

## TARGETING THE GROWING HISPANIC MARKET: ETHNICITY AND MEDIA PREFERENCES

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*This study focuses on the impact of ethnic identification on media preferences among U. S. Hispanics, specifically Mexican Americans. Reactions to various television commercials are explored using a 2x2 experimental design. Self-identification is used to categorize respondents as non-Hispanic, strongly identifying Hispanics and those who weakly identify with their ethnic group. Advertisements portraying a family and commercials featuring a Hispanic actor were preferred, with significant differences based on strength of ethnicity.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Of the diversity represented in the United States, Hispanics number 50 million, are growing at five times the rate of the general population, constitute 16 percent of the total, and have an estimated purchasing power of \$1.2 trillion (Poder Hispanic Magazine, 2011). Accounting for more than 40 percent of the total increase in the U. S. population in the 1990s, the Hispanic population is expected to account for more than 50 percent of all growth in the U. S. in the next decade. By 2050, the U. S. Hispanic population is projected to reach 132.8 million, comprising about 30 percent of the nation's total (Westlund 2009).

Although the Hispanic market has been largely underserved, equating to only slightly over two percent of the total, the Hispanic advertising industry is outpacing all other advertising sectors, growing four times faster and exceeding \$5.8 billion annually (*Fast Facts* 2009). Marketers are looking to offset sales declines in the general market due to the recession by increasing their share of the Hispanic market. This strategy makes sense long-term, since the general population is getting older as the baby-boomers age, yet the Hispanic market is a much more youthful one,

with 40.9 percent being 21 years old and younger (U. S. Census 2010).

In general, marketing campaigns addressing the Hispanic audience reflect a lack of sophistication, with many firms mistakenly lumping all Hispanics together and targeting them as one segment (Venice 2006), rather than realizing that "Hispanics are a diverse group with a myriad of ethnicities, voices and economic groups" (DeLafuente 2008). Not only is the Hispanic market made up of many different groups, with Mexican-Americans constituting the lion's share at about 66 percent, but within each of these subsegments, different levels of acculturation also exist. Firms deciding to target the Hispanic market have traditionally used Spanish-language advertising, when, in fact, 75 percent of U. S. Hispanics are bilingual and consume media in both Spanish and English (Poder Hispanic Magazine, 2011)

When one looks at where increased dollars to target the Hispanic market might best be spent, television commercials rise to the top of the list. According to Nielsen Media Research data, Hispanic households spend 56.9 hrs. per week watching television, as compared to 51.2 hours as a national average, and Nielsen's new universe estimates for the 2009-2010 television season show the growth of Hispanic TV homes continues to outpace the general market (Westlund 2009). Thus, it is not surprising that 64 percent of all dollars spent on Hispanic advertising in 2009 in the U. S. was spent on

television commercials (2009 Entertainment Media Handbook). Hence, this study focuses on television commercials and the impact of ethnic identification on media preferences among Mexican-American consumers, since they are not only the largest group, but also the fastest growing.

### ETHNICITY AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

In an age where globalization and its impact are seen everywhere, there is an opposing force to this homogenous identity. Groups are becoming more aware of their own identity on the basis of their ethnic background (Lee, Fernandez and Martin 2002). Ethnic groups can be considered as subcultures within a country; they preserve the main characteristics of the national culture from which they originate, but they also develop their own unique norms and beliefs. Ethnicity then is broadly defined as groupings of people on the basis of countries or regions of origin (Pearlman and Waters 2002). Ethnicity refers to the aspects of relationships between groups that consider themselves culturally distinct and are regarded by others in that same way (Hirschman 2001). However, Hui et al. (1997) contend that ethnicity goes beyond just speaking the language or residing in an ethnic neighborhood; it must include commitment to the pride in one's own cultural group. Ethnicity then is intended to capture a more cultural dimension of human groupings (Hitlin, Brown and Elder 2007). The term "Hispanic" in the U. S. is an identity that depends on context, influenced significantly by self-understandings of one's place in the United States and in relation to one's country of origin (Rodriguez 2000).

