



culturebeat
PULSE



PURPOSE

In our world today, with myriad sources for information, the pervasiveness of social networks, and the fragmentation of media, keeping track of what matters can be difficult. More importantly, making sense of how the news and events coming from these sources may impact your brand and your marketing strategy is now more important than ever before.

CultureBeat® PULSE is our humble initiative to bring you a consolidated, curated ensemble of relevant topics on multiculturalism and multicultural consumers. Our goal is to keep you well-informed on what's going on in our society and marketplace and, most importantly, why it matters.

In each edition, our multicultural research practitioners will bring you a mini collection of newsworthy events, conversations, and trends that are culturally relevant—with an informed point of view on why people from different walks of life, cultures, and ethnicities should matter to your organization, with the intent to serve as thought and conversation starters for the marketing community.

Jorge Martínez-Bonilla
Vice President—CultureBeat® + LatinoEyes®
jorgem@crresearch.com

LATIN**WHAT?** THOUGHTS ABOUT MODERN MONIKERS AND VALUING PURITY AND TRADITION IN A BEAUTIFUL LANGUAGE.

Jorge Martínez-Bonilla, *Vice President—CultureBeat® & LatinoEyes®*
jorgem@crresearch.com

Patricia Fernandez, *Senior Research Director, Quantitative Research*
patriciaf@crresearch.com

Two hundred times. That’s how many times I had to write the word “hasta” (“to” or “until” in English) in first grade so that I’d remember a silent *H* is its first letter. My mother made me do it (multiple times) so that I would later write and spell properly in Spanish and so that it wouldn’t be confused with “asta” which means “pole” (as in what you find holding a U.S. flag). I dreaded it then, but I thank her now for her tenacity—ensuring I learned and respected the language that became the vehicle to express our love for each other. Language is more than just words and sounds; it is emotions, thoughts, decisions, experiences, memories, actions, and tradition.

At the time, writing correctly also mattered because I went to a Catholic school run by Marists from Spain, and they were utterly keen and zealous proponents of the proper use of Spanish. These days, the grown-up multicultural consumer research practitioner in me values the grammatical correctness as much as the cultural value and heritage of the Spanish language.

LANGUAGE & MARKETING

While languages are, indeed, living and ever-evolving (minus Latin and other antique languages), proper use of language matters for functional reasons in marketing. And that’s true for any language! You have likely seen the cheesy t-shirts with the phrase, “Let’s eat grandma! Let’s eat, grandma! Commas save grandmas.” Cheesy? Yes, yet accurate. As marketing tools go, language is the most basic and quintessential resource marketers have to connect with consumers and convey their brands’ stories. And, while creative and artistic licenses are immensely valuable in branding (think Qdoba, Chick-fil-A, Froot Loops, etc.), proper use of language ensures messages are delivered the way they were intended. Without proper use of language, marketing would be the Wild West of social communications, and there would likely be more liability and trivial lawsuits than there already are.



LATINX, SPANISH GRAMMAR, AND MISINTERPRETED SEXISM

If you have found yourself wondering about or witnessed debates around which term, “Latinos” or “Hispanics,” is the correct one to use: you are not alone. And you were likely more baffled when someone suggested the use of “LatinX” in your marketing communications and strategy. It can be frustrating.

Here’s the short, oversimplified version of grammatical context for Spanish:

- Nouns, articles, and terms that belong to the masculine gender generally—although not always—end in the letter o (“niño” for boy, “abuelo” for grandfather, etc.).
- Most terms ending in a refer to the feminine gender (“niña” for girl, “abuela” for grandmother, etc.).
- In plural form, the above generally applies to either gender.
- However, when both genders are included, the language defaults to what is known as the masculine gender form (“niños” if there are both boys and girls, “abuelos” if referring to both grandma and grandpa).

Enter the famous—or infamous—“LatinX.” It has certainly grown in popularity and is more frequently

used today than when it made its original known appearance in the early 2000s. Proponents of the term argue that, traditionally, the Spanish language has promoted an oppressive, patriarchal, and sexist use of language by defaulting plurals to the masculine form. Advocates and neologism enthusiasts might use the rationale, “Why say Latinos if there are women and non-binary in our community? Let’s use ‘LatinX’ instead!” While they mean well by trying to ensure that our language is more inclusive, the language was always inclusive!

We are not linguists; we are researchers. But we argue that those advocating for “LatinX” as the norm fail to see that Spanish is already an inclusive language—one that embraces plurality while respecting the individual. Moreover, they are susceptible to falling into the modern trap of misinterpreting sexism and failing to address the issue of gender identity.

