

SUSTAINABILITY FOR HISPANICS IN CALIFORNIA: DO THEY REALLY CARE?

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a study about the perceptions of well-educated Hispanics living in California regarding environmental sustainability. Hispanics in the US are growing three times faster than non-Hispanics and now comprise 16% of the population, or more than 50 million. Just in the last 10 years, Hispanics grew 43%, equivalent to more than half of the growth of the entire US population. Given its importance and the undeniable needs of creating a conscious for sustainability in California, we developed this study to learn about the attitudes and perceptions of Hispanics regarding environmental practices, vs. non-Hispanics, in an effort to find out any differences between the two groups, and how this could be beneficial for many companies trying to market their products and services to this vibrant target market. The results of our survey showed a number of differences regarding environmentally friendly activities, such as use of solar energy and carpooling, and use of media to gain information about sustainability.

JEL: M30, M31

KEYWORDS: Hispanics, Sustainability, Environmental, Marketing Strategies, Eco-friendly Behavior

INTRODUCTION

Given the importance of the rapid growth of Hispanics in the US and particularly in California, associated with the impact of new and evolving environmental laws for all residents of California, as well as the promotion of a recycling culture and sustainability practices, the authors believe a new research is required to investigate the perception of attitudes of Hispanics living in California towards these practices, given its growing numbers in population. Hispanics in the US are growing three times faster than non-Hispanics and now comprise 16% of the population, or more than 50 million. Just in the last 10 years, Hispanics grew 43%, equivalent to more than half of the growth of the entire US population. California has the largest Hispanic population in the US with over 14 million, or more than 37% of the total Hispanics. The literature has yet to focus on the narrow issue of distinguishing between the green attitudes and behaviors of Hispanics from the larger population. There has been sparse information here to help guide marketers in better meeting the environmental needs of the Hispanic community. This includes needs in areas such as recycling, water conservation, personal solar energy, and hybrid cars. Given the reality of the growing Hispanic population, both in real numbers and as a percentage of the total population, marketers need this information to be more effective. This research seeks to identify productive information on this subject to both assist marketers and researchers will join in this exploration. The methodology and findings provide this contribution to the literature. The balance of this paper is organized with a review of the literature, methodology, findings, and conclusions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the 2010 U.S. Census there were 308.7 million people living in the United States, of which 50.5 million (or 16%) were Hispanics or of Latino origin (2010 census). Hispanics grew at an amazing rate of 43% between 2000 and 2010, four times faster than the general population at 10%. More than half of the growth of the entire US population was due to the increase in Hispanic population.

The preceding data enhances the relevancy of the Hispanic population in the United States and their influence in the long term future of our country, both politically and economically as well as the many cultural aspects that will be merged with the already diversified American melting pot. For marketers and business owners, this information is very relevant regarding the current and future marketing strategies to reach this lucrative market segment. In 2009, the U.S. Hispanic Buying Power reached \$ 978.4 billion, and is projected to reach \$1.3 trillion in 2014 (San Diego Ad Club, 2011), making it a very important part of the total US economy, estimated at \$15 trillion for 2011 according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Of the over 50 million Hispanics cited above, 63% are Mexicans, 9.2% Puerto Ricans, 3.5% are Cubans, and the rest are coming from Central America, South America and Spain. California has the largest Hispanic population in the US with over 14 million, or more than 37% of the total Hispanics, followed by Texas with 18.7%, Florida with 8.4%, and New York with 6.8%.

Hispanic or Latino? Numerous studies have been published about the possible differences between the term “Latino” and “Hispanic” in the U.S. to identify people coming from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba or other Latin American countries. Most of them agree that there are really no differences and the terms are the same. Some of the commonalities of this group are that they all come from Spanish-speaking countries and have specific customs and values. Most Hispanics or Latinos identify themselves in relationship to their country of origin, e.g. Mexicans, Cubans, or Colombians. Other articles show that some people in this group associate the term Hispanic with the Spaniards who conquered many of these countries, with a negative connotation, and hence prefer to be recognized as Latinos. However, for the purpose of this article both terms will be used to identify this segment, interchangeably.

Current research in Hispanic Marketing is insufficient and does not reflect the rapid population growth which translates directly into economic clout. Furthermore, the complexity of the Hispanic Market is growing almost as fast as its size as a result of second generations of Latinos as well as the constant influx of immigrants to the United States, both legally and illegally. Therefore, new research is needed to understand the dynamics and changes of this vibrant generation of Latinos that is influencing our society. The challenge to reach this segment is so significant that several prominent universities, namely Southern Methodist University, Florida State University, UCLA, and De Paul already have Ethnic Marketing programs and in particular Hispanic Marketing programs, courses and seminars (Sebor, 2007).

