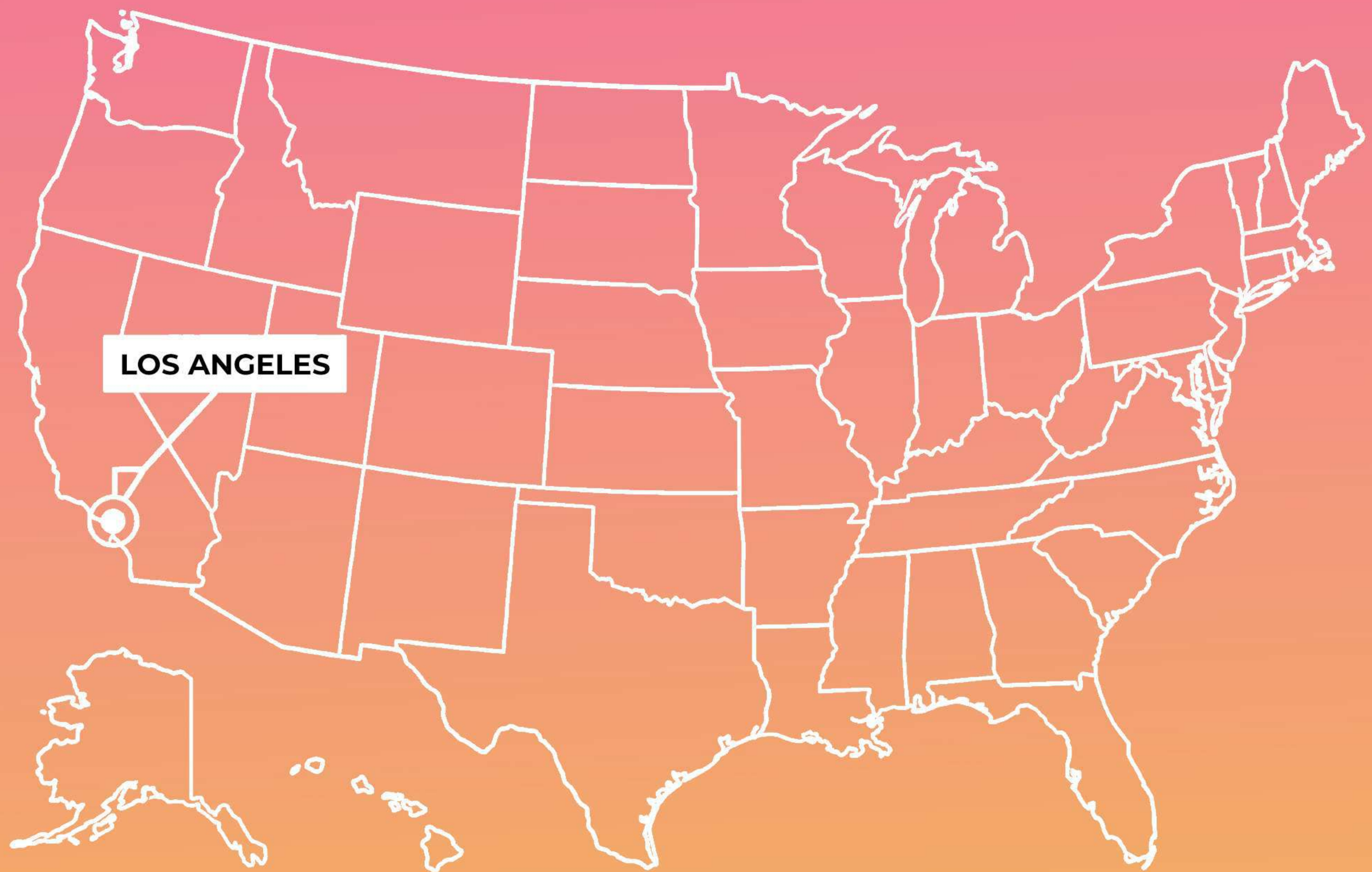


thinknow

The Representation Gap

Why United States Multicultural Consumers
Still Don't Feel Accurately Seen



How brands can move from diverse
visibility to accurate representation through
cultural intelligence.

Executive Summary

Most brands know representation matters. Fewer know whether consumers feel accurately represented.

Across the U.S., the population is becoming more multicultural, identity is becoming more fluid, and consumers increasingly expect brands to understand the communities they serve. Yet many brand systems still rely on broad demographic segments, generic multicultural creative, and media strategies disconnected from cultural context.