Perhaps because of my mother’s focus on proper spelling and grammar (and my educators’ grammar pedigree), when I heard the word “todos” (“all” or “everyone”) growing up, I never assumed it exclusively referred to males. I knew that females were likely included, because “todos” includes males and females—or just males! Same goes for English. If someone says, “everyone in the room was excited,” it is on me if I assume a gender-exclusive context.



WHY NOT “LATINX”? WHAT’S THE BIG DEAL?

I argue that the push for the term is capricious, experimental, rebellious, and unnecessary. Not only is the use of the term “LatinX” impractical, it has several pitfalls despite its creative appeal.

- It can lead to confusion in marketing. “So, what is it: “Latinos,” “Hispanics” or “LatinX”?” One might argue that it’s all of them, or some of them, depending on what’s convenient. Confusing? I rest my case.
- It is awkward to pronounce, and it fails to deliver specificity, something that comes in handy in marketing. If non-Spanish speakers already struggle rolling their *R*s, imagine what adding this can do to non-Hispanics’ understanding of who we are as a collective and integral part of U.S. society!
- The term undermines Hispanic cultural heritage and tradition. Using the term entails severing ties with the Spanish language and the cultural heritage that millions of people (consumers no less) have fought to have acknowledged in the U.S. social fabric, politics, academia, economy, and all dimensions of life. It suggests that an essential part of who we are, with our values, needs to be relinquished.
- It opens the door for futile and endless linguistic and marketing arguments. What do we do with all the gender-neutral words in our language?
 - Should we say “guitaristX” instead of “guitarist”? In Spanish, the right word is “guitarrista,” regardless of the individual’s gender.
 - How about we start saying “the humanX personX,” since in Spanish “la persona humana” includes all genders, despite using the feminine form?
 - How about “razX humanX” (“humanX racX”) instead of “raza humana” (“human race”), which also uses the feminine form despite including all humans.
- If the spirit behind the use of the term “LatinX” is advocacy-driven, changing a word in the vernacular is insufficient and will barely scratch the surface. We would rather see efforts focused on active advocacy: promoting inclusion in political discourse, advocating fair employment and compensation practices at work, volunteering for relevant social causes that benefit all Hispanics and all races, etc.

OUR POV

We acknowledge the argument is very much alive, and we are sensitive to the voices advocating for inclusion and diversity in our society, language, and culture. Undoubtedly, more inclusion, tolerance, and acceptance are welcome.

And, while we admit there might be very specific legitimate and strategic reasons to use the term “LatinX” in well-defined and well-designed marketing initiatives (e.g., marketing campaigns aimed at younger Hispanics or creative activation programs, where the use of the term builds on the branding or strategy—for instance, if your brand has the letter x in it), we suggest that the term should be used cautiously.

Hispanics have long worked extremely hard to contribute to U.S. society. Not only do we bring the beauty of diversity to the table, but we also bring a wealth of cultural richness, including food, music, entertainment, politics, business, social causes, and so many other dimensions of our nation’s vibrant life and history. Our language is a vital component of our cultural identity. Burying the words “Hispanic” and “Latino” to make room for a trendier term would be a disservice to that heritage. Rather than focusing on whether to use “LatinX” as a term, focus on the Hispanic and Latino consumer by being inclusive, purposeful, and authentic. Millions of women, men, and non-binary persons make up our cultural identity community—they want to be acknowledged and treated right. They’re not thirsty for a new label; they’re thirsty for respect.

LGBTQ—CELEBRATING OUR DIFFERENCES.

Anna Rossi, *Quantitative Analyst*
annar@crresearch.com



LGBTQ—it’s a lot of letters to remember, but it actually has fewer syllables than “heterosexual.” It may seem overwhelming to see those letters pile up, and it seems that the order or the number of letters keeps changing, but it’s all with good reason. The term LGBTQ is meant to represent an incredibly diverse and multicultural group of people, with each letter standing for one of many identities; so, there’s a lot packed into them! Those letters have a big job to do!

At CultureBeat®, we understand that it can be challenging to stay up to date on this under-represented and underserved segment. So, in celebration of Pride Month, we’ve put together this guide to familiarize you with the different terms and flags—and how they have evolved over the years.

LGBTQ—HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Before there was LGBTQ, the first widely used term was “homosexual,” which carried a lot of negative connotations—in part because, for many years, it was inaccurately classified as a mental disorder. The term LGBTQ was first used around 1996, but what makes up this more popular and widely used term?

