Qloo®

THE STATE OF CONSUMER INSIGHTS IN 2025

As organizations grapple with technological advancements, privacy challenges, and rising consumer expectations, continuously understanding consumers' preferences is more important than ever.

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Introduction

Consumer insights are no longer just about understanding what people want today—they're about predicting what they'll want tomorrow. As consumer tastes evolve faster than ever, businesses must stay ahead, deciphering the trends shaping customer behavior and finding meaningful ways to connect in response. Fortunately, advancements in AI have unlocked unprecedented capabilities, from uncovering hidden links between what people love—like the connection between a favorite song and a preferred wine—to predicting trends and gauging public sentiment in real time. These tools are not only reshaping how we gather insights but also raising expectations for what brands can deliver.

Today's consumers expect more than generic personalization—they want experiences that feel catered to their unique tastes and values. At the same time, growing concerns over data privacy and ethical use of information are forcing organizations to rethink how they collect and leverage data. Transparency, trust, and compliance are no longer just a "nice to have."

As the field evolves, insights teams at leading CPG brands and the agencies that support them are tasked with integrating the best of both worlds: the depth and reliability of traditional research with the speed and scalability of emerging AI-driven tools.

For instance, tools like Qloo enable organizations to map audience affinities across diverse domains, revealing opportunities to connect with consumers in surprising ways. By combining human creativity with technological innovation, businesses are entering a new era of consumer intelligence—one where the ability to adapt and innovate will determine success.

Insights at a glance

The challenge

Consumer preferences are changing faster than ever, and businesses must not only understand what people want today but also anticipate what they'll want tomorrow. Meanwhile, growing concerns about privacy and ethical data use are raising the stakes for how insights are collected and applied.

The opportunity

Advancements in AI and data tools are transforming the field of consumer insights. With capabilities like cross-domain analysis, synthetic data, and predictive analytics, businesses can uncover hidden connections, predict trends, and deliver more personalized, meaningful experiences. However, success depends on blending these tools with human creativity and ethical practices to build trust and deliver actionable insights.

The path ahead

To thrive in this new landscape, businesses must:

Embrace tools that integrate diverse data sources to uncover opportunities across domains.

Equip teams with the training needed to interpret AI outputs effectively and responsibly.

Prioritize privacy-first practices, leveraging first-party data and ensuring transparency to foster trust.

Research and insights teams within organizations

Yesterday

Centralized insights team

Today

Decentralized insights team
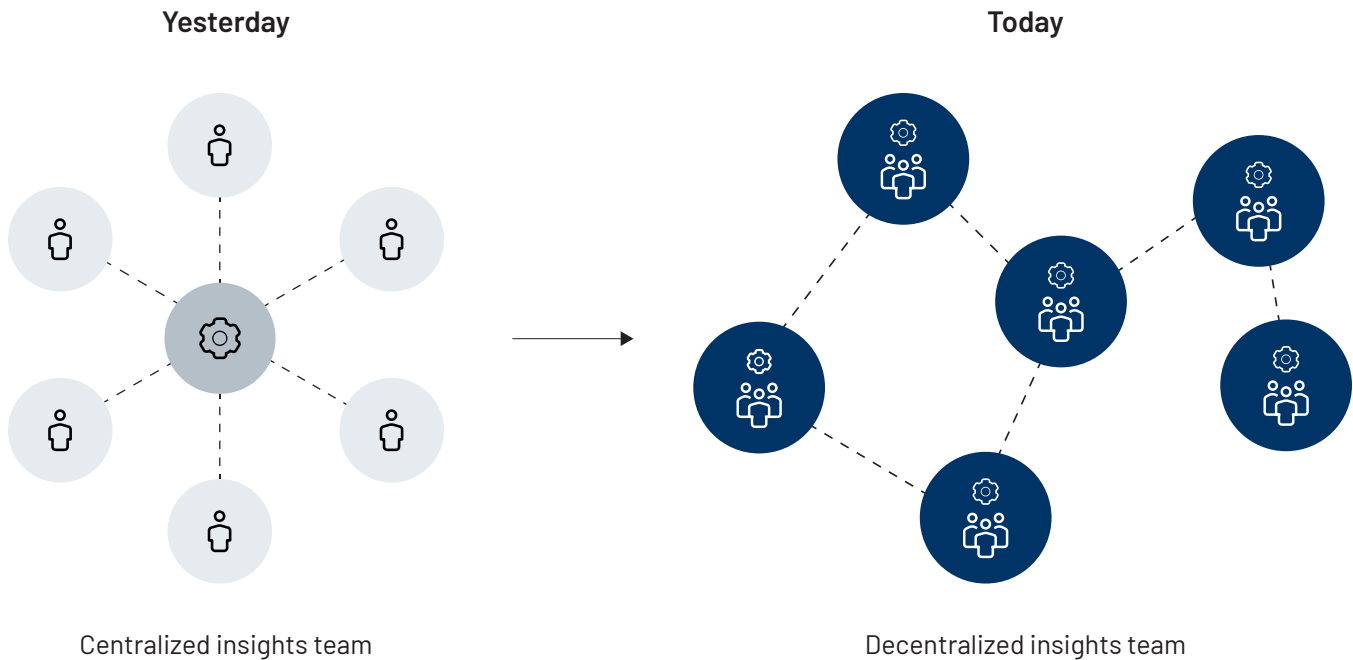
The structure of consumer insights within organizations is undergoing a new transformation, shaped by the need for agility and responsiveness. Traditionally, insights teams operated as centralized hubs, managing data collection, analysis, and dissemination across the business. This approach ensured consistency and depth but often lacked the flexibility to respond swiftly to emerging trends or specific departmental needs.

