (Caucasians, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans) in an effort to see if the demographic is unique in any way to the sport management domain.



Interestingly enough, it seems African Americans identified as sport fans more than any other racial group. Moreover, our study indicates that African Americans are *significantly* more identified as sport spectators than Caucasians, Asian Americans, and Native Americans.

The same can be said for Team identification, where African Americans identified with their favorite team (or athlete) more than their racial counterparts. Further, African Americans identified with their favorite team (or athlete) *significantly* more than Caucasian Americans, and Native Americans.



# RE- SULTS

**#1 IN IDENTIFICATION**



**A PASSION PROJECT**





# PASSION

While passion can have many meanings, it seems to take on a unique significance when it comes to sports. “How passionate are you?” and, “how passionate are you about your favorite sports team?” seem like two entirely different questions. It is for this reason sport management scholars have used passion towards sport as a way to capture the *intensity of a particular pursuit* [9].

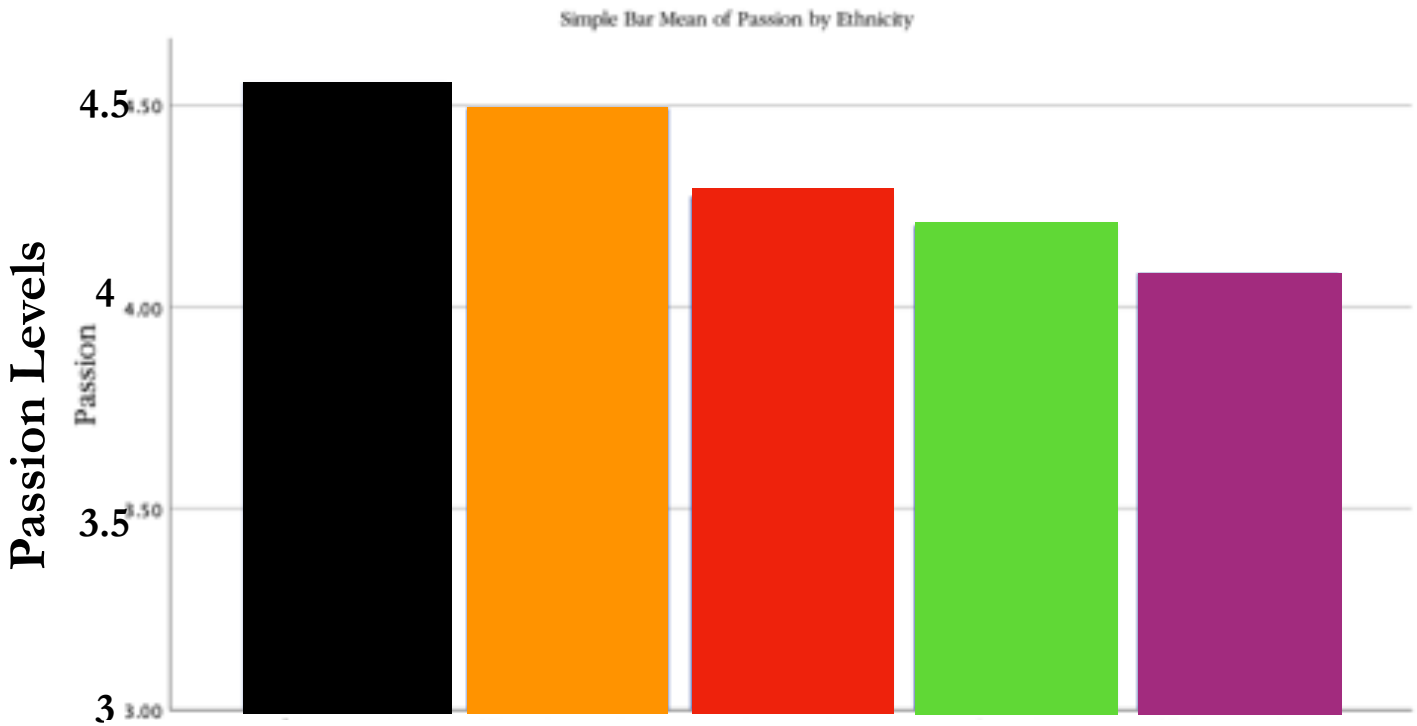
For our investigation we measured participants’ passion towards their favorite sports team or athlete. The study’s questions towards passion intended to measure how a favorite sports team or athlete inhabits one’s inner emotions (i.e., the heart), one’s consistent thoughts (i.e., the mind), and one’s time and energy (i.e., the body). Taking into account all three of the factors - the heart, mind, and body - is important, for this allows us to understand passion towards a sports team or athlete as an all-encompassing endeavor.

It should be noted that measuring passion gives us a deeper insight into consumption preferences as well. Studies have attested to passion’s correlation with buying behaviors, media behaviors, and sport consumption habits [9].



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\* Where Passion is measured on a 5 point scale



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# RESULTS

For the current investigation, we specifically measured passion (using a 5-point scale) towards a favorite sports team or athlete amongst African Americans, and compared passion levels alongside of their racial counterparts (Caucasians, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans)



Comparing passion across racial groups is revealing. The results of this examination suggest that African Americans not only have the highest levels of passion towards a favorite sport or athlete, but are significantly more passionate about their favorite sport or athlete than Caucasians, Asian Americans, and Native Americans.



