



Relative
INSIGHT

Diversity & Inclusion

Starting an open conversation



The study: What did we do?

It is a phrase that reverberates around the walls of boardrooms globally; it galvanizes the minds of hiring managers; guides the decisions of talent around the world; holds up as a metric and a means of cultural success. But what does diversity and inclusion really mean? There is of course the dictionary definition.



Diversity Inclusion



The representation of people from a variety of ethnic, social and sexual backgrounds.

To ensure that all of these people have an equal share of the voice, able to freely contribute and have their perspective listened to.

Open to interpretation

Yet the phrase ‘diversity and inclusion’, by its very definition, ought to be open to interpretation. Is it a target, or a way of being? An action, or a culture? A process, or a vision?

The answer is a matter of individual opinion, and at Relative Insight, we believe that opinion – real opinion – is revealed not just what people say, but *why* they say it.

The survey

With this in mind, we’ve surveyed 800 people in the UK and US, aiming to open the conversation around diversity and inclusion. The survey was a long one, with a majority of the answers asking for open-ended opinions.

Then, we used our own technology to analyse all this text data, which was thousands of words and a tangled mass of opinions, in order to lift the lid on what diversity and inclusion really means to the people who matter: *everyone*.

A truly open conversation

For many brand guardians and agency analysts, the very mention of an open-ended-text survey sends shivers down the spine. On a survey of 800 respondents with 20 open questions, results yielded up to 300,000 words – that’s over three novels’ worth of data, just waiting in a spreadsheet to be analysed, distilled, and made sense of.

The power of qualitative data

All that might sound like an impossible headache, so it’s no wonder that so many researchers choose to conduct their quantitative research safely in the realms of multiple choice.

However, while multiple-choice surveys provide powerful numerical information, we believe that the intricacies of qualitative data can offer so much more richness and nuance, and give you the true *why* behind the *what*.

What can qualitative data reveal?



A passive voice

The passive voice may suggest discomfort or disengagement.



Repetition

The repetition of certain categories of words and topics may reveal the lens through which people are really viewing the topic.



First-person narrative

The use of the first-person may imply empowerment or sympathy.

Take diversity and inclusion, for example: it is a challenging topic in which many people may struggle to articulate their opinions. Yet by peeling back their words, we can begin to reveal the truth. The challenge, then, was simply to extract this high level of granular detail from three whole novels’ worth of language data.

Relative Insight: listening to all voices

At Relative Insight, we specialise in analysing text data, at scale, to reveal the trends, differences, and insights latent within language. We use AI and NLP to process and compare text of any kind (from surveys, social media, reviews and CX transcripts) to identify the subtle differences in language that have major implications on thoughts and feelings.

What kind of data can we compare?

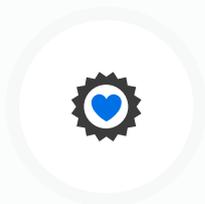


By understanding hearts and minds at this scale, we have direct access to the very marketing, branding, product and service insights that can change the course of businesses.

What was asked?



Definitions



Feelings of representation



Opinions of popular culture



Commitments to change



Hopes for the future

What does this mean commercially?



Humanity

Unlocking the personal definitions of ‘*diversity and inclusion*’ helps businesses to create policies that are more human and relevant to their employees.



Change

Exploring the level of representation that individuals feel, together with their opinions of how popular culture is performing, allows businesses to understand where they need to change.



Direction

Analysing commitments and hopes for the future indicates the areas that are most important to individuals, and the overall direction of travel for diversity and inclusion

What did we do?

As with any research using Relative Insight, the key to these insights is comparison. Using the first few questions in our survey to split our data – by *ethnicity*, *gender*, *sexuality*, and *nationality* – we were able to compare the thoughts and feelings of different groups within the data set.

As our findings suggest, these groups have widely different perspectives of how diversity and inclusion play out in the real world – and these perspectives add richness to our understanding of this ever-evolving landscape.