Recent studies show that culture significantly impacts customer responses, levels of satisfaction, propensity to buy products and services, and most significantly the relationship between a company or brand and the consumer. Moreover, cultural differences do impact assessment of quality and satisfaction of products and services (Ueltschy & Krampf, 2003). As stated by the Office of Minority Health, "Hispanics/Latinos are disproportionately underrepresented in research activities. Without adequate and targeted research, Hispanics/Latinos are disadvantaged in policy making, resource allocation, program planning and program implementation activities" (Diaz, 2005).

There is extensive literature addressing sustainability/green issues for organizations, in general, and marketers, in particular. This literature focuses on the strategies (e.g., Chen & Lin, 2011; Hedman & Henningson, 2011; Parguel, Benoit-Moreau, & Larceneau, 2011; Muster, 2011; Laughland & Bansal 2011; Rüdiger 2011; Burgin, 2010, Raghavan, 2010). These strategies range from the economic value to companies of internal green activities to incorporating green into the company's business model. Literature more directed to marketers focused on green brand management and promotional messages (e.g., Yakup & Sevil, 2011; Chen, Y., 2010; Schubert, 2010; Dos Santos, 2009). Additional research examined consumer responses to sustainable/green products and services (Singh, 2011). These studies were completed in a great variety of locations around the world (e.g., Chen & Chai, 2011; Choi & Ng, 2011; Cohen, 2010; Huang, 2011; Savita, 2010; and van Rijswijk, Fewer 2008).

The greatest surprise in reviewing the literature was the lack of academic research addressing questions about the attitudes and behaviors regarding environmentally sustainable activities. Searching a variety of databases of academic journals resulted in only one article directly on this subject (McCabe & Corona, 2011). The surprise was that this market, the second largest in the United States, was not the subject of intense research exploring its approaches to the growing effort to promote sustainable activities and purchases. Ignoring the unique dynamics within the Hispanic community would appear to be a poor business decision for organizations wishing to grow their market share.

METHODOLOGY

This research was designed as an exploratory study of the similarities and differences between Hispanic and non-Hispanic attitudes towards sustainability and their engagement in associated activities. A convenience sample was utilized, drawn from contacts maintained by the three researchers and databases of members of a variety of Hispanic professional organizations. While convenience sampling has known limitations, such as potentially not being representative of the larger population, this approach has been used productively in other studies, especially exploratory research. Particular attention was made to include a sizable proportion of known Hispanics in those invited to participate.

The survey instrument was developed to collect green activities and interests plus standard demographic information. The instrument was tested and appropriate modifications were made to increase both clarity and ease of completion. Potential responders were invited via email to participate. The instrument was made available utilizing SurveyMonkey.com over a two week period in November, 2011. A total of approximately 310 invitations were sent to potential responders. 144 completed the survey. This constituted a 46% response rate. Of these, 29 were discarded due to respondents not being residents of California. The remaining responses were sorted, tabulated, and correlated using standard statistical processes.

FINDINGS

After collecting all data from the surveys the answers to the direct questions were analyzed and tabulated, as well a series of cross tabulations based on the relevancy of the findings to take advantage of the data as much as possible. The findings were categorized as follows: Sustainable behavior and intentions, Energy, Media Preferences, Sustainable activities, and Demographics

The results on sustainable behavior are presented in Table 1. For all respondents to the question of “always” recycle, non-Hispanics recycle substantially more than Hispanics; 42% vs. 19% in print cartridges, 36% vs. 14% cell phones, 59% vs. 27% newspapers, and 61% vs. 25% plastic bottles, aluminum cans and glass. The highest recycling level for Hispanics was 27% for newspapers.

Between both groups who make \$100K or more, there is a large difference in the amount of water they plan to use over the next year. As we see in Table 1 (above), Hispanics are 19.4% more likely to use less water than non-Hispanics in the year ahead. They are also 13.5% more likely (70.6% vs. 57.1%) to recycle waste than non-Hispanics. The opposite was the result in lighting. Only 41% of the Hispanics plan to change their lighting or appliances to energy efficient, while 51.4% of non-Hispanics plan to make this change. If we take higher education as a basis for comparing both groups, Hispanics are far ahead in planning to use less water and change lighting to a more efficient one and about the same in their willingness to recycle waste.