The term “gay” was adopted by the community and widely used in the 1970s. Around this time, the term “gay-and-lesbian community” began to be used. Both of these terms were used to refer to more than just gay men and lesbians—without really representing anyone else. Then, in the late 1980s, the shorter but slightly more inclusive term “LGB” started to be used. Since that time, additional letters have been added to be more inclusive, leading to usage of the terms LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTIQ, and LGBT+.

Today, LGBTQ, LGBT, and LGBT+ are the most favorable terms for referring to the community. However, generally, gay men and Boomers don't like LGBTQ as much as the rest of the community because they are more likely to dislike the term "queer" due to its derogatory historical use. For this reason and countless more, it's important to understand your audience before using these terms. Furthermore, using terms such as LGBT-friendly or LGBT-welcoming is now preferred instead of "gay-friendly"; they are seen as more inclusive now that "gay" is used primarily when referring to gay men.

Though these terms are supposed to be more inclusive, it appears that when some brands market to the LGBTQ community, they most often are directing their marketing efforts primarily to gay men, who are more likely to be seen as a lucrative segment compared to others in the community. When many marketers think of gay men, they think of stereotypes supported by the men from the show *Queer Eye*—affluent, fashionable, and trendy. They're marketing to a particular type of gay man who is going to shop and spend; whereas lesbian stereotypes appear to be much less marketable. Conversely, most people in the LGBTQ community—not just gay men—report they make an effort to shop brands that are their allies. This is an opportunity for brands to consider appealing to this untapped segment in their marketing plans, as only 5-6% are doing so, according to the [CMI Annual Community Survey](#). Even the brands like Target, Apple, Amazon, and Starbucks (who this segment feels are doing a good job of reaching them) should continue to find ways to stay relevant to this group.



L IS FOR LESBIAN (WOMAN)

Lesbian refers to women who are sexually/romantically attracted to other women.

When brands market to the LGBTQ community, as mentioned previously, they are often directing their marketing efforts towards gay men, while lesbians are falsely stereotyped as people who don't buy

things or go out, preferring to stay home with their cats. The *CMI Annual Survey* also indicates that, while lesbians are more likely to own pets than the general population, they also make purchases in a variety of other categories. Along with other LGBTQ people, they spend more than the general population on entertainment (music, TV, movies, concerts, theater, etc.), alcohol, computers and electronics—and other notable industries—making them an appealing under-targeted group.

The same study states that lesbians report making an effort to shop brands that are their allies—notably Subaru, Wildfang, Ben & Jerry's, The Home Depot, Campbell's, and JC Penney.

In addition to the traditional LGBTQ Pride Flag, some lesbians also celebrate with this pink flag.



G IS GAY (MAN)

"Gay" typically refers to men who are sexually/romantically attracted to other men. The term "gay" is also sometimes used as a kind of catch-all, referring to same-sex attraction for both men and women. This is falling out of favor, however, as it's not very inclusive. It's use in the term LGBTQ specifically refers to gay men.

While gay men shop a variety of industries, they are especially likely to travel and consume alcoholic beverages. Brands in these industries should be especially thoughtful about how they communicate with this group of men.

Gay men report making an effort to shop brands that are their allies—notably American Airlines, Delta, Levi's, Marriott, Chase, and Hilton.

Gay men primarily use the traditional LGBTQ Pride Flag, sometimes also adding a black and brown stripe to support LGBTQ people of color.

Gender identity is how you identify in your mind, and gender expression is anything outward that you do to express how you identify in your mind.



B IS FOR BISEXUAL

Bisexual refers to men and women who are sexually/romantically attracted to both men and women.

There's a lot of misunderstandings about the bisexual community that result in false stereotypes calling them indecisive, greedy, or promiscuous. Be careful that your communications are respectful and don't accidentally tap into these stereotypes and offend this group.

In addition to the traditional LGBTQ Pride flag, there is also a Bisexual Pride Flag that uses traditional gender colors to represent being attracted to both men and women.



T IS FOR TRANSGENDER

Transgender refers to people whose gender identity or gender expression (how they dress, act, etc.) differs from the gender they were assigned at birth. The terms "Trans*" or "Trans+" are also sometimes used as well.

Transgender people report making an effort to shop brands that are their allies—notably Lush and GC2B.

The transgender community also has their own flag that uses white to represent transitioning from one gender to another.