The insights

Inclusion means: including me

It comes as little surprise that people are most likely to view diversity and inclusion through their own, **individual lens**. The flip-side of diversity and inclusion is of course inequality and marginalisation, and those groups who have historically experienced more of this are more likely to reference this particular part of their identity when de-constructing the meaning of diversity.

What did they talk about?



Non-white respondents

Ethnicities

Asian
Chinese
Hispanic



White respondents

Broad terms

Sexuality
Disability
Gender



LGBTQ+ respondents

Sexuality

Gay
Anti-gay
Queer



Female respondents

Safety

Safe
Vulnerable
Unsafe

People of colour and white respondents

Among non-white respondents, for example, diversity was most often decoded using the language of ethnicity. While white respondents tended to speak more broadly about the various components of diversity – including disability, sexuality and gender – non-white respondents were more likely to reference ethnic and religious backgrounds: *Asian, Chinese, Hispanic, Latin, Black, Muslim*.

People of colour talk more about ethnicities

“You see white, mixed black, trans and Asian in a scene”

The LGBTQ+ community

Naturally, a similar trend occurred among LGBTQ+ people. Compared with straight respondents, this group was more likely to use language directly related to the LGBTQ+ community – indicating that for these individuals, diversity and inclusion is often framed by sexuality.

The LGBTQ+ talk about their community

“I do not purchase anything from chick-fil-a due to their anti-gay agenda”

The female experience

Finally, even among female respondents, the subject of diversity and inclusion was viewed through the lens of the female experience. This group was far more likely to reference 'safe' and 'safety' in their descriptions of what it means to feel included in a diverse workplace – likely a product of the fact that the female experience of marginalisation is often linked with feelings of being unsafe or vulnerable.

Females talk about safety

“Diversity at the workplace helps people feel safe”

In summary

In these insights, a simple rule emerges: those who represent identities that have generally experienced more marginalisation, are more likely to reference this part of their identity when describing diversity and inclusion. In essence, the benchmark of inclusion is the absence of marginalisation – and this marker **begins** with 'me' and 'my' experience.



Respondents from more marginalised groups



Reference their identity and experience

The insights

From privilege comes caution

A different trend is visible among groups who historically have experienced less marginalisation – for example white respondents, straight respondents, and male respondents. Among these groups, the language used typically reflects uncertainty, caution, and a broad (*though sometimes directionless*) desire to take action.

What did they talk about?



Straight respondents



Generalisations

Thing
Not sure
Explain



White respondents



Negations

Don't
Isn't
Not



Male respondents



Action

Support
Attempts
Effort

Straight respondents

Take straight respondents, for example. Compared to their LGBTQ+ counterparts, this group was far more likely to use generalisations and use non-specific language when trying to articulate the meaning of diversity.

For example, their repetition of the word *'things'* is striking – and is perhaps representative of a group who are exercising caution over a vocabulary they've had less need to develop.

Straight respondents use non-specific terms

**“Inclusion to me means...
I'm not really sure how to explain it,
but showing different things.”**

White respondents

Similarly, white respondents were more cautious with their definitions than non-white respondents. This group was likely to use the language of *'not-ness'* in their definition of what it means to be inclusive – i.e., defining the behaviour against what it isn't, rather than what it is. *“It's not only what you do in your brand image”. “Not just put out ads.”*

White respondents use negations

**“Not try to sell us the idea by
including it into the advertising.”**

Male respondents

Male respondents, meanwhile, showed an interesting tendency towards the language of action – particularly hard-fought action. Men were more likely than women in the survey to use this language of *'effort'*, implying that diversity and inclusion requires *'support'*, *'work'*, and *'attempts'*.

The male respondents talk about their actions

“A tangible effort to hire people from different backgrounds.”

In summary

Taken together, these language trends among less marginalised groups reveal a different perspective.

Appreciating that the subject of diversity and inclusion is challenging – and it is important to get the language right – the trend among male, white and straight respondents is to exercise extreme care in their selection of words.

While this leads to generalisations, and in some cases in-articulation, what this does reveal is a somewhat sheepish perspective in which respondents know they have a role to play – but they are unsure of *how* to play it.