Auto behavior intentions are presented in Table 2. The finding that was most revealing was that of energy-related products and services. Hybrids were a topic of interest as 44% of all our respondents plan to purchase a hybrid car next. That is an increase in purchasing intentions from 14% who drive one now,

and is a strong indication of behavior change. Looking at only Hispanics surveyed, 46% plan to buy a hybrid and 13% already drive one. That finding was higher than expected for both categories of Hispanics, purchase intention as well as already drive one.

Table 1: Respondent Green Behaviors

	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic
Always Recycles - percentage		
Plastic, bottles, aluminum, glass	25	61
Newspapers	27	59
Cell phones	14	36
Print cartridges	42	19
High Income Green at Home		
Use less water	76.5	57.1
Recycle waste	70.6	57.1
Lighting	41	51.4
Higher Education at Home		
Use less water	75	52
Recycle waste	65	66.7
Lighting	85	43.8

This table reports the percentage of respondents in each of the two categories who reported that they always take the identified green actions.

When we looked further at those Hispanics who earn more than \$100,000, we saw even more revealing information. Of those Hispanics, 17.6% drive a hybrid and only 14.3 of non-Hispanics with that income do the same. Hispanics drive more hybrids at higher income levels. High income Hispanics are more inclined to purchase a hybrid car, (53% vs. 45.5%) than their counterpart high income non-Hispanics.

For the higher educated Hispanics, 10% drive a hybrid now and 30% plan to purchase one next time. For non-Hispanics, 14.6% drive a hybrid now and 39.1% plan to purchase a hybrid next. What this tells us is that the more educated Hispanics are different from those with money. These Hispanics are not greener than their non-Hispanic counterparts. With higher education, the preference to buy a new hybrid is 30% less for Hispanics than non-Hispanics. This finding surprised the researchers.

Table 2 Respondents Auto Behaviors/Intentions

	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic
High income respondents		
Drive hybrid	17.6	14.3
Next car hybrid	53	45.5
30+ mpg	29.4	22.9
21-30 mpg	36	60
Higher education respondents		
Drive hybrid	10.0	14.6
Next car hybrid	30	39.1

This table reports the percentage of respondents in each of the two categories who reported that they strongly agree with statements regarding their current and future auto purchases.

California is known for being a state in love with the automobile. We wanted to learn more about vehicle mileage comparing Hispanics to non-Hispanics. In the more than \$100K income segments, the major finding was that some Hispanics are not driving cars with good mileage. Hispanics that drive 21-30 MPG were 36%. Non-Hispanics in the same category are at 60%. For the more than 30 mpg, Hispanics have the edge at 29.4% vs. non-Hispanics at 22.9%. For the middle, 21-25 mpg, non-Hispanics are at 34.3% vs. Hispanics at 29.4%.

The 21-25 mpg segment was very similar among both Hispanics and non-Hispanics, averaging at about 33-34% for all income levels surveyed. There was a larger difference in Hispanic vs. non-Hispanic as the mpg numbers increased or declined, especially in the high mileage categories, i.e., more than 30 mpg. For

non-Hispanics in over 30 mpg vehicle mileage was 24% of respondents and for Hispanic responders the more than 30 mpg mileage was 15% (all respondents). One in four non-Hispanics has a primary vehicle with mpg greater than 30 mpg. The opposite was true for the low mileage vehicles, with 10% of Hispanics primary vehicle getting less than 15 mpg. They may be driving older trucks. Hispanics are paying attention, as 43% of them are now driving cars with more than 26 mpg. That number is similar for non-Hispanics, at 45%. For the higher educated, 45% drive a vehicle with 21-25 mpg. This 30% drive vehicles with more than 26 mpg. For highly educated non-Hispanics, 50% drive vehicles with more than 26 mpg, clearly a large difference.

Current Green activities of survey respondents are presented in Table 3. Solar Water Heaters: Among high income Hispanics (\$100k+) 23.5% have solar water heater vs. only 5.7% of non-Hispanics with \$100k incomes have solar water heaters.

Table 3 Current Green Activities of Survey Respondents

	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic
Solar PV (Photovoltaic) owner	0	11.4
Solar water heater owner	23.5	5.7
Eco activities	70.6	68.6

This table reports the percentage of respondents who answered “yes” when asked if they owners of these green investments in their homes and engaged in additional eco activities.