Q IS FOR QUEER

Queer is used as an inclusive term referring to non-heterosexuality. This can include sexuality as well as gender expression. Queer has a very complicated history, which is why it is sometimes excluded and why some dislike the term and find it offensive. Queer was originally used to mean weird or

strange, not in reference to sexuality. It then became a derogative term, a form of hate speech, against the LGBT community, and especially gay men. Now, the LGBTQ community has reclaimed the term, embracing its inclusivity, as it can be used to describe anything outside of heterosexuality and traditional gender expression or the norm.

Because it's so broad, some people have a difficult time understanding its meaning. Anything that subverts the traditional binary of masculine men and feminine women—anything that is non-normative—can be considered queer.

- Lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender people can all be considered queer.
- Women who aren't entirely feminine or men who aren't entirely masculine can be queer.
- Dressing in drag or androgynously can be queer.
- Relationships that look like heterosexuality, but aren't, can be queer—like a bisexual woman dating a man, or a man dating someone who looks like a woman but doesn't identify as a woman.

Due to its history as discriminatory and that some still find it offensive, it's important to be very careful when using this term. Using LGBTQ is still the preferred way to refer to the community as a whole, and the use of the term queer should only be used if someone self-identifies with that term.

+ IS SOMETIMES ADDED TO INCLUDE OTHER IDENTITIES IN THE COMMUNITY

The community is very diverse, and everyone has their own terminology that they prefer—some even prefer to avoid labels—so, the + is another way to be inclusive. Sometimes you also see other identities represented by the addition of these letters to the end of the term instead of the + sign.

Some other common identities and their respective flags are outlined on the following page.



INTERSEX

Someone born with both male and female genitalia.



ASEXUAL

Someone who experiences little to no sexual attraction.



AROMANTIC

Someone who experiences little to no romantic attraction.



PANSEXUAL

Someone who is attracted to people regardless of their gender identity, gender expression, or biology. Younger generations are more likely to identify as pansexual.



NON-BINARY

Someone who identifies as neither male nor female. They see themselves as completely outside of the gender binary. For this group, they may prefer to be called by gender-neutral pronouns such as “they” or “ze,” but if you’re not sure, simply ask. Younger generations are more likely to identify their gender as non-binary.

“They” and “ze” are popular gender-neutral pronouns that many of these groups may use. One way to create a safe space to share pronouns is to introduce yourself and share yours: “Hi, I’m Anna, and my pronouns are she/her.”



GENDERQUEER

Someone whose gender identity is outside the strict male/female binary. Their gender presentation may include both traditional masculine and feminine qualities, or neither. Younger generations are more likely to identify as genderqueer.



GENDER FLUID

Someone whose gender identity shifts or fluctuates. On some days, they may present more masculine and other times more feminine. Younger generations are more likely to identify as gender fluid.



GENDER-NEUTRAL/AGENDER

Someone who prefers not to be described by their gender. They reject gender completely. Younger generations are more likely to identify with the term.

OUR POV

LGBTQ consumers have been around for a long time, and they’re more visible and important now than ever. Brands who want to grow or stay strong in the overall marketplace owe it to themselves to figure out what this significant segment needs. It is okay to ask—in fact, go out and ask! This group appreciates being asked for their opinions, and a little research can go a long way towards meeting their needs and earning their loyalty. As a brand, you shouldn’t be paralyzed by the fear of going outside of traditional views of customers’ gender identity or because, “we’ve never done anything like this before.” Let us know how we can help you design a study to ask the right questions to get LGBTQ consumers in your corner.

