

Hispanic consumers remain an underserved demographic for many marketers

Article

A note on language: The terms 'Hispanic' and 'Latino'/'Latinx' mean different things. 'Hispanic' refers to someone from a Spanish-speaking country or with a background in a Spanish-

speaking country; ‘Latino’/‘Latinx’ describes someone who hails from a Latin American country or has roots in one. For the purposes of this article, ‘Hispanic’ refers to both unless otherwise specified.

This September marks the 53rd annual Hispanic Heritage Month, but are brands, retailers, and media entities reaching this important demographic year-round, or even acknowledging the different aspects of Hispanic identity? The data points to no, in a number of areas.

Advertising: Despite making up 18.7% of the total US population, Hispanic consumers make up a disproportionately small proportion of overall advertising spend.

- Only 6% of overall industry investment is spent toward the Hispanic community, per the **Hispanic Marketing Council**.

Film: Popular movies still marginalize Hispanic and Latinx people.

- The **USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative** found that despite accounting for 1 in 4 box office tickets sold, just 7% of leading roles were filled by Hispanic/Latinx actors in 2019, the last year for which data exists.
- Just 5% of 51,158 characters across 1,300 popular films surveyed were Hispanic/Latinx, and 43.6% of the films studied didn’t feature a single Hispanic/Latinx character.

While some industries spend too little time courting Hispanic and Latinx consumers, some may be spending *too much* time courting this demographic group.

Fast food: A report from the **University of Connecticut’s Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity** found that fast food ads heavily target Black and Hispanic communities.

- Fast food ads on Spanish-language TV increased 33% between 2012 and 2019, and ads viewed by children increased 7%.
- Hispanic Americans are at higher risk for health conditions like diabetes and obesity: a 2020 report from **The Brookings Institution** found that Hispanic women over the age of 20 have an obesity rate of 49%, and Hispanic men ages 18 and up have the highest risk of diabetes at 14%.

Taking the time to understand what’s important to this demographic is key to marketing to Hispanic consumers. While it’s impossible to do that justice in 700 words, a few highlights:

Identity: Hispanic identity is much more diverse than the media portrays.

- A quarter of US Hispanics identify as Afro-Latino according to Pew Research, but they and indigenous Latinos are “left out of the celebration” of Hispanic Heritage Month according to **Angel Jones, an Afro-Latina assistant professor of education at Southern Illinois University - Edwardsville.**
- Furthermore, Latinos are more likely to celebrate events and holidays that are specific to their culture, rather than a general event like Hispanic Heritage Month, said **Ed Morales, author of the book “Latinx: The New Force in Politics and Culture.”**

Language: Over 70% prefer speaking Spanish at home, according to **Instituto Cervantes** in 2020.

- Many brands rely on the fact that many of their Spanish-speaking consumers are bilingual, and rather than offer services in Spanish, rely on English only.
- While this approach may keep costs down, it doesn’t necessarily provide the best user experience.

Brand activism and loyalty: Hispanic Americans are especially aware of social issues, and feel strongly that they should be able to trust the brands they purchase from.

- A report from **Edelman Trust Barometer** found that Hispanics feel they can influence change more strongly with their wallets than with their votes than other demographics: 54% felt that they can better influence social issues through the brands they buy than with who they vote for.
- Hispanic Americans also put their values in high priority when selecting and working with employers, and brands that align themselves with the values and issues that affect Hispanic communities are likely to find success.

The big takeaway: Brands have an opportunity with Hispanic consumers—a big one. A more detailed understanding of this critical demographic is key to better serving them and reaping the benefits.