

## Empowering the U.S. Hispanic Female: How Companies and Brands Can Become More Relevant to Latinas' New Sense of Power

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An abundance of information has been gathered in the past few years on how to win the hearts and minds of Hispanic females in the U.S. Major CPG, healthcare, media, and HBA businesses have conducted research about what it means to be a Latina – the meaning of beauty, what makes them feel special and appreciated, the importance of family, etc. And in many ways this information has led to newer and better products for her, new publications that cater specifically to her, new TV content and channels, as well as better offerings at the supermarket and other places where she shops.

However, as the market evolves due to shifts in levels of acculturation, immigration policy, and the positive proliferation of media options to name a few, so too must strategies to win this target over. Historically, marketers have placed much emphasis on the role of family in defining how the Latina is uniquely different from other ethnic/cultural groups. While this continues to be an important factor in marketing, there are increasing numbers of companies discussing how empowering the Hispanic female can be a driving strategic principle behind their brands.

In the general market, efforts to empower female consumers have typically focused on “self-empowerment” as the guiding principle. Companies subscribe to the belief that by celebrating and glorifying women’s self-identity, independence, autonomy, freedom, individualism and assertiveness, they will feel that brands and media content are relevant to their modern persona. Arguably, this is changing somewhat as more and more women aspire to a more meaningful life that balances the career-driven elements from the 80’s and 90’s with family and care-giving. Specifically, new technologies are now making it easier for women to have a successful career and spend more quality time at home. Nevertheless, the focus on the “self” is still primary.

But as with most general market paradigms, these aren’t necessarily adopted by the Hispanic market. In the case of female empowerment as a guiding brand experience principle, general market efforts aren’t scalable unless they are calibrated to incorporate the meaning of empowerment for Hispanic women.

### The Concept of Latina Empowerment

First off, it’s important to understand that a sizeable proportion of Hispanic women do not or have not yet associated themselves with the set of values that have to a large extent over the years defined empowerment in the general market. Self-identity, individualism and assertiveness are elements to which they do not relate in their current acculturation state (more so for Hispanic Dominants and Biculturals than for U.S. Dominants). Many Hispanic women are still very much centered on the notion of collectivism versus individualism. To a large extent, the Latina defines her own identity within the construct of her “tribe” (children, husbands, in-laws, cousins, etc.) and she does not want to have her identity linked to what could be interpreted as egocentric or self-centered qualities as opposed to altruistic and giving.

To readers who are not familiar with Hispanic culture, the above may sound like a position of weakness because it could be interpreted that Hispanic women are constrained in their role. But in truth, Hispanic women derive a strong sense of power within this social architecture of collectivism. For example in “The House of Spirits” by Isabel Allende, Hispanic women’s strength and their influence in the ultimate fate of a traditional Chilean family during tough political times, are a result of diplomacy,

endurance, and subtleness within their collectivist role. Likewise, in Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s “100 Years of Solitude” the matriarchy is unquestionable – Ursula is the master puppeteer pulling strings for every individual in her family and the pillar that keeps it all together – to the point that when she dies the family walls start to crumble.

So, Hispanic women may not find the concept of “self-empowerment” relevant because they realize that more power is gained within the confines of their tribe, as opposed to the view in the general market where self-identity and individual independence are more empowering to women. That said, Hispanic women also find themselves on a journey in the United States where they are exploring and re-defining those values and their identities both as Hispanics and as women. As it relates to power, while acknowledging the influence of the acculturation process, we believe that Hispanic women will still want to protect and capitalize on the influence they can exert in a collective environment. However, they also are attracted to U.S. mainstream values and the freedom they provide. But beyond independence and individualism, Hispanic women may find “anonymity” to be the most empowering value of all. In many ways, the Hispanic family architecture is a pressurized environment where women can oftentimes feel overwhelmed. Being in the U.S. allows them to have more personal space and distance between themselves and their tribe at home – to be anonymous means being able to explore.

Looking at fashion and style as an example, Hispanic women, even the less acculturated, are melding Latin American and U.S. mainstream influences and creating a new unique persona that reflects their Latina sensibilities in a new context. In the case of foods, they are open to canned and prepared products, but only as long as they can add their own twist to the food before serving it to the family. Also, in financial services and TV viewing, they are seeking offerings that allow them to maintain their power role in the matriarchy while having their own choices as well.

As companies develop go-to-market strategies using empowerment as a lynch-pin, they will find that the tension between old world and new world views of the role of females and their place in their social circles is where the real power exists for Hispanic women, and it is at this crossroads where brands will have the most relevance.