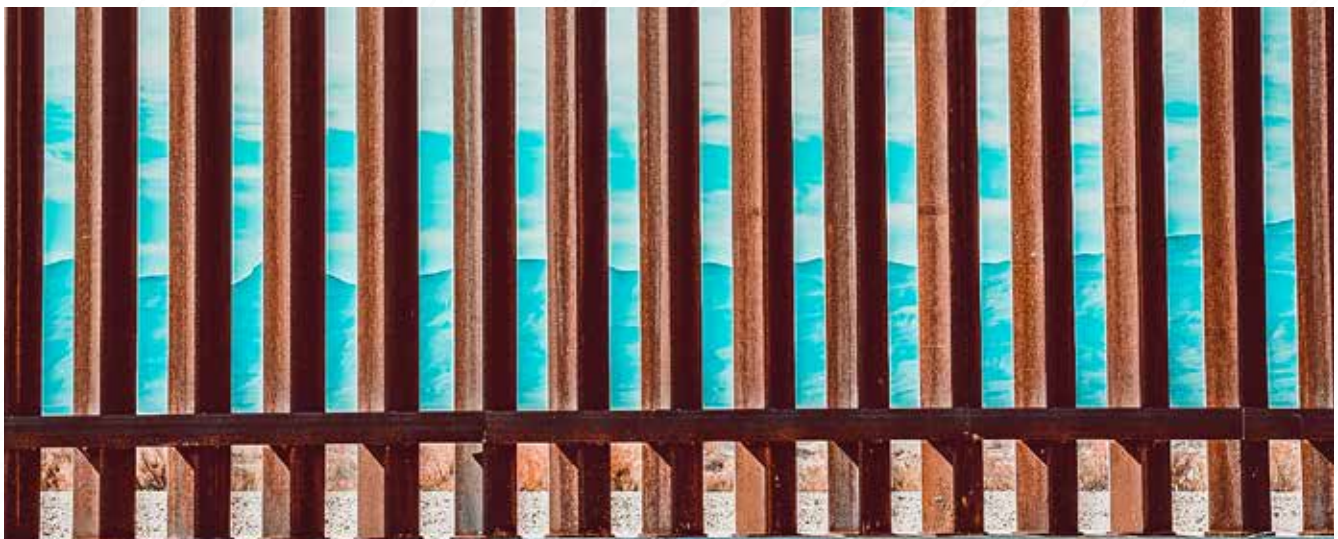
CENSUS CITIZENSHIP QUESTION: BAD FOR MARKETING RESEARCH?

Jorge Martínez-Bonilla, Vice President—CultureBeat® & LatinoEyes®
jorgem@crresearch.com

“You can lose all your points for any one of three things. One: If you cry. Two: If you ask to see your mother. Three: If you’re hungry and ask for a snack!” These are the warning words Guido (pretending to translate for a German officer) tells his little son, Giosuè, in a masterfully played scene in Roberto Benigni’s *Life is Beautiful* (1998). This movie has the power to simultaneously make one cheer for the hope of a better world and shed a tear of intense sadness for how uncompassionate humanity became at its lowest point in history. The movie follows the story of an Italian Jewish man, Guido, who is sent to a concentration camp where he concocts an imaginary game to shield his son from the horrific realities of the Holocaust. In other words, he does everything in his power to protect his son...by lying.

If you were in Guido’s shoes, it would be reasonable to expect you would do the same: you would do everything in your power to protect your loved one. That is what we do as humans; we love, and we belong; and, by loving and belonging, we become protectors and protégés of those we love and belong to, including our nation and society.

The current administration, through the commerce secretary, the overseer of the Census Bureau, has proposed the inclusion of a citizenship question in the 2020 Census. The question would directly ask the U.S. citizenship status of everyone living in the nation (to be precise, it would ask, “is this person a citizen of the United States?”). The proposition has been challenged in court, and a definitive ruling on the issue has not been made; however, from a business perspective, there are advantages to avoiding asking a citizenship question.



ILLUSIONS OF AN INACCURATE COUNT

Commerce Secretary Ross and the administration's argument for backing the inclusion of the citizenship question pivots on enforcing the Voting Rights Act, intended to protect individuals from language and racial discrimination.

Opponents of the citizenship question fear an inaccurate counting. And that is a pretty big deal.

On a political level, the counts from the census ultimately help determine the number of seats in the House of Representatives, and it also helps to determine how federal funds are allocated for each state. And, by funds, we mean billions of dollars.

From a business and marketing perspective, the census information is used by just about every corporation to make critical business decisions and projections that impact the survival of entire industries. For example:

- A food and beverage company might check census data prior to launching its latest multi-million-dollar advertising campaign.
- A company developing a new skincare product designed with a specific population in mind will check which markets offer the most promising prospects.
- A financial and banking enterprise that develops solutions for low- and middle-income consumers might check the census to estimate their market potential, etc.

ACCURACY AT RISK

The census has long been considered an impartial source of vital demographic, social, and economic information. Billions of dollars move every day as a result of decisions made based on the information provided by the census—where to move corporate headquarters, how many Walmart stores are opened in a given market, how many dollars are invested in an ad campaign in one state versus another, etc.

If you watch TV, you have probably seen AT&T's "Just OK" campaign. In one of the ads, a patient

awaiting surgery asks a nurse what she thinks about his surgeon, only to get a disparaging, "he's OK" response. Who wants a "just OK" physician? Similarly, who wants "just OK" census data? Nobody. Inherently, a citizenship question risks these results.