Respondents from less marginalised groups



Use generalisation and cautious language

The insights

The conditions of culture

Perhaps most revealing – and most suggestive of a way forward – were the questions in the survey that concerned popular culture. Which brands and TV programmes are getting it right? Which are getting it wrong? Naturally, our different groups had varying opinions on these questions, and all are illuminating.

What did they talk about?



LGBTQ+
respondents



Authenticity
Everyday
Performative
Authentic



Non-white
respondents



Fairness
Equality
Representation
Equal



Female
respondents



Representation
Fairness
Body-inclusivity
All kinds

LGBTQ+ respondents

For members of the LGBTQ+ community, for example, authenticity is key. When defining best practice in diversity and inclusion, this group is most likely to use the language of authentic inclusion in their descriptions – shirking ‘performative activism’ and token gestures, and embracing the representation of everyday experiences.

For LGBTQ+ respondents, therefore, diversity and inclusion is defined by small acts of genuine warmth – not grand, public gestures. One respondent mentioned *Master of None*: “It is a very genuine representation of both struggles and joys of living in a predominantly white country as a person of colour.”

LGBTQ+ respondents talk about authenticity

“Master of None... it shows the everyday life of minorities.”

Non-white respondents

For non-white respondents, the focus was placed slightly differently. In selecting their ‘most inclusive’ brands and TV shows, this group tended to choose the likes of *Walmart*, *AT&T*, *Orange is the New Black*, and *How To Get Away With Murder* – citing fairness and even representation in their reasoning.

In fact, non-white respondents were more likely than white respondents to use the language of fairness and equality in their definitions of diversity. This indicates an interest that goes beyond just representation, and reaches into values and principles.

Non-white respondents talk about fairness

“Be fair to everyone.”

Female respondents

There is a similar and interesting symmetry in the way that female respondents framed their perspectives of what it means to be diverse and inclusive. Although not a minority group, the language of female respondents still reflected an interest in even representation and authentic inclusion.

This was particularly the case when discussing brand and TV shows; women were most likely to refer to the topic of body inclusivity in their responses, calling for inclusivity even within and between members of their group.

Female respondents talk about body inclusivity

“I want to see campaigns that show all kinds of models... big, small, different colour ranges, and different races.”

In summary

In analysing the brands that are *‘getting it right’*, the groups in our survey inevitably had very different interpretations and perspectives. However, there are strands in their arguments that unite them. A desire for authenticity; an interest in fairness; a call for granular inclusion and representation – all of these come together to build a picture of diversity and inclusion as a comprehensive set of values.

In the eyes of these respondents, diversity and inclusion should be a culture; an unthinking, everyday reality. The brands and shows that are doing it well are those where you don’t even notice they’re doing it.

How can brands get it right?



Where's next?

It's fitting that a report on diversity and inclusion should reflect such a diverse range of perspectives.

This is not a simple topic, which makes it simultaneously very important and very challenging to navigate. Through an open-text survey combined with thorough, AI-assisted text analysis, we've hoped to shed light on a few of the most important trends and opinions on the topic; the opinions that belong to the very people whom diversity and inclusion affects.

In summary

Among groups that are less well represented, or who have been historically marginalised, there are clear trends in calling for authentic, cultural inclusion that extends far beyond a policy, quota, or grand gesture.

Among groups who have historically experienced less marginalisation, the evidence suggests something quite opposite: caution and conscientious in-articulation; an uneasiness about saying or doing the wrong thing.



Less marginalised **More marginalised**

Inability to articulate language around inclusion.

A calling for authentic, cultural expression.



Ironically, it may be this very conscientiousness that is preventing the most productive, genuine conversations from taking place. Caution breeds silence – exactly the opposite of the everyday authenticity that many groups are looking for.

In this survey, we have hoped to begin to open the conversation.

relativeinsight.com
info@relativeinsight.com

@relativeinsight
+44 (0)7970 245 935

[Contact us](#)