ThinkNow's World in One City research offers an early signal of the challenge. In Los Angeles County, 67% of residents say it is important that brands reflect LA's diversity in advertising, but only about 37% say they always or often feel accurately represented when LA is portrayed in advertising or media.

That gap reveals the next frontier for marketers: moving from diverse visibility to accurate representation.

Closing the Representation Gap requires more than a campaign. It requires a connected cultural intelligence system that can diagnose where consumers feel unseen, ground insights in real multicultural audiences, model scenarios, build actionable segments, activate with cultural context, and keep learning over time.

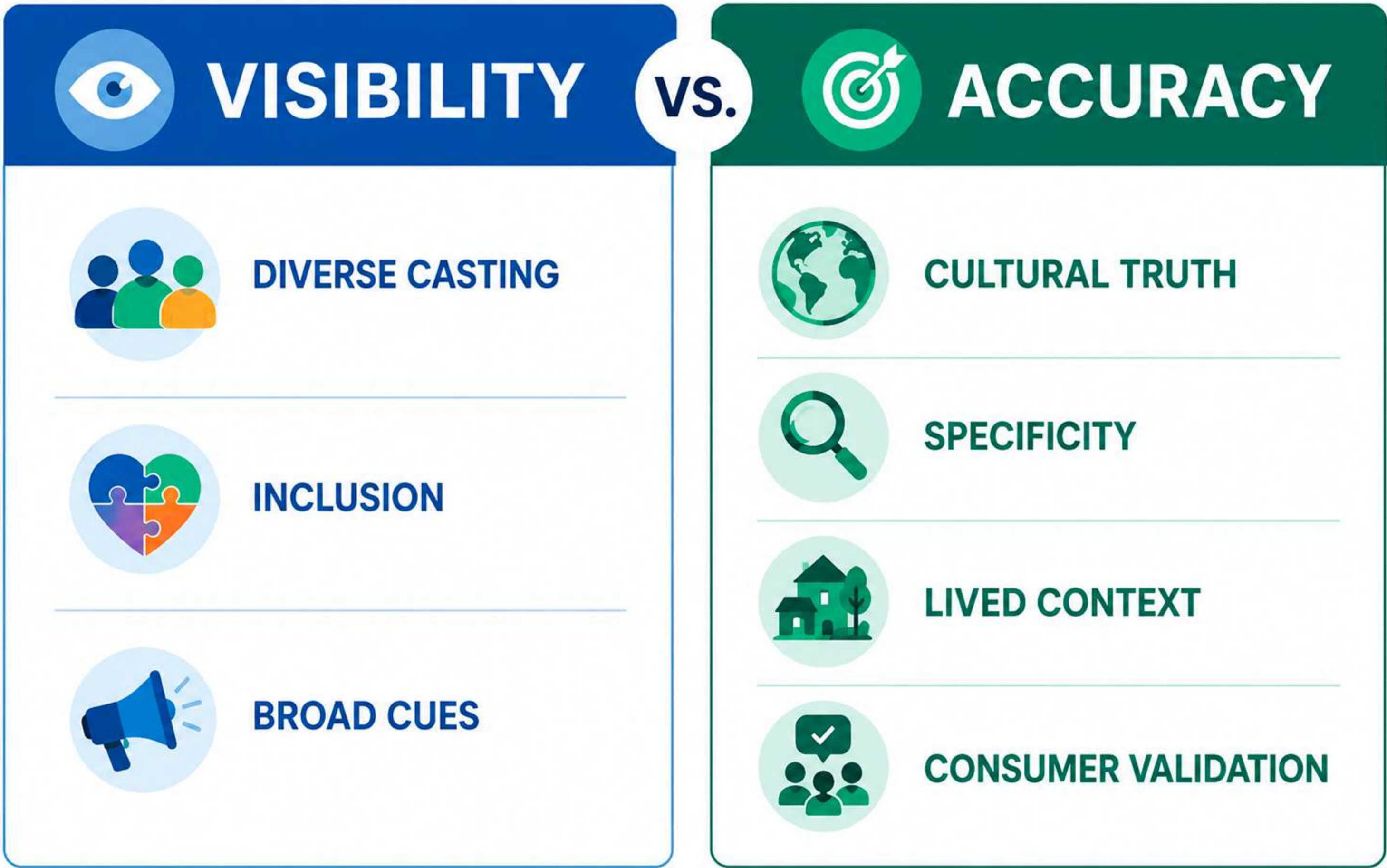
The New Representation Standard

Representation used to mean visibility. Today, it means accuracy.