# RE- SULTS

# #1 IN PASSION





PLAYING FAVORITES



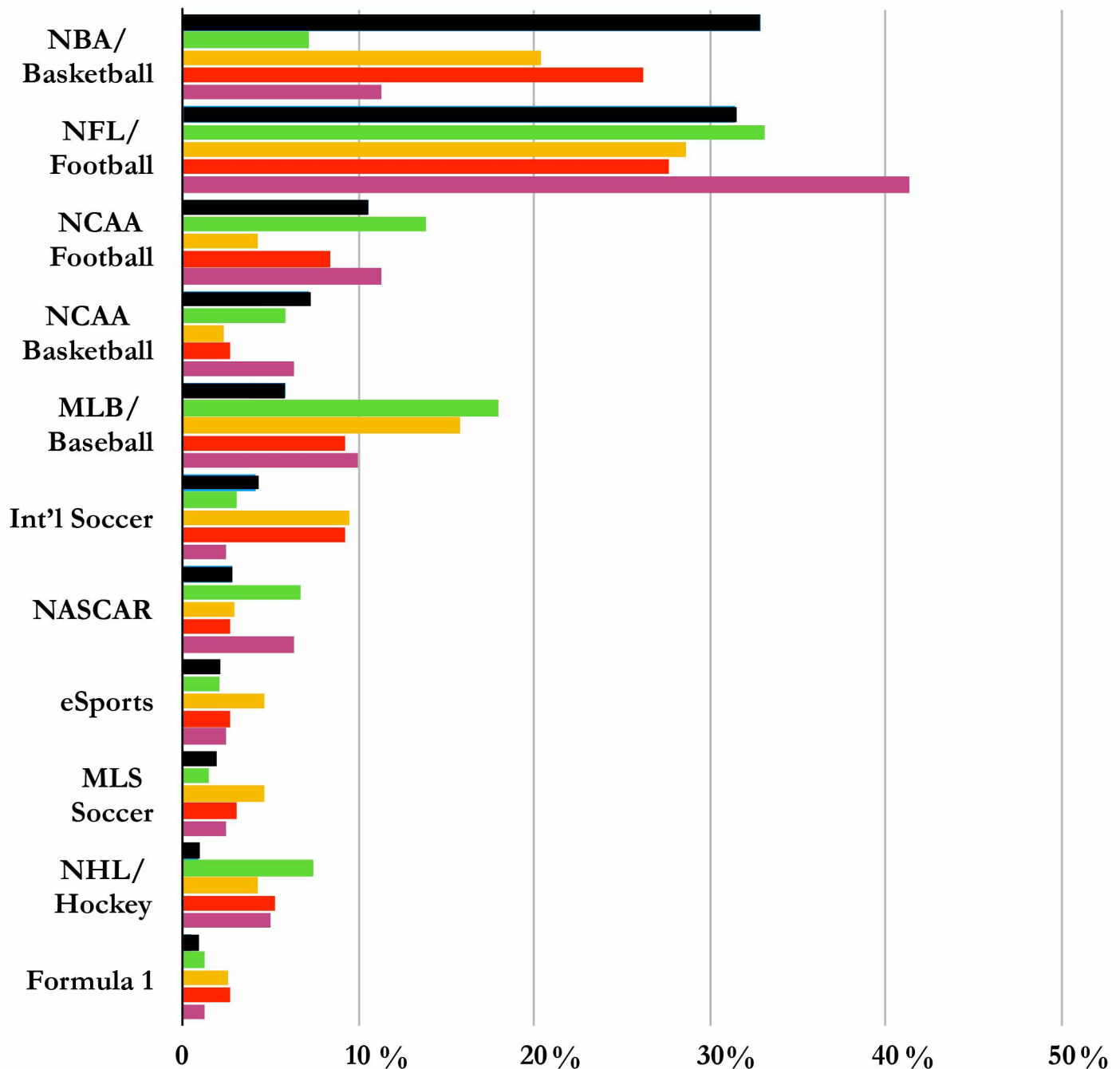
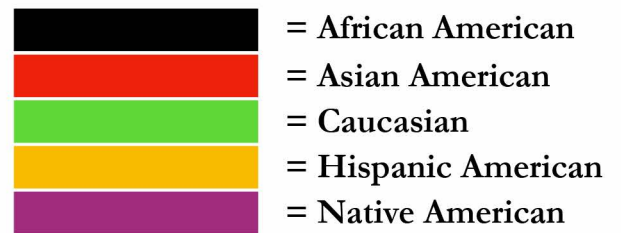
# FAVORITE SPORT

Along with society itself, the sports landscape has certainly changed over the past decade. Aside from the landscape of America becoming more diverse, we've seen an influx of new technology, new fads, and new trends. Each of these have affected who Americans are, and have affected who we are as consumers. It is for this reason, that we wanted to provide an up-to-date snapshot on the sports that are favored by African Americans, along with their racial cohorts. Below is a chart, broken down by which sport the sample felt most passionate about following.