Regarding solar energy, we found that none of our Hispanic respondents had solar PV (Photovoltaic) installed; however, 13% had a solar water heater, nearly double of the non-Hispanic response. The average cost of installing solar PV is still considerable, and the cost of solar water heaters is roughly one quarter to one third of the price. Our non-Hispanics at 10.5% had installed solar PV, and only 7% had solar water heaters, which was another unexpected response. Looking at the higher incomes, still zero Hispanics have solar PV, and a higher 11.4 non-Hispanics have solar PV homes. Among high income Hispanics 23.5% have solar water heater compared to only 5.7% of non-Hispanics with this feature. This finding indicates that for the same incomes, four times as many Hispanics chose to use a solar water heater than non-Hispanics. Looking at the more educated graduate Hispanics, 10% have a solar water heater at home vs. 6.5% for non-Hispanics, consistently lower ownership rates for this segment.

Green Event Participation: Among these \$100k incomes, 70.6% of Hispanics have participated in green events, vs. 68.6% of non-Hispanics who have participated. Slightly more Hispanics have participated in green events at the high income levels. That finding changes if you look at our summaries, where only 56% of Hispanics participate in green events vs. 72.4% of non-Hispanics participate. It would seem that the more Hispanics earn, the more likely they become active in green activities. Of higher educated Hispanics, 60% have been involved with green events vs. 68% for non-Hispanics with graduate degrees.

Hispanics clearly responded to the question about what media they prefer to get information about green products and services, and with higher response rates to electronic news versus print or magazines as seen in Table 4. Hispanics slightly prefer TV over the web and then radio. Non-Hispanics prefer the web, then Newspapers/Magazines, then TV then radio. (See Table 4 below) Nearly 70% of those Hispanics responding overall indicated a preference for TV to get their information. The findings about Facebook’s popularity with both Hispanics and non-Hispanics are very similar, at nearly one third of respondents. However, what was not expected was the difference in Twitter response. Three and a half times more non-Hispanics prefer Twitter to get their information than Hispanics.

As shown in Table 4, the top choice for Hispanics earning \$100K and over is TV and second is the web. Both choices were for 60% or greater of the respondents. For non-Hispanics, it’s very different: the top choice was newspapers, with nearly 60 % and the second was the web, with nearly 55%. As incomes rose

for non-Hispanics, newspapers became more important as a resource for information. Non-Hispanics in the higher income categories did not rate other media as their preference for information about environmental issues. For non-Hispanics, they selected TV at 42.4% vs. 66.7%. Facebook was similar, with Hispanics ranking that higher. Hispanics preferred Twitter only 6.7% compared to non-Hispanics, who preferred it 18.2%, nearly 3 times more frequently.

Table 4: Media Preferences on Green Information Sources

	Hispanic All Respondents	High Incomes	Higher Education	Non-Hispanic All Respondents	High Incomes	Higher Education
TV	69.2	66.7	52.6	44.7	42.4	43.2
Web	66.7	60	73.7	55.3	54.5	59.1
Radio	53.8	53.3	36.8	40.8	30.3	34.1
Newspapers	43.6	46.7	26.3	48.7	57.6	50
Facebook	39.8	33.3	26.3	31.6	27.3	29.5
Flyers	12.8	13	0	3.9	9	2
Twitter	5.1	6.7	10.5	18.4	18.2	18.2

This table reports the percentage of respondents who indicated particular media as their preferred source of information regarding green products and services.

Table 4 also describes the high earning Hispanics vs. non-Hispanics choices for media to inform them about environmental issues. TV is most frequently selected, followed by the internet for Hispanics when it comes to learning more about environmental issues. Respondents were asked to select all that apply. For non-Hispanics, magazines and newspapers were the top choice, followed by the internet and then TV.

The top choice for Hispanics with graduate degrees is web ads and websites, with second being TV, and then radio. Only 10.5% use Twitter. The top choice for non-Hispanics with graduate degrees is web ads, then magazines/newspapers, and then TV. 18% are using Twitter, 80% more than Hispanics in the same education category. These findings had us consider selective perception and if people are paying attention to messages, they may be likely to act.

Table 5: High Income Who Always Pay Attention to Information

	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic
Solar energy	41	20
Hybrid cars	31.3	14.3
Water	47	37.1
Recycling	17.9	26.5

This table reports the percentage of those with family incomes of over \$100,000 who pay attention to information presented in the media.

In responding to the “always” pay attention question for the high income category in both groups, Hispanics want to know more about Solar Energy and non-Hispanics were more interested in water than solar energy. The answer “always” for Hispanics was water with 47%, vs. non-Hispanics was only 37%. For Solar always were 41% vs. 20% for non-Hispanics. Hybrid was 31.3 for always for Hispanics and 14.3 for non-Hispanics.

