How Marketers Can Rethink Their Approach to Gathering LGBTQ+ Data

Lyft recently introduced “Women+ Connect,” a feature allowing women and nonbinary riders to select drivers of the same gender. Developed in collaboration with organizations like the Human Rights Campaign, this initiative addresses safety concerns and sexual assault incidents, demonstrating the benefits of enhanced self-identification and user-protection options for vulnerable populations.

This advancement might seem surprising given the widespread scrutiny over Big Tech’s handling of user data, particularly regarding privacy, discrimination and safety. Nonetheless, enhanced data collection methods are crucial for better supporting minority groups, especially LGBTQ+ individuals.

Until recently, laws considered sexual orientation to be sensitive information and exempt from routine data collection. This has led to a significant gap in data on LGBTQ+ individuals, complicating efforts to support and represent this community effectively.

Also, traditional demographic data collection often lacks the subtlety needed to capture the complex identities within this group, which is essential for understanding and addressing the diverse needs of LGBTQ+ populations. These dynamics are essential to brands navigating an ever more nuanced world where LGBTQ+ consumers are in the most diverse and fast-growing demos.

Marketers looking to provide value and create inroads are concerned about making missteps, and this sort of data can embolden their outreach. Accurate data is foundational for facilitating authentic representation, reducing stereotypes, fostering societal acceptance and emboldening respectful engagement.

Recent initiatives

In response to the growing need for more data, the U.S. Census Bureau is soliciting public feedback on proposed changes to the 2024 American Community Survey. The focus is on refining verbiage, questions and response options related to sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI). This initiative aims to capture a broader spectrum of LGBTQ+ identities, improving the accuracy of data for policymaking and service provision.

Despite these needed efforts, political resistance persists. Senators Marco Rubio and J.D. Vance have expressed concerns that including SOGI questions could invade privacy and "politicize" the survey. Meanwhile, just so far this year, over 550 legislative proposals aiming to restrict transgender rights have been introduced across the U.S.

This highlights the disparity between the limited data available and the intense focus on LGBTQ+ issues in policy debates.

While marketers and community-builders alike tend to negotiate public and private identities in localized ways according to regional laws and cultural tolerances, this issue is further complicated by the globalized nature of diverse member organizations, cooperatives and community platforms. In countries where LGBTQ+ individuals face persecution, like Russia, Nigeria and Malaysia, there is a profound need for

systems that protect individuals' privacy while collecting data; enhanced methods for global brands must prioritize the secure and private self-identification of LGBTQ+ individuals.

The solution: adland to establish thoughtful data retention policies, considering varied legal and cultural contexts internationally—vital steps toward creating more inclusive platforms and brand experiences.

Inclusive data collection 101

Creating a safe environment starts with trust, which involves implementing consent mechanisms that respect customers' preferences and levels of comfort with disclosure. Cultural sensitivity is paramount, recognizing that some individuals may not disclose their identities due to safety concerns or societal pressure—data collection should be on an opt-in basis.

Brands should foster open dialogues about privacy and security, continually engaging with their communities through meetings, surveys and forums. It is also vital to maintain transparency about how data is collected, used and stored; compliance with data protection laws like the GDPR and CCPA is essential, as well as adherence to antidiscrimination measures.

Exploring innovative, privacy-preserving methods in data collection can help minimize risks. For example, American Community Survey respondents can answer questions online, by mail, over the phone or through in-person interviews—and as additional precautions, the Census Bureau is proposing using flash cards for in-person interviews and using numbered response categories for people who do not want others in their household to know their responses.

Marketers must understand that the technical aspects of data collection pose significant risks, and ensuring the security of stored data is crucial to protect the privacy of LGBTQ+

individuals. Access to sensitive data should be restricted to only those who need it to perform their job functions. Implementing role-based access control (RBAC) ensures that individuals only have access to the data necessary for their roles, reducing the risk of internal breaches.

Employ robust encryption methods and verify the accuracy of self-disclosed information and identifying metadata to prevent misuse. Ensure compatibility across platforms and a user-friendly experience to encourage voluntary disclosure, while managing sensitive data storage for adherence to stringent data protection standards.

If a lot of these steps sound like they’re going to demand new conversations and connections, you’re right. Your creative teams will have to work more closely with strategy teams on the nature of insights and how they must translate toward safe, inclusive, integrated experiences. Your chief strategy officer and chief technology officer will be having a lot more calls. And your research leads must have more direct conversations with members of LGBTQ+ and other diverse communities themselves.

But by aligning your talent and brand around enhancing privacy protections and refining data collection methods for diverse constituents, we can all foster collaborative environments and platforms where LGBTQ+ individuals feel safe, considered and represented.

Recommended articles
https://www.adweek.com/performance-marketing/how-marketers-can-rethink-their-approach-to-gathering-lgbtq-data/