Today, however, many companies are experimenting with decentralized models, embedding insights functions directly into teams like marketing, product, or strategy. This shift allows for closer alignment with specific goals, such as tailoring campaigns or refining product features. However, decentralization also comes with challenges, such as ensuring data integrity

and maintaining a cohesive understanding of the customer across the organization.

For example, a team leader tasked with analyzing how audience interests shift seasonally may struggle to piece together insights from multiple data streams without a clear, unified approach. Similarly, marketing teams trying to understand the wide range of their audiences' interests may find these connections difficult to uncover with traditional tools. These challenges highlight the need for platforms that can integrate diverse data sources and intuitively surface meaningful patterns.

Fortunately, the democratization of insights tools is helping bridge these gaps. AI-powered platforms empower non-specialists to access and interpret data with ease. For instance, tools

Research and insights teams within organizations

that reveal how audience preferences vary across regions or identify surprising affinities between customer segments and lifestyle categories enable teams to translate complex questions into strategic actions—all without requiring extensive technical expertise.

As Jeff MacDonald, Director of AI at Mekanism, explains,

"Everyone's in charge of pulling their own research now, and AI is making it easier. It's a shift that allows us to hire for taste and creativity while making insights more accessible."

This new accessibility is empowering teams to integrate data-driven decisions seamlessly into their workflows, whether they're refining creative strategies or assessing campaign performance.

Yet, with increased accessibility comes the need for oversight. Balancing the benefits of decentralized insights with the need for coherence requires a careful approach. Organizations can foster collaboration by establishing shared data governance frameworks and promoting regular cross-functional discussions. For example, a quarterly review of insights across departments can surface opportunities for alignment and innovation.

Ultimately, the evolving structure of insights teams reflects a broader trend: the blending of of collaboration, organizations can unlock the full potential of their data, driving smarter, faster, and more impactful decisions.
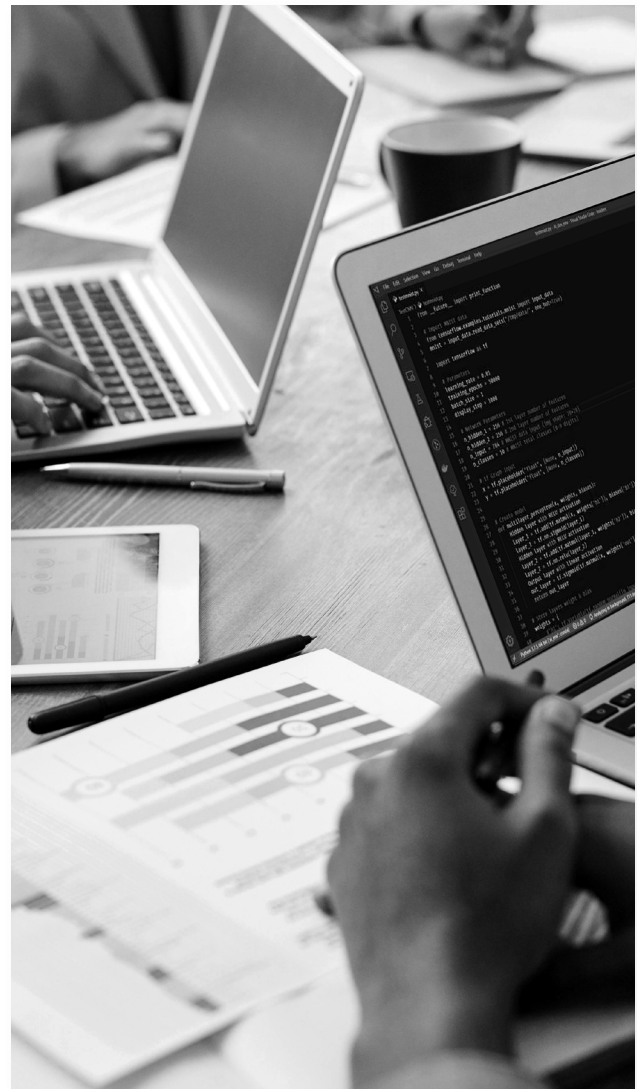
Data sources, methodologies, and tools