Although ethnicity is a multidimensional concept including language, customs, cultural values, etc., it quickly becomes evident that self-categorization and self-identification are requisites in the ethnic identification process, with self-identification being the accepted means of classifying respondents as to their ethnicity, as advocated by major researchers in

the field (DiMofte, Forehand and Deshpandè 2004; Webster 1997; Hirschman 1981). It is how the person himself feels and who he or she identifies with as an ethnic group that determines behavior, not the classification system of an outside organization or an individual observer. The process of self-categorization forms the foundation for the social identity theory. Self-categorization (Turner 1987) looks at the ways in which individuals divide up the world into people like them and unlike them, with the individual being the reference point. Social identity theory (Tajfel 1981) involves aligning oneself in social space along societally-influenced dimensions of salient social groups. In the process, we define our sense of self along with similar others who hold many of the same beliefs and values as being important. Thus, a category system based on self-identification is the appropriate one to study ethnicity (Stephan and Stephan 2000) and the one which will be used in this study. As Villareal and Peterson (2008, p. 197) so aptly put it "being Hispanic is a binary demographic characteristic, one either self-identifies or does not identify as being Hispanic."

Cultural differences can influence consumer responses to various marketing stimuli, with the influence of ethnicity being first noted by Hirschman (1981) in her study of American Jewish consumers. In fact, researchers have concluded that ethnicity represents a consumption driver (Rosenbaum and Montoya 2007) and influences shopping behavior. It has been shown to influence attitudes toward global brands (Dimofte, Johansson and Bagozzi 2010), impact purchase decision making (Kim and Kang 2001a), website preferences (Singh et al. 2008), customer satisfaction (Ueltschy, Krampf and Yannopoulos, 2004a), perceived risk toward online purchasing (Ueltschy et al. 2004b), sales (Torres and Gelb 2002), store loyalty and brand preference (Berkowitz and Bao 2005), and advertising response (Dimofte, Forehand and Deshpandè 2004). Thus, ethnicity can be expected to influence advertising responses to the television

commercials presented to respondents in this study.

The concept of self-identification and the phenomenon that people like to feel a congruency between their self-identify and those around them (Rosenbaum and Montoya 2007) lead to the first hypothesis:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Hispanics will have more positive feelings toward television commercials which include a member of their own ethnic group than towards television commercials which do not portray any Hispanics.

This is supported by the work of Whittler and DiMeo (1991) who found that respondents felt empathy with ads which used models of their own ethnic group. Additionally, Ryu, Park and Feick (2006) found that for hedonic products, participants preferred ads that featured an endorser whose ethnicity matched their own.

The importance of family in Latin America, especially in Mexico, is widely accepted and cited in interdisciplinary studies, such as the work of McGoldrick, Pearce and Giordano (1982). In a study by Singh and Bartikowski (2009), a content analysis of ads targeting the U. S. Hispanic market found that familialism predominated the Hispanic advertisements, which leads to the following two hypotheses:

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Hispanics will have more positive feelings toward commercials portraying a family situation than toward non-family ads.

**H<sub>3</sub>:** Hispanics will have more positive feelings toward television commercials portraying a family situation than will non-Hispanics.

Further supports for the importance of family to Hispanics comes from the work of Carlo-Casellas (2002) who found that marketing promotions were more effective when the entire family was featured. Landale and Oropesa (2007) in their work on families concur that the importance of the family to Hispanics remains paramount in their lives and

influences their decisions and perceptions on a daily basis.

The last two hypotheses relate to the idea that an individual may identify strongly with a particular ethnic group, or barely at all, and that this differential strength of ethnic identification influences consumer responses. Valencia (1985) speaks of the "Hispanicness," or strength of ethnic identification, of Hispanic consumers and its influence on consumer behavior. Similarly, Harmon (2005) finds that the strength of ethnic identification does indeed impact consumption practices. Barbosa and Villareal (2008) found that strength of ethnic identification influenced shopping behaviors such as use of coupons, brand loyalty and preferences for shopping in person. Torres and Briggs (2005) found that advertising to Hispanics who strongly identified with their own ethnic group was particularly effective for low involvement products. This was true because in these situations, ethnicity can easily influence choice, since few attributes are considered. When investigating the strength of ethnic identification, it can idealistically be viewed as varying along a continuum with an infinite number of points, with those strongly identifying at one end and those weakly identifying at the other end. However, as a means of analytical simplification, Deshpandè, Hoyer and Donthu (1986) suggested that the differences in strength of ethnic identification be investigated in terms of two groups: Strong Hispanic identifiers and Weak Hispanic identifiers, which leads to the final two hypotheses:

**H<sub>4</sub>:** Strong Hispanics will have more positive feelings toward television commercials portraying a family situation than will Weak Hispanics.

**H<sub>5</sub>:** Strong Hispanics will have more positive feelings toward television commercials portraying at least one member of their own ethnic group than will Weak Hispanics.

## METHODOLOGY

### Sample

The sample (N=176) was collected from 2009-2010 in Michigan and Ohio, where settled out migrants of Mexican-American descent are in the minority, yet make up a significant percentage of the residents. Although not a true random sample, respondents were of varying ages, income levels, education levels and both male and female. To achieve diversity in terms of age, income, and education, respondents were solicited from three different church groups and from one community college. Each of the church groups received a donation based on number of useable questionnaires, and the students at the community college were enticed to participate by receiving extra credit from their instructors and a chance to win a color television by having their names put in a raffle. (See Table 1) Of the total sample, 108 respondents identified themselves as Hispanics and 68 as non-Hispanics.

### Procedure

In this study, each respondent viewed four different television commercials, completing a questionnaire after each. Television commercials were selected as the stimuli, since television is the form of mass media most preferred by Hispanics (Hoffman 2006). These television commercials were taped off national television stations in Chicago and El Paso in order to match the target audience of the television commercials (Mexican-Americans) with the Hispanic subjects of this project, Mexican-Americans. Television commercials featuring dramas were used, because they are thought to be processed empathetically and to influence beliefs by a path that evokes more expression of feelings (Deighton, Romer and McQueen 1989). All television commercials chosen were in English to eliminate language as a confounding factor. The study was conducted with four different groups of subjects and the order of presentation of the television

commercials was varied each time to control for any possible ordering effects (Nunnally 1967).

### Questionnaire

An English version of the questionnaire was constructed, which included ethnicity measures, demographic questions and attitude toward the ad questions. The bilingual researcher then translated the questionnaire into Spanish and had it backtranslated by a native Hispanic graduate student who was also fluent in English and familiar with the subject matter. Finally, both versions of the questionnaire were pretested using 29 Hispanic subjects, with minor changes made to the final version.

### Measures

Ethnicity was operationalized using self-identification questions, as advocated by major researchers in the Hispanic market (Donthu and Cherian 1992; Webster 1997). First, respondents were asked to indicate the ethnic or racial group to which they belonged. They were then asked to identify how strongly they identified with this racial/ethnic group on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1-very weakly to 5-very strongly (Deshpandè, Hoyer and Donthu 1986; Hirschman 1981). Hispanic respondents were then classified as Strong Hispanics or Weak Hispanics based on their self-identification strength of ethnicity. The sample was comprised of 68 Non-Hispanics, 28 Weak Hispanics and 80 Strong Hispanics.

The positive feelings toward each ad in this study were measured using the warm and upbeat adjectives developed by Burke and Edell (1989). Specifically, the upbeat and warm adjectives used were alive, amused, delighted, happy, light hearted, playful, joyous, cheerful, proud, hopeful, kind and sentimental, in statements such as, "the commercial made me feel delighted." The subjects responded on a seven point Likert-like scale, with 1 representing strong disagreement and 7 representing strong agreement. The positive feelings toward each ad were operationalized as