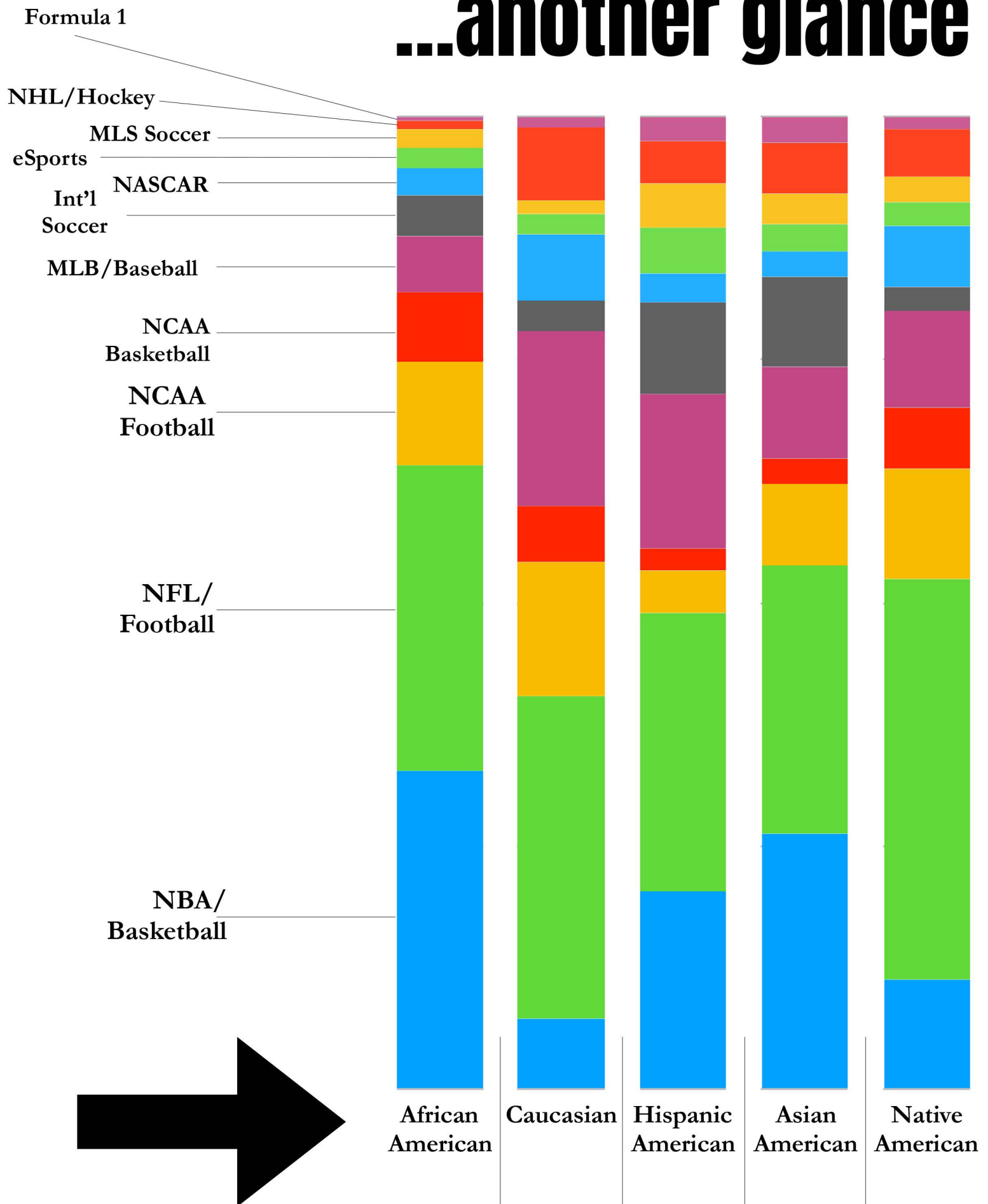




# “Which are you most passionate about following?”



# ...another glance







**WE'RE ENGAGED**



# ENGAGEMENT METHODS

Identification and passion are important metrics. As mentioned, they not only have sociological implications, but they also have marketing implications (e.g., a correlation with sport consumption habits). They are in essence a “why.” Being highly identified with the New York Mets, for example, gives us a reason as to why a particular fan engages in buying behaviors. Moving forward in our investigation though, we wanted to investigate the “how.” That is, we wanted to see “how” certain groups were engaging with their favorite sports team or athlete. In today’s day and age, there are a variety of mediums in which individuals can consume their favorite sport or team, each of which may provide different benefits for different demographics (whether it be race or age, for example). Our comparisons of engagement methods across race provide a neutral exhibit of the collected data, and are exhibited in an effort to allow sport marketers to more accurately engage an intended target market - in this case, the African American sport consumer.



In that this paper revolves around the discussion of race, and upholds comparisons across racial groups, we would be remiss to ignore a greater sociological consideration of racial differences. While this paper will not provide an in depth account on racially diverse viewpoints, it should be noted that the author and the investigators understand the importance of a diverse set of viewpoints. As such, when comparing factors such as consumption habits, or consumer engagement methods, we are not supporting the idea that one particular consumer engagement method is superior than another. Our comparisons across race therefore simply provide a neutral exhibit of the collected data.