Understanding today's consumers requires a blend of traditional approaches and modern innovations. Historically, insights teams relied heavily on methods like surveys, focus groups, and brand health tracking to uncover consumer preferences and behaviors. These approaches offered reliability and depth but were often time-intensive and resource-heavy.

In contrast, the tools of 2025—social listening, predictive analytics, and AI-driven intelligence—enable real-time insights and a more agile approach to decision-making. For example, social listening tools have helped businesses track sentiment and uncover trends as they unfold, allowing marketers to adapt campaigns mid-flight. However, privacy regulations like GDPR and CCPA, combined with shifts in platform accessibility, have limited the reach of these tools. API restrictions on platforms like X (formerly Twitter) mean that insights professionals must now find creative ways to extract value from reduced data streams while ensuring compliance.

Take sentiment analysis as an example: while these social listening tools excel at detecting trends, they can sometimes oversimplify the complexity of human behavior. Over-reliance on averages or binary sentiments can lead to generalized strategies that miss the nuances of consumer motivations. As Jill Fruchter, Principal at Field Notes Consulting, notes, "Averages can be the enemy. They don't tell the full story. You have to cut the data by different segments to truly understand your audience."

At the same time, synthesizing data from multiple sources presents its own challenges, as each channel reflects distinct consumer behaviors and contexts, which can introduce bias if not interpreted carefully. For example, what someone shares on X may be more spontaneous or curated for a public audience, while focus groups often capture more reflective and candid insights. Without considering these differences, the resulting narrative risks being fragmented or skewed. As Fruchter says, "How do you normalize for context? That's so important—making sure you're not just creating a collage but a coherent picture." Modern insights teams must ensure that diverse data streams are integrated into a unified narrative that is both meaningful and actionable.

To address these challenges, businesses are increasingly adopting hybrid approaches that combine the depth of traditional methods with the speed and scale of modern tools. For instance, a company launching a new product might pair customer interviews with AI-driven audience segmentation to capture both the "why" behind consumer behaviors and the larger patterns shaping demand. Tools like Insights by Qloo™ make it possible to analyze audience affinities across categories, providing a more comprehensive view of consumer preferences.

Data sources, methodologies, and tools

Blended methodologies not only improve the accuracy of insights but also empower teams to ask better questions. Consider a retailer exploring why sales of a particular product spike in one region but lag in another. By combining geospatial data from traditional market research with AI-powered heatmaps, they can uncover contextual factors—like local events or demographic variations—that inform more targeted strategies.

Ultimately, the goal is to create a holistic understanding of audiences. Modern tools allow organizations to synthesize insights at a once unthinkable scale, but the human touch remains critical. AI can identify patterns, but turning those patterns into meaningful actions requires creativity and empathy. The best results come when technology and human expertise work in tandem to tell richer, more actionable stories about what drives consumers.

Evolving consumer insights practices

The practice of consumer insights is evolving rapidly, reflecting a shift toward agility, adaptability, and a more proactive understanding of audiences. In 2025, businesses are moving beyond static snapshots of consumer behavior, embracing real-time and predictive analytics to anticipate trends and make more informed decisions.

One of the most notable changes is the role of real-time and predictive analytics. Tools like AI-powered models enable businesses to predict behaviors based on past data, helping organizations adjust strategies more dynamically. For instance, a clothing retailer might use AI to identify regional variations in product popularity and tailor their future marketing or inventory strategies accordingly.