The first era of multicultural representation focused on inclusion: making sure diverse consumers appeared in advertising, media, content, and brand storytelling. That progress still matters, but the bar has moved.

Consumers are no longer only asking, "Do I see people like me?" They are also asking: "Does this brand understand people like me? Does this feel real? Does it reflect my community, my language, my context, and my lived experience?"

For national brands, that shift changes the work. Representation can no longer be treated as a casting layer, translation step, or campaign adaptation. It has to become a measurable part of consumer understanding, creative development, audience strategy, and activation.



A National Challenge, Seen Clearly in Los Angeles

The Representation Gap is not an LA-only issue. Los Angeles simply helps us see it clearly.

As one of the country's most diverse and culturally influential markets, L.A. offers an early view of the pressures national brands face as the U.S. becomes more multicultural, more identity-fluid, and more locally nuanced.

In ThinkNow's World in One City research, 69% of L.A. County residents say everyday diversity - language, culture, and food - best captures what Los Angeles represents. And 65% agree that LA sets trends for the rest of the country.

That combination matters. L.A. is both highly multicultural and highly influential. When representation falls short in a market where diversity is part of everyday life, it signals a broader challenge for brands operating nationally.

The implication for Fortune 500 marketers is clear: representation cannot be solved with one national creative idea and a few audience variations. Brands need systems that can understand how representation expectations vary across communities, categories, languages, and markets.