# ENGAGEMENT METHODS

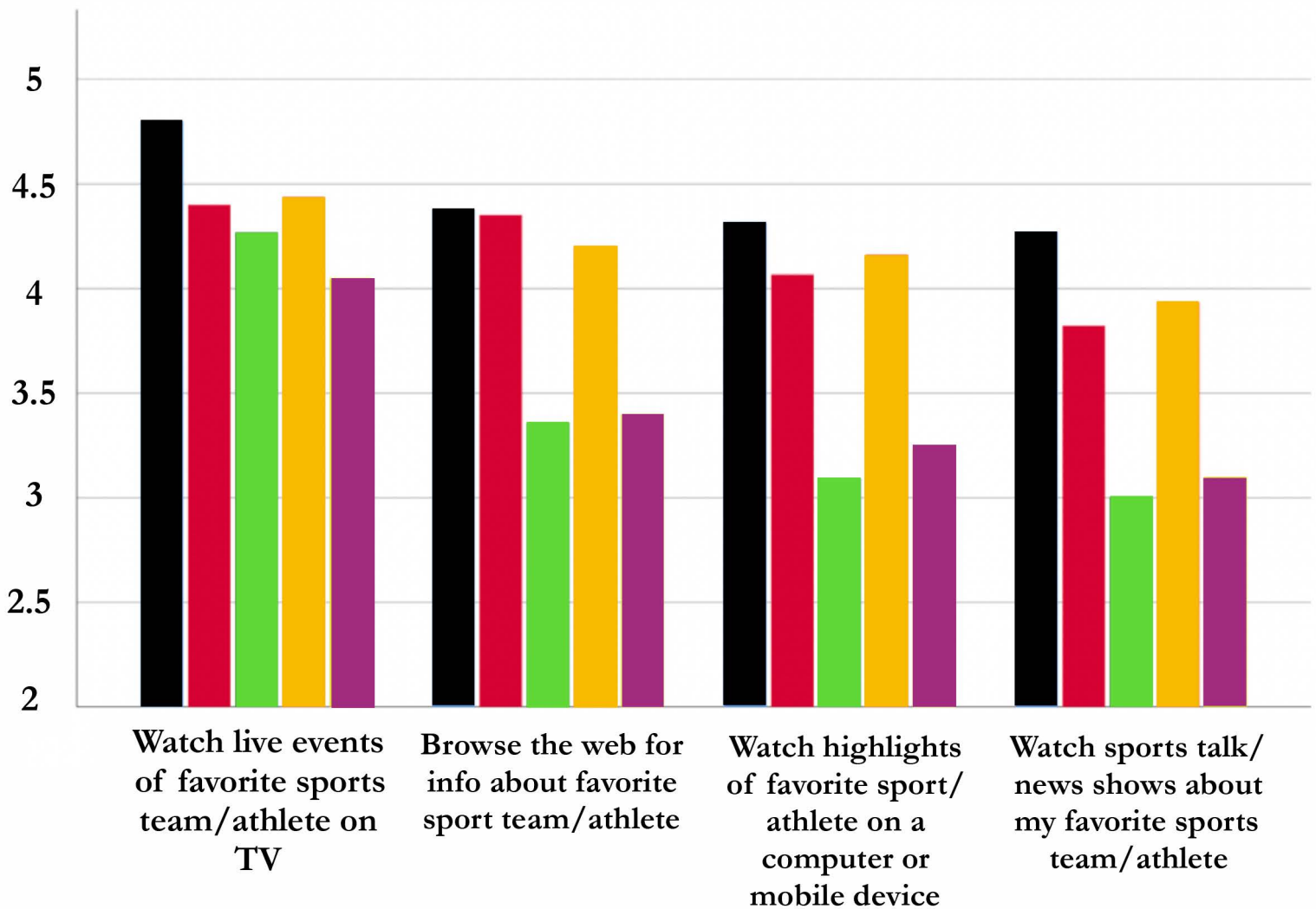
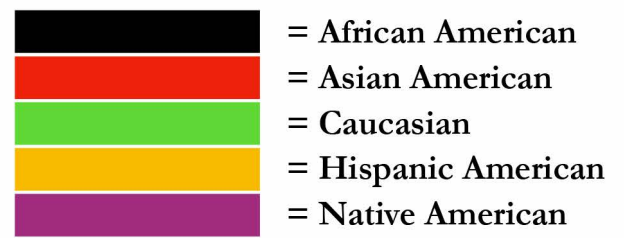
Participants were asked how often they engaged in the following activities in order to consume sport:

- Browse the web for info about favorite sport team/athlete
- Consume favorite sport team's/athlete's social media posts
- Stream live events on a computer or mobile device
- Listen to favorite sports team/athlete via radio or internet broadcast
- Listen to podcasts about favorite sport team/athlete
- Watch highlights of favorite sport/athlete on a computer or mobile device
- Watch live events of favorite sports team/athlete on TV
- Watch on demand sports content, such as sports documentaries
- Watch sports talk/news shows about my favorite sports team/athlete

**Where: 1= not at all, & 5 = very often**

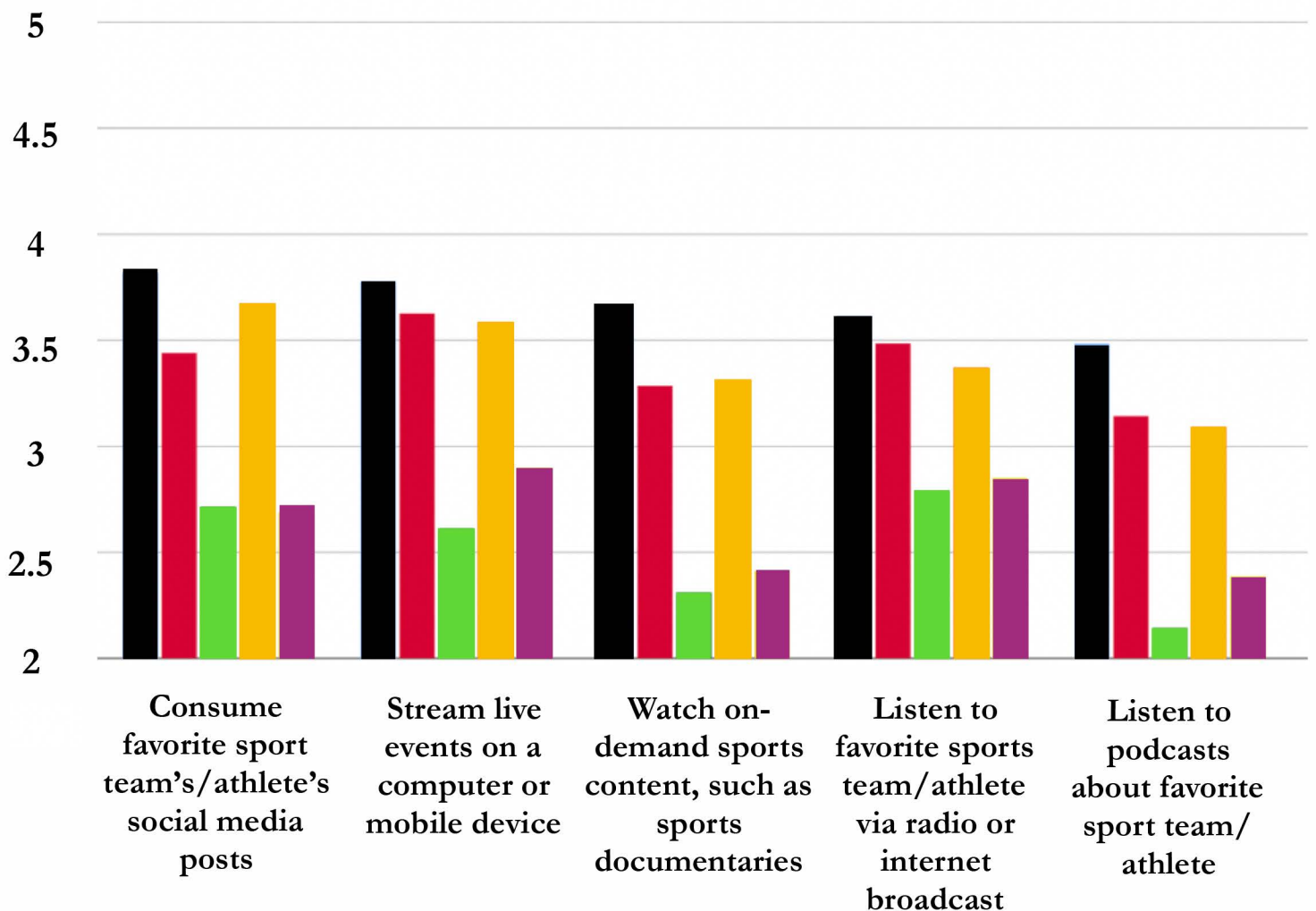
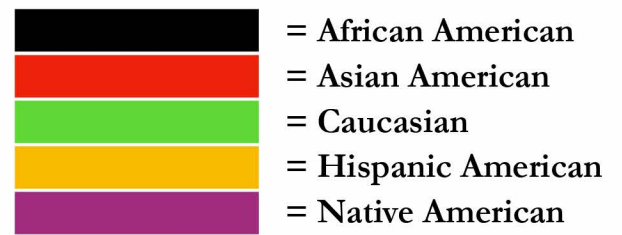