Technology is also empowering businesses to uncover insights across domains. Platforms that reveal cross-domain connections—such as how music preferences align with travel habits—are helping brands craft more personalized campaigns. These tools enable companies to think beyond traditional segmentation, identifying new opportunities for partnerships and engagement.

However, even as technology accelerates the pace of insights, the human touch remains indispensable. AI can uncover patterns, but interpreting these patterns—understanding the "why" behind them—requires creativity, context, and empathy. Insights teams are continuing to pair AI with qualitative methods, such as customer interviews or focus groups, to build a fuller picture of consumer behavior.

As technology reshapes the field, organizations are also reevaluating how they use unconventional data sources to capture authentic consumer perspectives. Comment sections on social platforms, for example, offer unfiltered opinions that can complement quantitative data and reveal what truly resonates with audiences. Jeff MacDonald of Mekanism describes these insights as a "gold mine," noting how authentic conversations drive a deeper understanding of what consumers care about.

The future of consumer insights demands a balance between technology and ethics. As consumers become more aware of how their data is used, transparency and accountability will remain essential. Companies that can integrate predictive capabilities with a human-centered approach will not only meet but exceed the expectations of today's empowered consumers. As organizations innovate to uncover deeper insights, they must also navigate the growing demand for transparency and ethical data use.

The privacy imperative

Data privacy has become a defining issue for businesses navigating today's insights landscape. Regulations like GDPR and CCPA mandate stricter controls over how data is collected, stored, and used, especially when it comes to personally identifiable information (PII). Beyond compliance, privacy-first practices are becoming a competitive differentiator, with companies prioritizing trust and transparency to build deeper consumer relationships.

One of the most significant shifts is the growing reliance on first-party data—information collected directly from consumers with their explicit consent. As Diane Fiddle, General Counsel at Qloo, notes, "The law requires the need to transition from third-party to first-party data collection. It is therefore necessary to engage with consumers through first-party data enhancement and compliant third-party sources." This transition not only ensures compliance but also establishes a foundation for transparency and trust, empowering businesses to create meaningful connections with their audiences.

Emerging technologies like federated learning and synthetic data are further reshaping how organizations balance privacy with insights. Federated learning allows companies to analyze patterns across decentralized datasets without accessing raw PII, enabling privacy-safe innovation. Similarly, synthetic data mimics real-world scenarios without exposing sensitive details, offering businesses a scalable way to test strategies and generate insights.

Federated learning

Federated learning is a collaborative machine learning technique where data remains on users' devices, and models are trained locally. The aggregated results are shared with a central server, ensuring data privacy and security by keeping sensitive information decentralized.

Synthetic data

Synthetic data is artificially generated data that mimics the characteristics and statistical properties of real-world data. It is used in machine learning to augment datasets, protect privacy, and simulate scenarios where real data is limited or unavailable.

The privacy imperative

Transparency remains a critical component of these efforts. "Both privacy laws and AI regulations require ethical considerations in the collection, processing, and use of data," Fiddle explains. "Regulations are driving the need for transparency in how a company collects data, uses AI, retains data, and provides services. While this may necessitate additional resources or new vendors, it's a long-term investment in maintaining, building, and growing consumer trust."

This emphasis on transparency aligns with consumer expectations. According to Razorfish, nearly two-thirds of US consumers said that a company being transparent about how they plan to use their audiences' personal data would help that company gain their trust. A recent Deloitte study found that consumers who trust their technology providers tend to spend significantly more, with trusted brands seeing up to 50% higher spending on connected devices over the past year. By offering clear explanations of how data is collected and used—or allowing users to opt into anonymized data-sharing for research purposes—businesses can foster trust and strengthen consumer loyalty.

As privacy expectations and regulations evolve, organizations must adopt thoughtful, ethical approaches to data handling. By embedding privacy-by-design principles and systems into their practices and operations, businesses can ensure compliance, build trust, and maintain a competitive edge in a rapidly changing landscape.

AI in consumer insights

Artificial intelligence is transforming how organizations understand audiences and anticipate their needs. One of the most significant applications of AI is in predictive analytics. For instance, a retail brand might use AI to analyze historical sales data and forecast demand for a product launch. By identifying patterns—like how weather conditions impact purchases or how regional preferences vary—companies can make more informed decisions about inventory and marketing strategies. AI's ability to process data at scale enables businesses to uncover insights that might otherwise go unnoticed.