In the never category, for Hispanics: Hybrid was 18.8, solar 17.6 and water use and recycling 5.9, were the same. For non-Hispanics, never Hybrid was 14.3, Solar 11.4, Water was 8.6 and recycling was 8.8. So, in summary for the never, Hispanics were more on never with hybrid and solar (more expensive propositions) and they were less likely to say never on the water use and recycling, which are less expensive.

For the question about willing to pay for organics in Table 6 below, Hispanics responded 35.3% sometimes vs. 48.6 % for non-Hispanics. Clearly, Hispanics are not willing to pay as much, which could be attributed to insufficient information.

Table 6: Actions Respondents Are Willing or Not Willing to Take

	Hispanics	Non-Hispanics
Sometimes willing to pay for organics	35	49
Never use shared transportation		
Car pool	41	37
Public transportation	70.6	67.6
Always or most of the time save water		
Water at work	67	69
Water at home	77	82.9
Always reduce printing	47	38
Always save energy by saving lights	61.5	49.3

This table reports the current behaviors regarding a variety of green activities. These are indicative of the respondents' commitment to eco friendly actions.

Of all Hispanics surveyed, 41.2% never use a car pool vs. 37% for non-Hispanics. 70.6% of Hispanics never use public transportation, and of non-Hispanics, 67.6 % never use public transportation. Although the difference is not significant, Hispanics are slightly less likely to use shared transportation than non-Hispanics.

Compare Hispanics to non-Hispanics on saving water at work vs. at home. As depicted on Table 6 above, Hispanics and non-Hispanics tend to save 10% more at home than at work. What this may mean is they have more control over their home environment. Hispanics are slightly less inclined to do both of these activities always or most of the time.

Finally, Table 6 above shows that Hispanics tend to reduce their printing and are more concerned about energy saving lights, than non-Hispanics.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper was intended to explore the differences between the attitudes and behaviors, regarding eco-friendly issues, of well-educated and higher income Hispanics from similar Non-Hispanics. This research tested the validity of the prevailing pattern of marketers in approaching Hispanics as an extension of the Non-Hispanic population. This study looked at those with higher education and higher incomes to see if there were differences. Using a web-based survey instrument, participants responded to emailed invitations to complete the surveys electronically.

After reviewing the results, we conclude that there are substantial differences in Hispanics with higher income and education than the perception of the general public has for this Hispanic market in general. These variables are relevant in comparing both Hispanics and non-Hispanics regarding the perceptions and attitudes about the environment, and more specifically recycling newspapers, plastic bottles, cell phones and cartridges. For the affluent Hispanic with income of over \$100k, the study showed a greater propensity to use less water and recycle waste than non-Hispanics, which was surprising. The results were different using Higher Education for both groups and therefore can infer that these two independent variables are very significant for both groups, and with a low correlation factor.

High income Hispanics are more inclined to buy a hybrid car than non-Hispanics that was also an interesting discovery from this study. 10% of educated Hispanics have a solar water heater at home vs. only 6.7% of non-Hispanics. Similarly, 23.5% of high income Hispanics has a water heater at home vs. only 5.7% of their counterpart. Regarding involvement in green activities, it would seem that the more

money Hispanics make, the more likely they become active in green activities: 60% of them with graduate degree are involved vs. 68% of non-Hispanics with same education.

Regarding attention to media, Hispanics prefer TV and the web, and non-Hispanics prefer newspapers as number one, followed by the web. This may be of some interest for marketers trying to reach the Hispanic segment. Interestingly, Hispanics responded very low to their attention and involvement with Twitter (only 5.1%) vs. 18.4% for non-Hispanics. Facebook was very similar for both groups. The study also revealed that Hispanics are less likely to pay for organic products than non-Hispanics. In regards to transportation, 41.2% of Hispanics never use car pool vs. 37% for non-Hispanics, and the ones who never use public transportation was consistently high for both, 70.6% for Hispanics vs. 67.6 % for non-Hispanics.

These findings bring some significant light to the behaviors and attitudes of Hispanics vs. non-Hispanics in California regarding environmental issues, which can be used for marketers in conveying their messages to this important growing segment of the population. Nonetheless, more in-depth research is needed to find out other variables and factors that may affect the results.

This has been an exploratory study that investigated an emerging area of concern for marketers. The limitations of this research are primarily in the nature of the convenience sample, rather than a random sampling of the targeted population. The study focused on Hispanics and Non-Hispanics with higher education and higher income who live in California. Further research is desirable to test the results using a random sample of the targeted population. Additionally, it will be useful to test the generalizability of these findings to those with less education, less income, as well as those Hispanics and Non-Hispanics who live beyond the borders of California.

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