# ENGAGEMENT METHODS





# ENGAGEMENT METHODS



**African  
Americans are**

**#1**

**In Sport Spectator ID  
In Team ID  
In ALL engagement methods**

**320%**

**African Americans are most  
passionate about  
Following the NBA/  
Basketball**

**Only 6% and 1% of African  
Americans are passionate  
about following the MLB and  
NHL, respectively**

**6, 1 %**

**With an engagement  
level of**

**4.8**

**African Americans consume  
their favorite sport on TV  
significantly more than all of  
their racial counterparts**



# THIS IS US





# MEASURING WITHIN

While comparing and contrasting the African American sport consumer to other consumers is enlightening, we thought it of considerable importance to perform an investigation on the target market itself. We consider it beneficial to sport marketers to understand the African American sport consumer market fully. We have therefore taken the above factors - sport spectator identification, team identification, passion, favorite sport, and the various engagement methods - and have performed a generational comparison on the African American sample across age (i.e., generation).

We define four age groups as:



**Gen Z:** 13-21 years old; 28.9 % of the African American sample

**Millennial:** 22-37 years old; 37.4 % of the African American sample

**Gen X:** 38-53 years old; 20.8 % of the African American sample

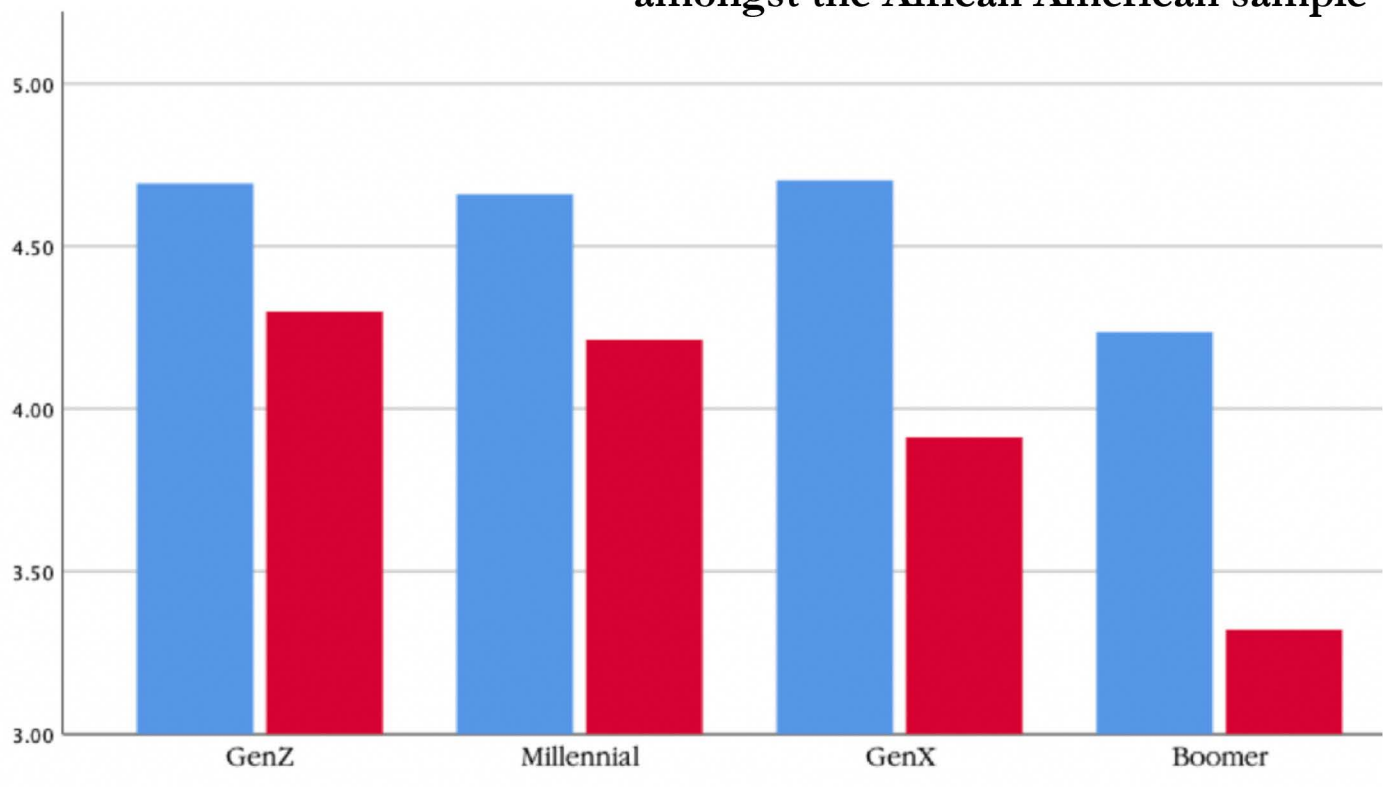
**Boomer:** 54- years old; 12.9 % of the African American sample

Such a snapshot can allow marketers to view trends amongst the demographic, and can perhaps enlighten marketers on accurate ways to engage specific subcultures.