***L.A. is not the issue.
L.A. is the early signal.***

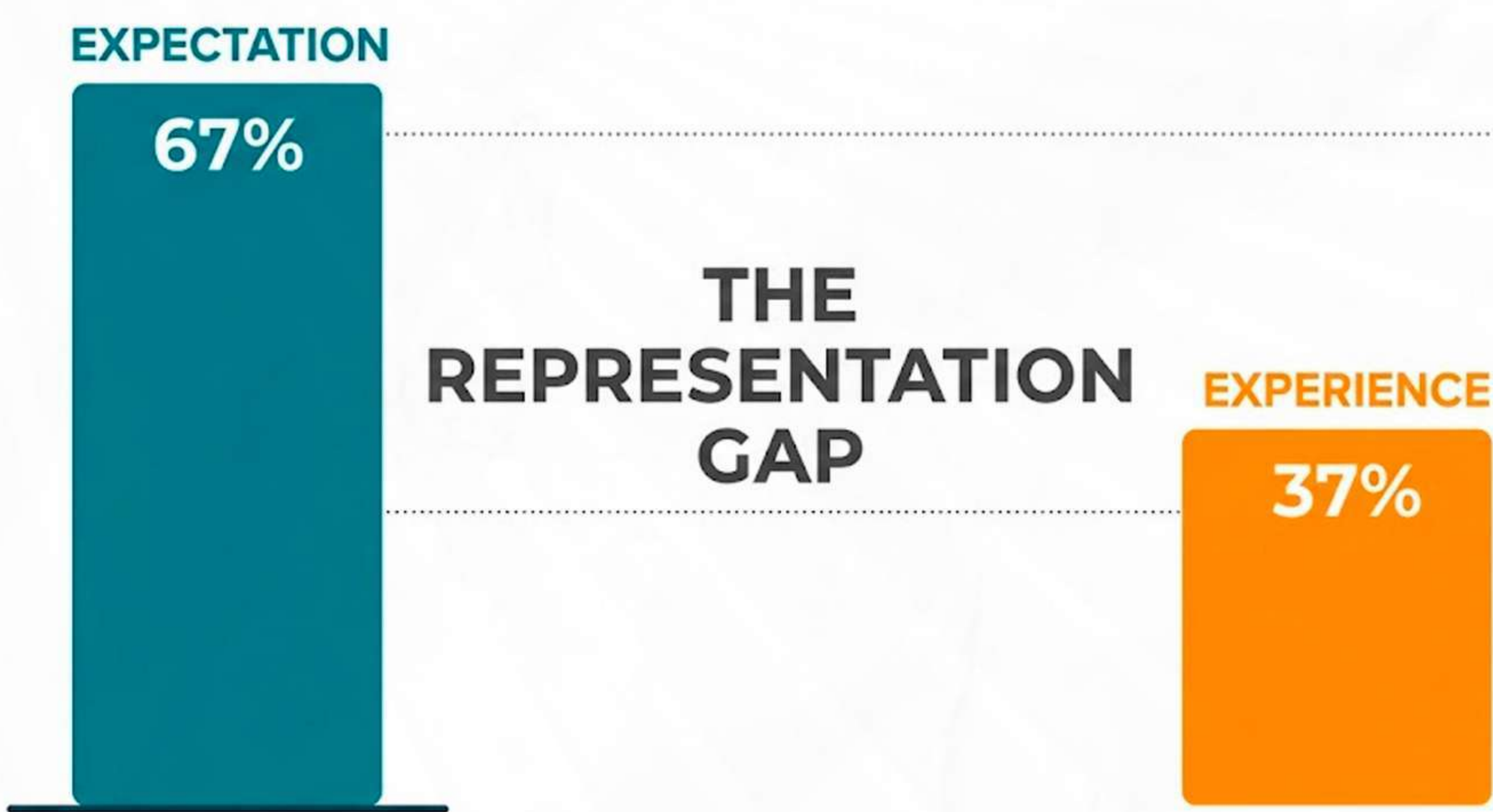
The 30-Point Representation Gap

The central data point is the gap between what consumers expect and what they experience.

In LA County, 67% of residents say it is important for brands to reflect LA's diversity in advertising. But only about 37% say they always or often feel accurately represented when Los Angeles is portrayed in advertising or media.

That creates a roughly 30-point Representation Gap.

This gap is not just a creative problem. It is a strategic problem. It means brands may be reaching diverse audiences without making them feel accurately seen. It means media may deliver impressions without cultural resonance. It means campaigns may look inclusive while still feeling generic or disconnected from lived reality.



Why Brands Miss

Brands often miss not because they ignore representation, but because they define it too narrowly.

Common failure points include treating representation as a casting choice, a translation task, a DEI message, a campaign adaptation, a media targeting variable, or a national strategy applied locally.

This is where the work becomes bigger than a single ad. It becomes a system for understanding how consumers see themselves and how they evaluate whether brands understand them.



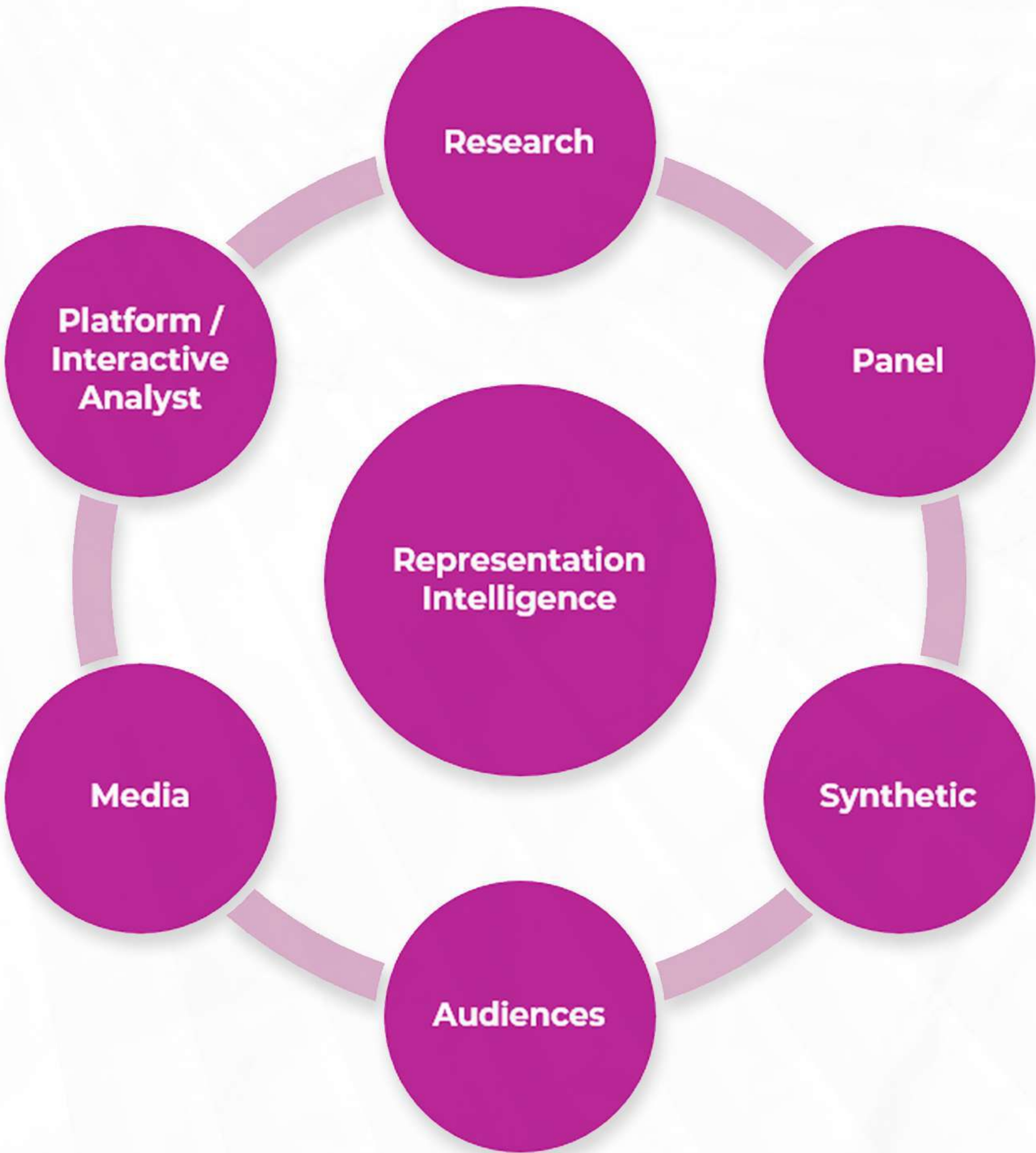
Business Area	What Happens When Representation Misses
Insights	Audiences are described demographically, but not culturally.
Creative	Campaigns look diverse but feel generic.
Brand	Consumers question authenticity and credibility.
Media	Impressions reach audiences without cultural resonance.
Growth	Brands miss emerging multicultural demand.
Risk	Misrepresentation creates backlash, indifference, or lost trust.