**TABLE 1:**  
**Respondent Profiles**

	<b>Non-Hispanics (N=68)</b>	<b>Weak Hispanics (N=28)</b>	<b>Strong Hispanics (N=80)</b>
<b>Age</b>			
18-24	17 (25%)	13 (46.4%)	23 (28.8%)
25-34	32 (47%)	6 (21.5%)	29 (36.2%)
Over 35	19 (28%)	9 (32.1%)	28 (35%)
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	35 (48.5%)	13 (46.4%)	44 (55%)
Female	33 (51.5%)	15 (53.6%)	36 (45%)
<b>Income</b>			
Lower	16 (23.5%)	6 (21.4%)	23 (28.8%)
Middle	34 (50%)	17 (60.7%)	47 (58.7%)
Upper	18 (26.5%)	5 (17.9%)	10 (12.5%)
<b>Education</b>			
Less than H.S.	4 (5.9%)	0	5 (6.3%)
High School	37 (54.4%)	12 (42.9%)	55 (68.7%)
Some College	17 (25%)	9 (32.1%)	16 (20%)
College Degree	10 (14.7)	7 (25%)	4 (5%)

the mean of the summated responses for the warm and upbeat adjectives and these means were then used in the analysis. The positive feelings toward each ad were the criterion or dependent variable for all five hypotheses.

### ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

To test the hypotheses set forth, the following analytical procedures were performed. The first hypothesis states that Hispanics will have more positive feelings toward television commercials that include a Hispanic than those that do not. A repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) using univariate tests of hypotheses for within subjects effects was utilized, with the first hypothesis strongly supported ( $p < .0001$ ) (See Table 2). Using ANOVA, the second hypothesis, which states that Hispanics will have more positive feelings toward television commercials portraying a family situation than toward non-family ads, was strongly supported ( $p < .001$ ) (See

Table 2); Hispanics do prefer ads portraying a family. The third hypothesis states that Hispanics will have more positive feelings toward television commercials portraying a family situation than will non-Hispanics. Using a repeated measures ANOVA, the third hypothesis was not supported (see Table 3). The importance of the family in Hispanic culture was in evidence, but the comparative importance of the family in TV commercials to Hispanics versus non-Hispanics was not statistically significant at the .05 level.

The fourth hypothesis states that strongly identifying Hispanics will have more positive feelings toward television commercials portraying a family situation than will those Hispanics who weakly identify with their ethnic group. Using a repeated measures ANOVA, this hypothesis was strongly supported ( $p < .05$ ) in the direction hypothesized (see Table 3). Finally, the fifth hypothesis which states that those Hispanics strongly identifying with their

**TABLE 2:  
ANOVA  
Family/Ethnic Ads**

<b>Family Ads</b>	<b>F Value</b>	<b>Pr&gt;F</b>
Vs. Non-Family Ads	864.93	.0001 *
<b>Ethnic Ads</b>	<b>F Value</b>	<b>Pr&gt;F</b>
Vs. Non-Ethnic Ads	983.95	.0001 *

\*Significant at .05 level

**TABLE 3:  
T Tests  
Family/Ethnic Actors**

<b>Variable: Family</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>Prob&gt;  T </b>
Non-Hispanics	-1.75	.085
Hispanics	-1.80	.076
<b>Variable: Family</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>Prob&gt;  T </b>
Weak Hispanics	-2.36	.030 *
Strong Hispanics	-2.89	.006 *
<b>Variable: Ethnic</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>Prob&gt;  T </b>
Weak Hispanics	-3.61	.002 *
Strong Hispanics	-4.23	.000 *

\* significant at  $p < .05$

ethnic group will have more positive feelings toward TV commercials portraying a Hispanic than will weakly identifying Hispanics, was supported ( $p < .01$ ); having a Hispanic in the TV commercial was significantly more important to strongly identifying Hispanics than to those weakly identifying with their own ethnic group (see Table 3).

Additional data collected on the advertisements relating to identification, empathetic linkage, involvement and inferences drawn from the ads was analyzed to see how all of these variables relate to positive feelings toward the ad. A correlation analysis of these variables was done

for each of the four ads for all 176 subjects and it was found that all of these variables are significantly correlated with each other at  $p < .001$ . These preliminary results suggest that if a subject identifies with an ad, he or she will feel involved with the ad, have empathetic feelings for the people in the ad, will then draw inferences from the ad and have ultimately positive feelings toward the ad.