Accuracy is at risk with a citizenship question because millions of people would arguably be compelled to ignore the census questionnaire or fill it out incorrectly, leading to the all-too-undesirable outcome of a miscount—the opposite of what the census is supposed to do.

FEAR OF DISCOVERY AND UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

Here's where the image of Guido's ordeal comes into play. We are living in times of incredible social and political divide, intolerance, and distrust. Minorities are on the receiving end of social bullying; there are countless stories of people being harassed for speaking in a different language or for looking and dressing differently; and political and social discourse often only feeds the tension. If you are on the receiving end of this hostility, you might feel compelled to hesitate to answer the citizenship question. Like Guido, you would do everything in your power to protect your anonymity (thus, saving yourself and your family from potential targeting).

These concerns aren't unfounded or irrational. On the contrary, they are very real and can be paralyzing to Americans. As NPR has reported, [Census Bureau officials have recommended against including a citizenship question](#) to ask all households about their status, "for fear that it would harm the accuracy of information collected for the head count."





Finally, undocumented and illegal immigrants would have good reason to not answer the census question, or they could answer it incorrectly, at the expense of facing legal and financial consequences. However, there are other individuals who might be inclined to do the same—or, at the very least, would feel conflicted about the issue:

- Undocumented parents of U.S.-born children
- Those who have a resident or refugee status, but are not citizens
- Those in the process of obtaining legal residency or citizenship
- Recent citizenship recipients who fear having the privilege rescinded
- Those who would use the census as a vehicle to protest the current administration's handling of immigration and social welfare

Experts and opponents of the question have argued that there are better and more accurate methods to count citizens for political purposes—namely, the Bureau's *American Community Survey*, which is longer and sent regularly to a smaller number of homes. So, why risk the accuracy of the census?

WHAT IT MEANS FOR MARKETING

As explained in a [Forbes column by Isaac Mizrahi](#), a well-respected advertising professional and thought leader in the multicultural marketing community, there is simply too much at risk. If the question ends up making its way onto the census, it would complicate the work of marketers across national, if not global, industries.

As market researchers, we see these issues constantly, especially working with multicultural audiences—and not just Hispanics. Collecting samples with Spanish-speaking and unacculturated Hispanics has become challenging over the last several years, as participants have become elusive and reticent to share basic personal and household information. During a recent project for a non-profit organization (a globally renowned museum and educational institution) we heard stories of would-be program beneficiaries who declined sharing basic family information because they worry about being targeted for ill-intended purposes. On another project for a food and beverage industry leader, a teenage participant eagerly spoke about his participation in immigration reform advocacy, but abruptly shut down when asked about family traditions, as he became emotionally overwhelmed by the prospect of discussing his parents' immigration status.

Census figures are used in the marketing community and business world at large every day to make critical decisions on:

- How much to invest in an ad campaign
- What DMAs to target
- Where the next store will be opened
- How many branch offices are needed to service consumers
- How much to invest in the next fiber-optic network
- What areas to target with 5G connectivity

All of these business endeavors would be at risk with inaccurate census counting. With marketing being as complex as it already is, it does not make business sense to risk census accuracy.

OUR POV

We believe the nation, its business community, and the whole economy are better served by an accurate counting of the U.S. population—all of it—no matter what skin color, what country a person hails from, what language they prefer to speak, whether they fell in love with someone who is not a citizen, or if they were born to parents with an irregular immigration status!

We believe a nation that embraces our differences and strengthens its social fabric through valuing differences—rather than weakening them through hatred and intolerance—is a nation that moves forward, a nation that progresses towards a better and brighter future. It is a future where immigrants fuel creativity and progress, and where businesses flourish as part of a vibrant economy—our marketing industry included.



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CELEBRATING INCLUSION

Shaili Bhatt, *Senior Director, Qualitative Research*
shailib@crresearch.com

Teens wearing rainbow backpacks, matching hats, and glittery feather boas in support of their best friends at a Pride Parade. A group of friends wearing traditional cholis and saris, who are learning dance steps for garba-raas and attending Navaratri festivals together. Strategies to celebrate inclusion—instead of just celebrating diversity—are on the rise, and we'll explore a few examples in this piece.

CultureBeat® Readers: it would be wonderful [if you have your own examples of inclusivity to share](#), and we can publish a follow-up piece that includes YOUR personal stories!

Regardless of our age or location, some of us are lucky enough to have friends who invite us to immerse into their cultures, even if it's just for a day or a weekend.