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\*Where Sport Spectator ID & Team ID are measured for each generation  
on a 5 point scale  
amongst the African American sample



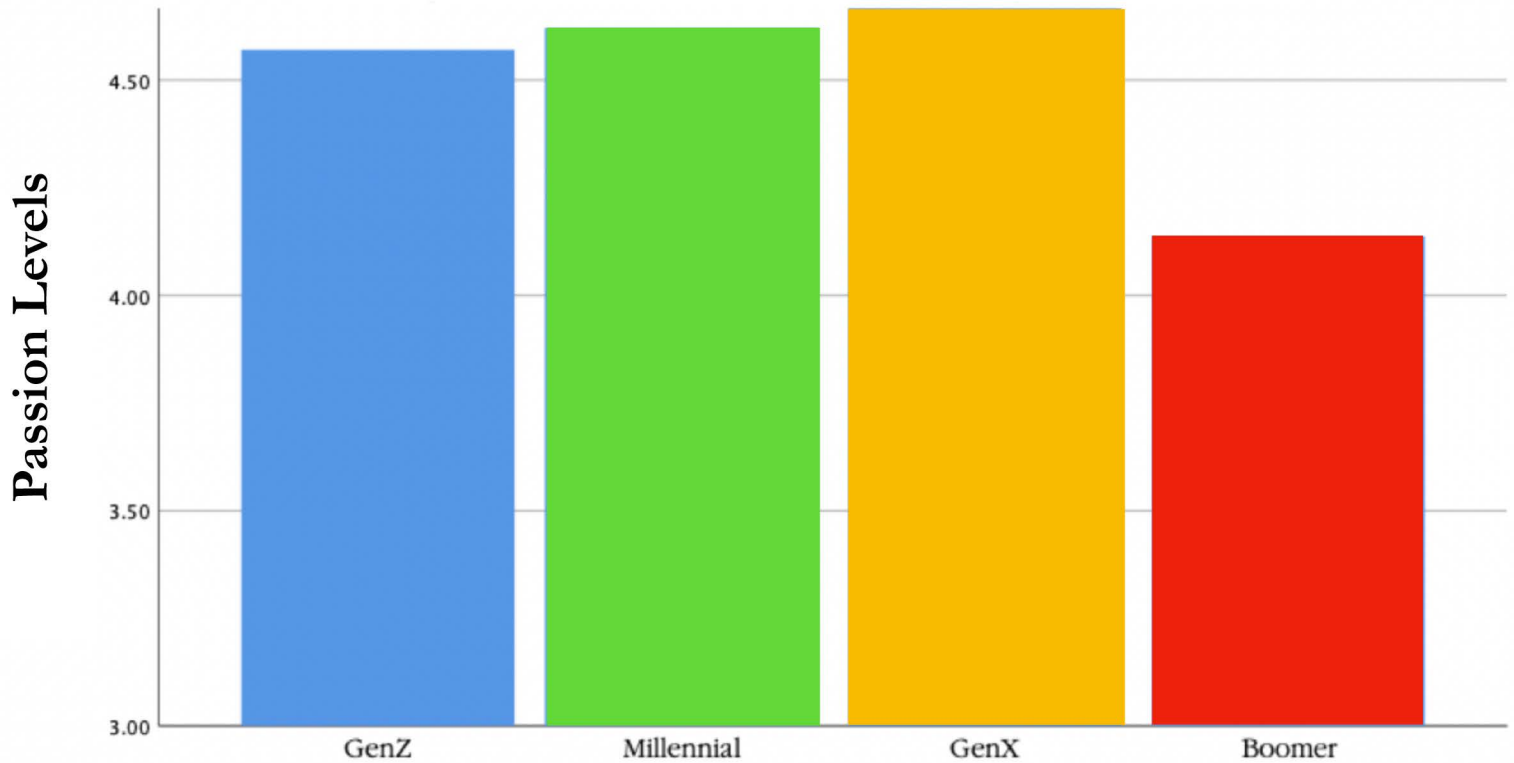
RE-  
SULTS

 = Sport Spectator ID  
 = Team ID