A mean involvement variable and a mean identification variable were then calculated for each group: non-Hispanics, Weak Hispanics and Strong Hispanics. The groups were set by using high involvement to be above the mean

involvement and low involvement to be equal to or less than mean involvement, and similarly with identification. ANOVA was then run to see if different levels of involvement and identification were significant in explaining differences among the groups. Results indicate that differences in involvement and identification are significant at  $p < .001$  in explaining differences among the groups. Here we look at the F values which are all significant at the .0001 level for each of the ads. Thus, the main effects were found to be significant at the .001 level for each of the ads. A separate ANOVA was then run which included the interaction effects between involvement and identification. The interaction effects were not found to be significant for any of the ads, which is desirable from a researcher's point of view when interpreting the results.

A multiple regression was then run using positive feelings toward the ad as the dependent variable and identification, involvement, empathy and inferences as the independent variables. Here, we find that the F value of 12.99 is significant at the .001 level and the R squared tells us that the model explains 59.7 percent of the variance in positive feelings toward the ad. We then look at the individual betas and find that all are significant at  $p < .05$  except the beta attached to empathy. This says that identification, involvement and inferences all are significant in explaining the variance in positive feelings toward an ad. Also, as expected, when mean involvement and mean identification are considered, Strong Hispanics identify more and are more involved with ethnic ads than with non-ethnic ads.

#### **DISCUSSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Using theory as a foundation, the present study hypothesized and found empirical support for the contention that ethnicity does influence consumer behavior, specifically advertising response to television commercials. Hispanic respondents' positive feelings toward ads portraying a family situation were significantly greater than those expressed by non-Hispanic

respondents. This is not surprising since the importance of family to Hispanics has been noted for several decades (Rizkallah and Truong 2010, Guernica 1980; Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961). However, marketers must research the demographics of the particular Hispanic market in which they wish to advertise, and portray the family in a manner to which the Hispanic viewers can identify. For example, more than sixty percent of U. S. Hispanics are now part of the middle class (Westlund 2009), so a commercial showing a Hispanic family struggling in the "barrio" will not draw them into the message of the advertisement near as effectively as one portraying a middle class Hispanic family in its typical lifestyle. For example, a 2008 Pew Internet study found that U. S. Hispanics lead the general population in cell phone usage (DePalma 2008) so a commercial which might resonate with this segment might be a middle class Hispanic family eating dinner when the teenager's cell phone rings telling her about a great sale on the item being advertised. Additionally, much more humor is being used today in these commercials portraying the family with good rating results (Kiley 2006). Lastly, Dale (2008) suggests that commercials portraying the family combined with their passion for soccer have been particularly effective in targeting the Hispanic market.

Hispanic respondents were also found to express significantly more positive feelings toward those commercials portraying at least one Hispanic member. This supports the results of a study conducted by New California Media in 2001 which found that Hispanics were more likely to pay attention to media that portrays their ethnic group (Fetto 2002). This also confirms the work of Wong, Muderisglu and Zinkhan (1987) who concluded that if viewers can find similarity between themselves and the characters in the advertisements, the message of the commercial is more readily accepted. This phenomenon can be explained by the identification theory (Kelman 1961) which maintains that people automatically assess their level of similarity with a source during an interaction and make similarity judgments; this

process drives individuals to prefer models based on perceived similarities to themselves. Pires and Stanton (2005, 68) refer to this same phenomenon by saying that “similar others” are more trusted than “dissimilar others,” because in minorities, “similar others may have experienced the same consumption situation whilst subject to similar handicaps.” In terms of advertising, the judgments that consumers make when exposed to ads regarding similarities and dissimilarities and the ability to picture oneself relative to the ad portrayal are forms of self-referencing (Debevec and Iyer 1998). Martin, Lee and Yang (2004) found that self-referencing as a psychological mechanism was a powerful tool in explaining ethnicity effects and, in particular, the preference of consumers to view ads containing models of similar ethnicity. Some might say that the results of this study are more pronounced due to the distinctiveness theory (McGuire 1984); the Hispanics in this study are definitely in the minority in their communities, but this cannot be concluded until future research replicates this study in communities where Hispanics are not in the minority.

