

Understanding Today's Hispanic Youth Identity in the U.S.

Today's new generation of Hispanic youth defines itself largely using three key areas of experiences:

1. **What they have in common with each other;**
2. **What makes them different and unique compared to older Latinos; and**
3. **What makes them different and unique compared to non-Latino youth in the U.S.**

Young Hispanics are driving growth in a multicultural youth generation unlike any other, and with the 2nd generation Hispanics projected to have the largest share of Hispanic population among 1st, 2nd, and 3rd generations by 2020, young Hispanics are a group with which marketers need to be intimately familiar.

AHAA, the Association of Hispanic Advertising Agencies, states that Latino identity in the U.S. is dynamic, complex and contextual. . . there are key cultural values that drive identity, and often times, it is dependent on who one is with, where they are, and how they grew up. Hispanic youth identity is no different. In fact, theirs is an identity that is perhaps even more dynamic, given their mindset and life stage realities as well as their technological fluency.

Collectively, young Hispanics share a common upbringing that blends their experiences navigating both Latino and American worlds. The mixing and blending of these cultures make for a unique identity that can be both a positive and a negative experience at once. On the one hand, young Hispanics feel empowered, uniquely advantaged and optimistic because they can pick and choose the aspects of each culture that suit them best. On the other hand, societal and familial expectations can make it difficult for a young Latino to find his or her identity. Mainstream U.S. culture may dictate that they act a certain way, while their family members have different expectations.

Many young Hispanics, especially the 2nd generation, are also united by the shared experience of retro-acculturation, as they reconnect with the traditions, customs, values and ultimately, pride that Latino culture inspires. As they navigate through typical teen "fitting in" rites of passage, many who feel comfortable enough with their identity seek to reconnect with their Latino culture in the same ways their parents have.

A shared 'urban' mindset that many, but certainly not all, young Hispanics possess provides yet another dimension of unification. Urban culture—identified here as experiences inspired by the hip-hop culture—has the music, fashion and trends that many young Hispanics want to be associated with. Once these elements intersect with U.S. Latino values, an urban Latino movement is formed. While this movement is not necessarily new, the continuous evolution and maturation of both the hip-hop and Latino cultures allows for increased areas of intersection and blending.

Aside from shared experiences, it's important to understand how Hispanic youth differs from older U.S. Hispanics. Technology, having set in motion a generational gap in the U.S. as a whole, has also set apart today's generation of young Hispanics from their parents and grandparents. Young Hispanics' high comfort level with technology allows them to connect with the media, content, brands, and each other in deeply engaging ways. Their virtual networks and rules of engagement differ greatly from those of their older relatives. Discovering and sharing new experiences is possible with just the push of a button.

Older Hispanics rely on young Hispanics to be translators of language and culture. Young Hispanics possess a vital role in the daily lives of this older generation as they translate for older family members at banks, supermarkets and doctor's offices. Beyond these daily person-to-person translations,

young Hispanics are also translating American cultural experiences that set the context for many marketing and advertising messages aimed at older Hispanics. In short, understanding this key "gate-keeper" role can only help advertisers looking to connect with the U.S. Hispanic market. Compared to their non-Hispanic peers, young Hispanics have a different cultural outlook that is grounded in traditional Latino values, customs and traditions learned at home. Many feel that they value family (and extended family) differently than their non-Latino friends, especially since so many Hispanic families have multiple generations under one roof. When it comes to spirituality, young Hispanics generally consider themselves more conservative and closely aligned with the values their parents and grandparents instilled in them. Finally, dealing with stereotypes on a daily basis is an experience many young Hispanics feel their non-Hispanic friends are not exposed to. Encountering regular issues of racism and stereotyping—in the eyes of young Hispanics—is yet another reason they have a unique upbringing compared to their non-Hispanic counterparts.

These distinct experiences combined with a unique, more youth-focused reality compared to their parents, help drive young Hispanics' sense of identity. For marketers, this represents an opportunity to connect with an emerging, influential and multi-faceted consumer in a relevant way.

Five Recommendations To Reach Hispanic Youth

- 1: Allow young Hispanics to sample your brand's product or services before the mainstream to leverage their trendsetter behavior.
- 2: Provide positive portrayals of Hispanic youth to dispel negative stereotypes they encounter on a daily basis.
- 3: If you traditionally target older Hispanic heads of household, consider also messaging to young Hispanics since they possess influence over household purchases.
- 4: Look to address the emerging urban Latino consumer by integrating authentic elements from urban and Latino cultures into your messaging and creative.
- 5: Let young Hispanics access your brand on a local, grassroots level since extended families and local communities are vital for sparking word-of-mouth.