I grew up in a large suburban town just outside of Chicago, which was considered somewhat diverse in the 80s. Our residents were mostly Caucasian—of German, Italian, and Polish heritage, but it also included some African Americans, Hispanics, and less than a handful of Native American and Indian families who had children in my school.

To celebrate diversity (i.e., our cultural differences), our schools and community would host multicultural fairs; if you're reading this, it's likely that you've attended one or more of these types of fairs or festivals. These events usually included a small but sentimental mix of fun facts, food, costumes, and dances, compartmentalizing each of our countries into a neat and palatable package. Admittedly, a lot of it was predictable—but the volunteers' and attendees' hearts were in the right place.

CULTURE + LOVE + RESPECT = INCLUSION

For several years, I decided to buck conventional expectations for showcasing my Indian heritage, and I teamed up with my friends to help them portray some of their cultures. In one of my favorite examples, I danced with a group of friends in [Greek fustanellas](#) and woolen vests; only one of us was Greek, so we had to borrow the outfits from my friend's cousins. We learned to make platters of baklava together, and my friend's mom helped us learn the syrtaki dances, which we synchronized to authentic Greek music.



If anyone raised an eyebrow at these efforts, especially the parents or teachers, no one really said a word to stop us; we were immersing ourselves into new cultures, blurring the lines. We wanted to closely embody that look, style, and authenticity—and, to some extent, explore a broader, more united cultural identity.

Inclusion is not just about participating; the foundation for inclusion lies in being supportive, respectfully curious, and genuinely interested in each other's cultures.

As kids and teens (and, even now, as adults), it totally made sense to include and embrace each other into our respective cultures. We talked about different history, traditions, and holidays that our families were celebrating on the weekends, even if they were never listed on the calendar.

When we visited each other's homes, we had the benefit of intimately observing and learning aspects of each other's cultures firsthand, not just admiring them in a museum or in a book. By participating in special cultural milestones and events, like a friend's bat or bar mitzvah, Quinceañera, or attending a festival at a local temple or church, we were celebrating each other's cultures; we asked each other lots of questions that stemmed from a place of love and respect.

Now, let's talk about cultural appropriation. Some people feel that any "out-of-the-box" representation inappropriately dilutes cultural boundaries to the point of cultural appropriation. Some believe that cross-cultural actions are politically incorrect and wholly unacceptable. For example, we should all know that blackface and Native American mascots

fall squarely in this category. Apart from these types of examples, it does not have to be all-or-nothing.

To view every "out-of-the-box" cross-cultural practice as cultural appropriation tends to discount the fun, and perhaps more importantly, the celebration of inclusivity in a tide of righteousness.