Another growing area of innovation is synthetic consumer data—data generated by AI that mimics real-world scenarios without exposing sensitive personal information. For example, a CPG company can create synthetic personas based on aggregated behavior patterns to test different product marketing strategies without relying on actual consumer records. This approach not only protects privacy but also enables insights teams to experiment more freely and at scale, especially when real-world data is limited or fragmented.

Another area where AI excels is cross-domain analysis, connecting seemingly unrelated data points to provide a richer understanding of consumer preferences. For example, an AI tool like Qloo might reveal that fans of a particular film genre are more likely to engage with specific travel experiences or dining options. Insights like these not only inform more personalized marketing campaigns but also open up

Innovations in AI

Predictive analytics

AI-powered predictive analytics uses historical data, machine learning algorithms, and statistical techniques to forecast future consumer behaviors, such as purchase trends or content preferences. It enables marketers to anticipate needs and optimize campaigns proactively.

Synthetic consumer data

Synthetic consumer data is artificially generated, privacy-compliant data that mirrors real consumer behavior. It allows marketers to simulate scenarios, train AI models, or test campaigns without using sensitive or personal information, preserving privacy while enabling insights.

AI focus groups

AI focus groups leverage generative AI to simulate consumer personas or run virtual discussions, enabling marketers to gather insights on preferences and reactions quickly. These tools analyze real-time inputs and past data to emulate human feedback at scale.

Cross-domain analysis

Cross-domain analysis uses AI to identify patterns and correlations across unrelated datasets—like linking shopping habits to entertainment preferences. This approach reveals deeper consumer insights, enabling more comprehensive targeting and personalization strategies.

AI in consumer insights

opportunities for partnerships and innovation.

Despite its strengths, AI has limitations. It often struggles to capture the emotional and cultural nuances that human researchers can uncover through direct interaction with consumers. For instance, while AI might detect an increase in mentions of a brand online, it may miss the deeper context of *why* consumers are engaging—whether out of loyalty, frustration, or curiosity.

To address these gaps, organizations must invest in training teams to interpret AI-generated insights effectively. Providing analysts, marketers, and strategists with the tools and knowledge to contextualize findings ensures that AI's outputs are both meaningful and actionable. While AI excels at processing vast amounts of data and surfacing patterns, it often struggles to fully contextualize these insights in ways that resonate deeply with human experiences. As Jill Fruchter explains, "Insights need a human element to connect emotionally and inspire action." Jeff MacDonald adds, "What AI can't do is humanize and personify the 'why.' Designers or product managers have to see the scope of the problem to solve or the opportunity that's worth solving for. You have to humanize it." Together, their points underscore the importance of combining AI with human creativity and empathy to craft insights that not only inform but truly resonate.

As AI continues to evolve, the possibilities for integrating it into consumer insights workflows are expanding. Companies are using AI-powered heatmaps to visualize audience affinities across regions, generative tools to simulate focus group discussions, and synthetic data to explore "what-if" scenarios without real-world risks. These tools, when paired with human judgment, help businesses stay agile and responsive in a rapidly changing market.

Ultimately, AI's role in consumer insights is to enhance, not replace. By automating some of the heavy lifting of data analysis, AI allows teams to focus on what they do best—asking the right questions, interpreting results with nuance, and designing strategies that connect with audiences on a deeper level.

Recommendations for 2025

Navigating the evolving consumer insights landscape requires a balance of innovation, ethics, and practicality. For anyone unsure of where to begin, these recommendations provide a clear starting point to build effective strategies:

Use tools that connect data across domains

Consumer behavior doesn't exist in silos, and your insights tools shouldn't either. Invest in platforms that reveal how preferences in one area—like entertainment or dining—can inform strategies in another. Cross-domain insights reveal unexpected connections to engage audiences more meaningfully.

Combine AI tools with human expertise

Take a deep breath—AI isn't going to be replacing marketers any time soon. While AI identifies trends and predicts behaviors, its value peaks when paired with human interpretation. Use AI-powered audience intelligence tools and predictive analytics to forecast market trends, but supplement these findings with qualitative methods like focus groups to understand the "why" behind the numbers.

Train teams to interpret AI-generated insights

AI is only as good as the data it's trained on—and as the people interpreting its outputs. Equip your teams with the skills and training needed to contextualize and act on AI-driven findings. Develop training programs that blend AI-generated insights with qualitative methods to ensure teams can turn data into strategies that resonate.

Create a culture of data transparency

Transparency and compliance build trust. Clearly articulate in your Privacy Policy how data is collected, used, and protected, and communicate regularly about data's role in enhancing user experiences. Transparent practices boost consumer confidence and align your organization around compliant and ethical data use.