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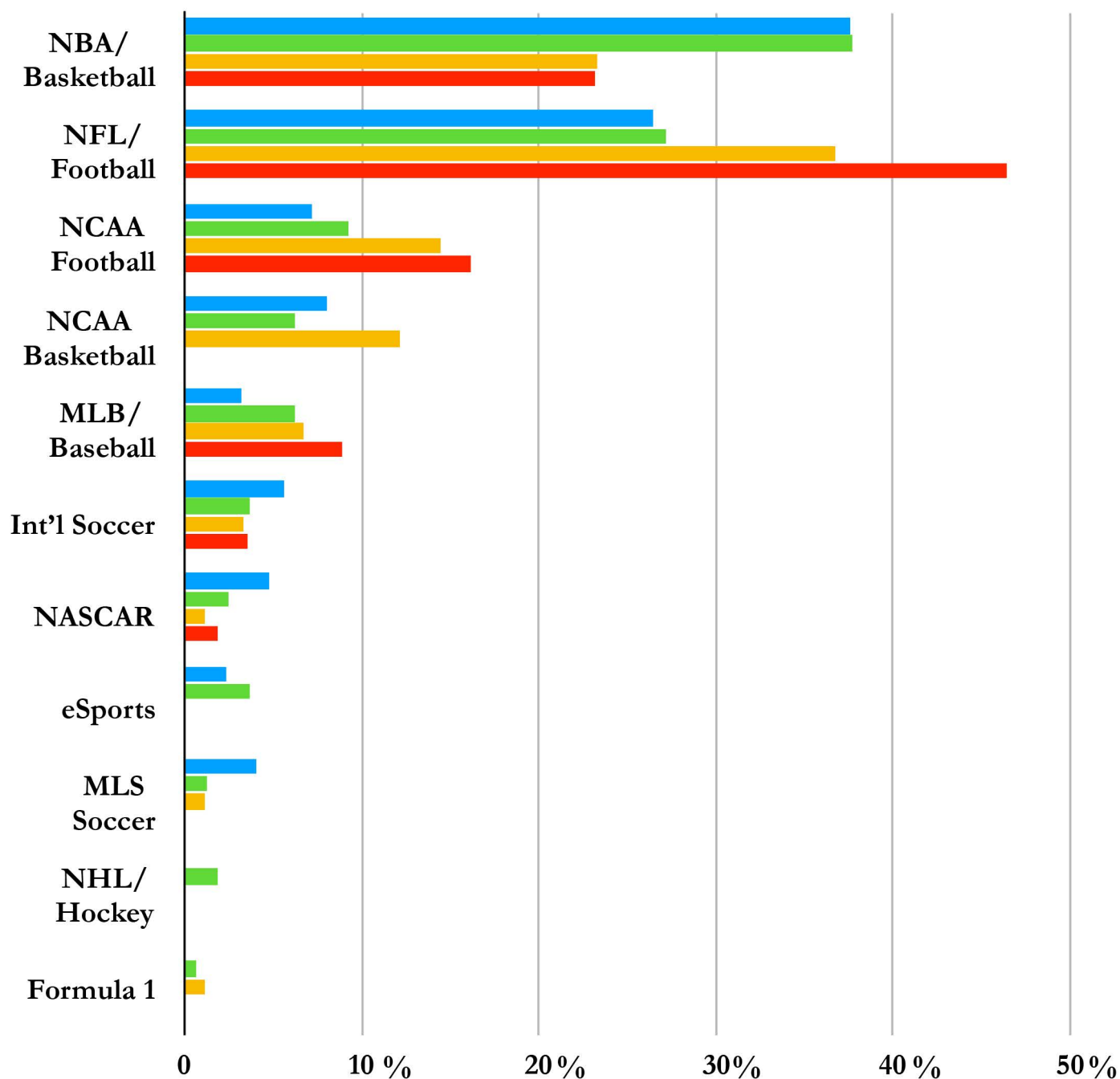
\*Where Passion is measured for each generation  
on a 5 point scale  
amongst the African American sample



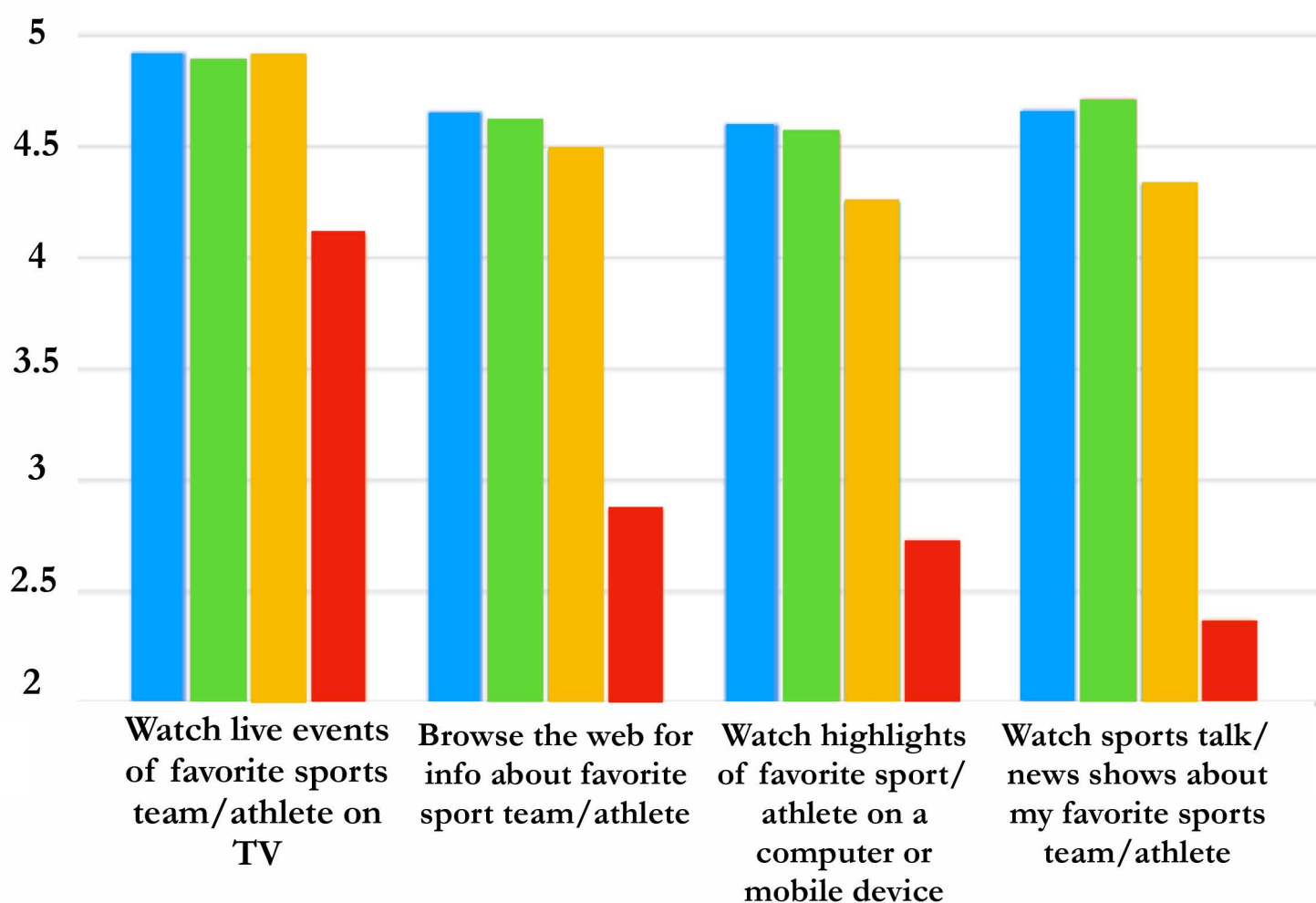
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# RESULTS