From Representation Gap to Representation Intelligence

Closing the Representation Gap requires more than a campaign or one additional survey. It requires a connected intelligence loop.

Representation intelligence is the ability to measure, model, activate, and improve how brands represent multicultural consumers across the marketing lifecycle.

This is where ThinkNow's integrated platform lens comes into focus. Research, panel, synthetic intelligence, audience development, media activation, and interactive analytics are not separate services in this story. They are connected stages in a system designed to help brands understand and close the gap.



The Representation Intelligence Loop

1. Diagnose the Gap - ThinkNow Research

Measure where consumers feel seen, unseen, or misrepresented. Understand how representation affects trust, relevance, consideration, and brand credibility.

2. Ground It in Real Consumers - ThinkNow Panel

Use real multicultural consumers to understand what accurate representation means by audience, market, category, language, and community.

3. Scale the Learning - ThinkNow Synthetic

Once grounded in real respondent data, synthetic modeling can help explore additional audiences, scenarios, messages, and creative directions. Synthetic does not replace real consumers; it extends culturally grounded learning.

4. Build Actionable Segments - ThinkNow Audiences

Translate insights into culturally relevant, media-ready audiences. Identify which audiences are most affected by representation gaps and how they can be reached.

5. Activate With Cultural Context - ThinkNow Media

Representation does not end with creative. It also matters where, how, and in what context the message appears. Reach finds the audience; cultural context helps the message matter.

6. Make Insights Usable - ThinkNow Platform / Interactive Analyst

Turn static research into ongoing decision support. Help teams ask questions of the data, compare audience differences, and bring cultural intelligence into brand, creative, and media workflows.

The CMO / Insights Leader Checklist

- Do we know where our brand has a representation gap?
- Do we know which audiences feel least accurately seen?
- Have we tested whether our creative feels authentic, not just inclusive?
- Can we model audience response before launch?
- Can we activate culturally relevant audiences with cultural context?
- Can our teams interact with the data after the report is delivered?
- Are we creating a learning loop across research, creative, audience strategy, and media?

If the answer to any of these questions is unclear, the brand may be operating with an outdated representation model.

The Representation Gap is not solved by showing more diversity alone. It is solved by understanding whether consumers feel accurately represented and by building the systems needed to improve that understanding over time.

For national and global brands, the challenge is clear: as multicultural consumer expectations rise, representation has to move from a creative consideration to a measurable, actionable intelligence layer.

ThinkNow helps organizations close the Representation Gap through an integrated cultural intelligence platform connecting research, diverse consumer access, synthetic modeling, audience intelligence, media activation, and interactive analytics.

Download the full report to explore the data, framework, and practical steps brands can use to move from diverse visibility to accurate representation.

<https://la.thinknow.com/>