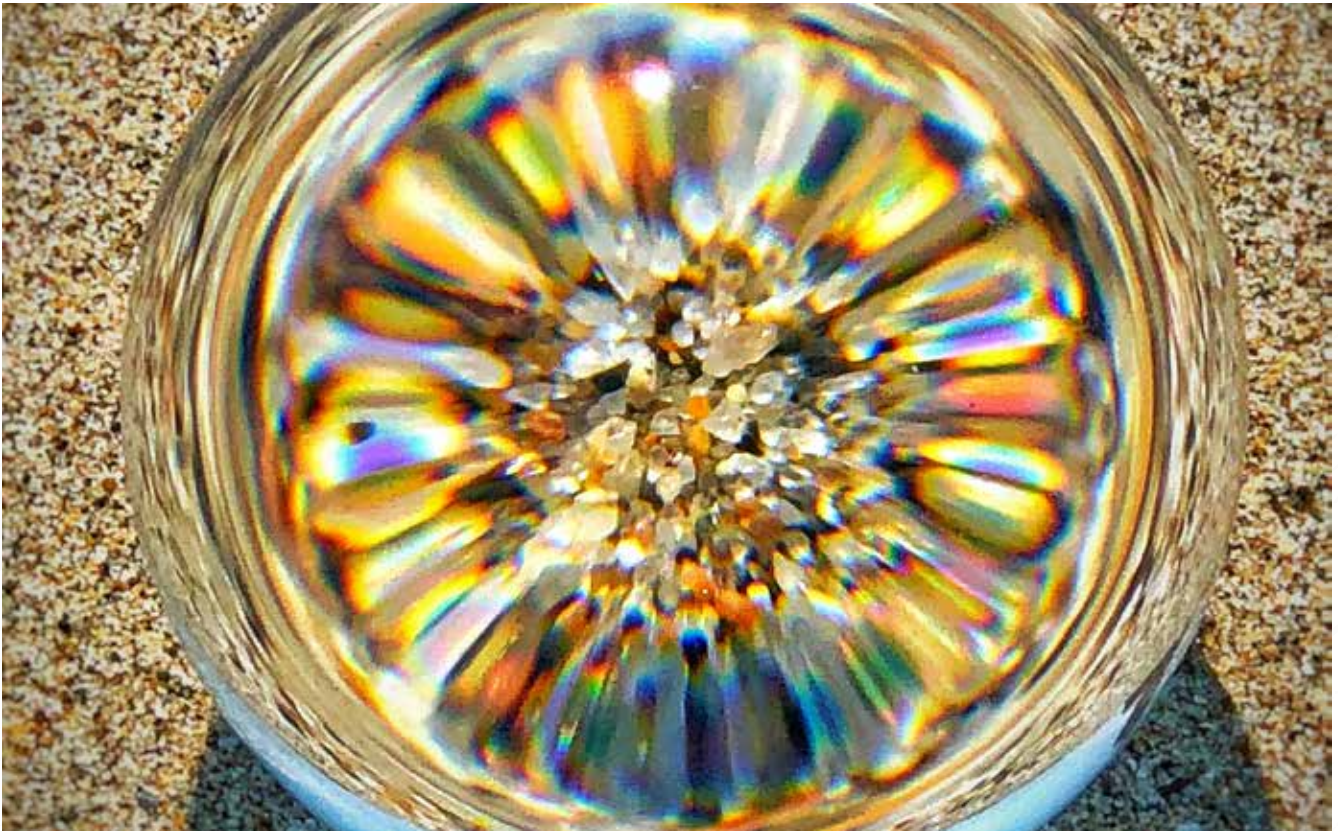
It's no secret that the need for meaningful shared experiences has grown stronger among Millennials and Gen Z—and, frankly, across multiple generations, as we constantly seek ways to learn and connect apart from our mobile devices. There is also more sensitivity about diversity and our cultural differences than a couple of decades ago, but let's try to avoid totally compartmentalizing our worlds.

COLORS WITHOUT CONTEXT

Some of you might have participated in a "[color run](#)" yourselves, or you've heard of the event. Runners joyfully throw a dry, powdery mix of colors, which often results in caking the runners' faces, shoulders, and clothes with colors to celebrate reaching the finish line of the race.

Notably, there are strong parallels in throwing these colors and this celebratory theme with the Indian and South Asian festival of [Holi](#). One of my well-traveled coworkers, who completed a color run some time ago, expressed how she only recently learned about [Holi](#). She admitted that uncovering these parallels to Holi after the experience had already happened made her feel embarrassed and even somewhat disgusted at her ignorance. She wished she "would have known." By not knowing about Holi (i.e., lack of cultural context), she perceived that the event she had enjoyed and shared at the end of her color run was cultural appropriation.





From a cultural standpoint, it is not wrong to participate in activities or events like this, but it is wrong if participants are uninformed.

Inclusion may be the strategic answer for these shared experiences to retain the joy, yet provide much-needed cultural context that is missing from these events. By honoring the original intent of the cultural tradition/practice—maybe describing a blurb on the website, talking about it at the start or end of the race—celebratory themes from Holi would feel more authentic and help to provide culturally appropriate context to those who are participating.

Savvy marketing teams are already exploring and embracing cultural immersion and inclusion beyond the “fun facts,” providing information and support in culturally relevant and authentic ways.

OUR POV

For some brands and companies, this transition from celebrating diversity to celebrating inclusion is a remarkable shift in strategies. It is no longer enough to point out that we all hail from different cultures, backgrounds, and families. Consider infusing more cultural context from the start, and help your customers connect the dots early and often.

Market research conducted with diverse audiences and in-culture consumers can help to uncover deeper context or significance that might not otherwise surface. Qualitative research such as friendship groups, in-home interviews and tag-alongs, are just a few examples of the in-depth interviewing that we can provide. A strategy of cultural inclusion can be done respectfully, from a place of understanding and love, to create more colorful and meaningful shared experiences.



culturebeat

The multicultural research division of C+R Research.

CultureBeat®, C+R Research's multicultural research division, helps brands understand how different cultures, ethnicities, and lifestyles—and the dynamics that intertwine them—influence their consumers.



latinoeyes®

LatinoEyes® is the research consultancy division of C+R Research that specializes in U.S. Hispanic and Latin American consumers and shoppers.

For more information, visit crresearch.com, or email info@crresearch.com.