For marketing managers who are trying to maximize the effectiveness of their ads to the Hispanic market, they certainly would want to include at least one Hispanic actor, but they would also want to take into account the context in which the commercial takes place. To optimize the chance of generating positive feeling toward the ad, marketers should include ethnic primes or cues in the targeted advertising which will intensify the consumer reaction to actors of their own ethnic group (Forehand and Deshpandè 2001). Chattaraman, Lennon and Rudd (2010) found that the same cultural primes had differential effects among Hispanics who strongly and weakly identified with the Hispanic culture, so marketers will need to fine tune their advertisements.

The last important finding of this study is that strength of ethnic identification should be considered a powerful tool for targeting and segmenting the Hispanic market in the U. S. Strong Hispanics exhibited significantly more

positive feelings toward both television commercials which portrayed a family and those that contained a Hispanic as a member of the commercial than did Weak Hispanics. This supports the work of Kim and Kang (2001b) who found that ethnicity affects personal influences and these personal influences differ depending on strength of ethnic identification. For marketing managers, strength of ethnic identification may also be used when deciding which language the commercial should be in, because Strong Hispanics tend to prefer advertisements in Spanish, while Weak Hispanics prefer ads in English, but as Villareal and Peterson (2008) point out both groups consume media in both Spanish and English, so studying the complex language and media behavior relationships is crucial to defining the appropriate target audience and using an appropriate platform. As with any targeting strategy, marketers would need to do market research to obtain the socio-demographic profiles of the targeted segments, then the marketer would be able to select the most effective message, the preferred language and the correct media outlet. As Callow and McDonald (2005) point out that advertisers who are targeting the Hispanic market should take into account the media vehicle before determining their communication campaign.

## CONCLUSION

U. S. Hispanics represent an important consumer segment in the North American market. Given the size, projected growth and spending power of the U. S. Hispanic market, advertisers have been researching, creating and implementing strategies to market products and services effectively to this population (Kelly et al. 2010). Additionally, the Hispanic market is serving as a buffer for firms as they cope with the severe economic downturn in the general market (Edwards 2008). Procter & Gamble, Verizon, Johnson & Johnson, State Farm, General Mills and others are aggressively targeting the Hispanic market and are reaping double-digit sales gains. Hispanics have been hard hit by the recession also, but they tend to have less mortgage and credit card debt, two or



more earners in the household and like to buy products and services from brands advertised on television (Grover 2009), which makes studies such as this one particularly relevant for marketers.

Although this study could be considered exploratory due to its limited sample size, as firms target this growing market, the findings of this study demonstrate that it would be wise to consider not only ethnicity and its influence, but also the strength of ethnic identification to fine tune their marketing efforts. Singh and Bartikowski (2009) use the analogy that if we apply the standardization/localization debate to the Hispanic market, the conclusion is that if firms want to target this market, total localization must be used to connect linguistically and culturally with the subsegments. As Korzenny (2008 p. 176) observes: "As these culturally unique markets grow, they learn they have power. Marketers need to serve them in their style, language and value scheme." Because only if relevant promotions reach the appropriate markets, will investment dollars result in higher ROIs (Joffe 2008). Ultimately, to be successful, businesses not only need to provide quality products and services, they need to totally connect with their customer base (Medina 2010).

Although the results of this research are not generalizable to the population as a whole, or even to the entire Hispanic population, since the convenience sample in this study was limited to the Midwest and Mexican Americans, it is believed that its findings make a useful contribution to the field of advertising to the Hispanic market and can be considered a good starting point for future research on the Hispanic population. Future studies might explore generational differences, as well as extend the study to other Hispanic groups in the U. S., such as Cubans and Puerto Ricans. Additionally, interesting future research might replicate this study in U. S. cities where Mexican-Americans constitute the majority, or not the proportional minority, such as Brownsville, Texas or San Diego, to see if the

distinctiveness theory holds true as found by Deshpandè and Stayman (1994).

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