Start small and scale strategically

For organizations new to modern insights tools, begin with a single high-impact initiative and expand as you see results. Identify one use case—such as uncovering regional trends with heatmaps or testing audience affinities for a product launch—and invest in the tools and training needed for that initiative. A focused approach allows you to demonstrate ROI quickly, build internal momentum, and scale your capabilities in a controlled way.

Uncover connections, drive decisions

Insights by Qloo™ is the perfect complement to the human touch, offering real-time AI-powered tools to uncover meaningful connections across domains. Whether you're mapping audience affinities, predicting trends, or personalizing experiences, Qloo's cross-domain capabilities empower you to make smarter, faster decisions—all while maintaining a privacy-first approach. Qloo's new Creative Copilot[BETA] takes it a step further, using the power of genAI to transform Qloo's detailed consumer intelligence into actionable summaries, strategies, and recommendations — helping you craft campaigns designed to resonate while staying rooted in consumer truths.

Input anything, learn everything

From different demographics and locations to interests and hobbies, Qloo's insights platform reveals the detailed taste preferences of any global audience.
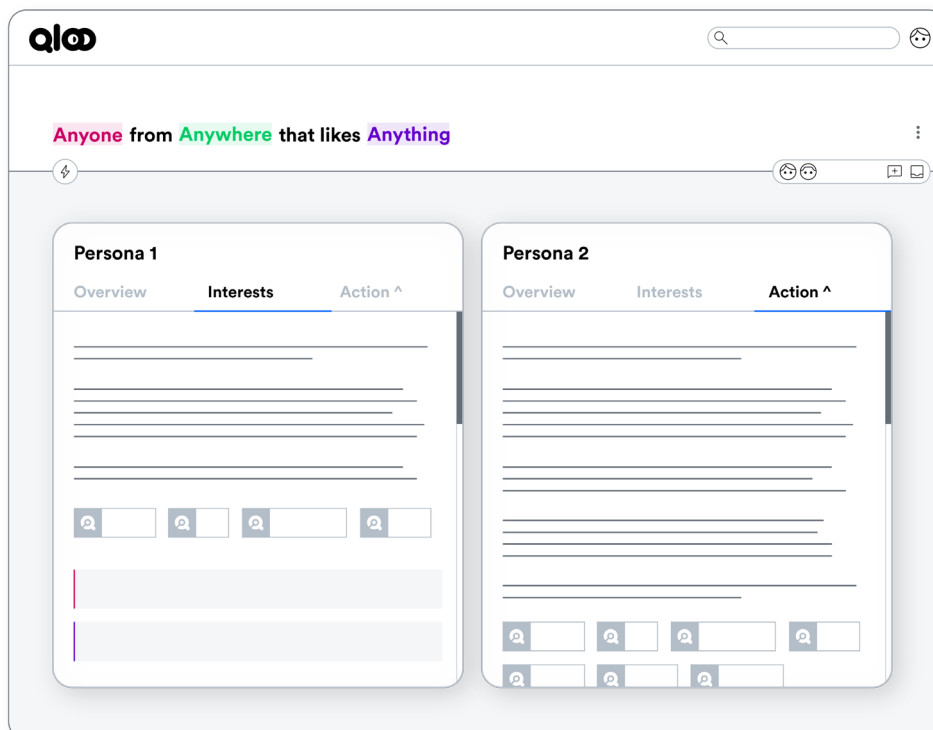
Instantly turn insights into action

With just one click, transform detailed consumer interest data into actionable marketing strategies.

Always compliant at its core

Qloo's models operate without any personally identifiable information (PII), ensuring complete compliance with major data protection regulations like GDPR and CCPA.

ABOUT QLOO®

Qloo is a leading AI company dissecting the intricacies of global tastes and preferences. The company operates one of the world's most robust catalogs of notable people, places, and things, coupled with a consumer behavior and sentiment database containing more than 10 trillion unique signals and zero Personally Identifiable Information (PII). By leveraging cutting-edge AI models, Qloo unlocks the value of these databases to understand and predict audiences' interests and affinities with unrivaled accuracy. Since 2012, Qloo's award-winning Taste AI technology has helped multinational companies — including Netflix, Starbucks, JCDecaux, and Michelin — drive growth by powering personalized customer experiences and large language models, superior recommendations, data-driven marketing strategies, and advanced audience intelligence.