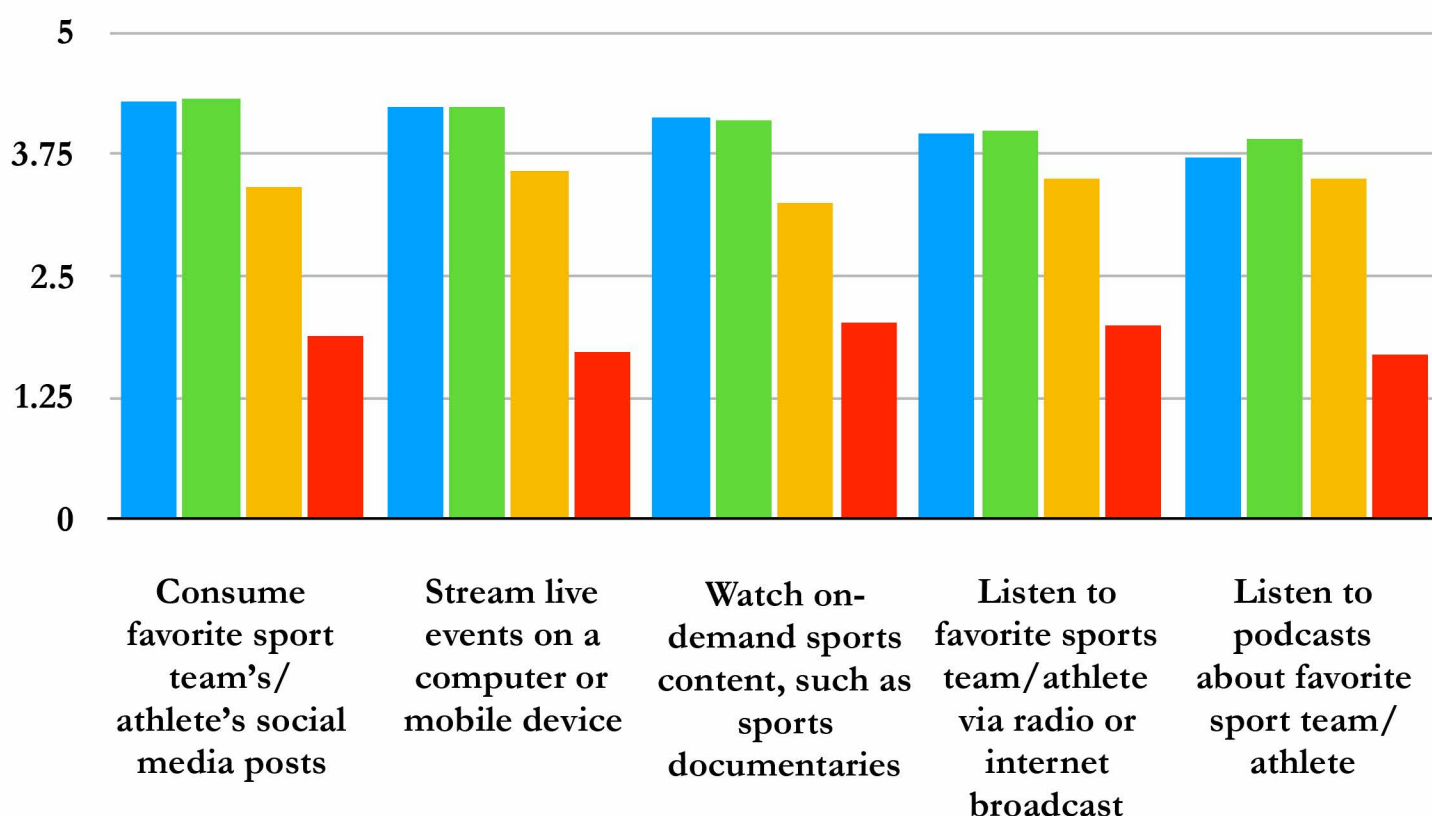
# “Which are you most passionate about following?”



# ENGAGEMENT METHODS



# ENGAGEMENT METHODS



**African Americans  
GenZers are**

**# 1**

**In Team ID**

**46%**

**African American Boomers  
are most passionate about  
Following the NFL/Football**

**African American Millennials engage in new age  
and social media methods as much as African  
American GenZers**

**HIGH-  
LIGHTS**



# BRIEF THOUGHTS

All of the above results are enlightening. Our study suggests that African Americans are not only the most highly identified sports fan, but are also the most passionate sports fan. Further, the study suggests African American sport consumers to have the highest engagement levels of all groups. And though it may not be necessary to call for a complete shift in sport marketing practices, there should at least be an attempt by sport marketers to further garner this fan base as lasting consumers. Given the aforementioned financial aptitude of the demographic, the results in this study certainly lend credence to the African American demographic being a highly valuable and worthwhile target market.

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# THE PLAYERS

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