

You say Hispanic, they say Latino

When your next qualitative research project seeks the insights of Latinos, will you know how to approach this market segment? It might be harder than you think because the U.S. Latino market is not a homogeneous group of people. Rather, it is a fragmented and complex tapestry of Latino backgrounds that includes more than 20 countries of origin.

“Many clients think that there is one solution to reach all Latinos in the United States, and there’s not. Latinos, like any other market segment, represent many levels of acculturation, education, income levels and ethnic influences,” says Ricardo Lopez, president of Hispanic Research Inc., East Brunswick, N.J., and past president of the Qualitative Research Consultants Association (QRCA).

To identify and share best practices in conducting qualitative research among Latinos, the QRCA created the Latino Special Interest Group (SIG). The group notes that from a Latino consumer’s perspective, the term “Latino” is often preferred because it is the correct Spanish word to define people who come from Latin America. The term “Hispanic” is rarely used by people who speak Spanish.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 43 million people in the United States identified as Latino in 2006. Of that number, more than half are of Mexican descent, with Puerto Ricans accounting for almost four million of that population and Cubans numbering two million. The remainder of the group consists of Central American, South American or “other” areas of origin.

Because people of Mexican descent greatly outnumber people from other Latino countries in the United States, some marketing campaigns focus on geographies and ethnic preferences of Mexicans only.

“One common misconception among clients is that we are all Mexicans. I find that markets like

Miami and other areas that are not primarily Mexican feel untargeted since many products and campaigns seem to strictly target the Mexican segment,” says QRCA member Otto Rodriguez of Hispanic Research Inc.

Lopez cites a recent qualitative research study for client Time Inc. that clearly showed the differences between Latino groups in the United States. Lopez used focus groups to highlight opinions among



By Steve Richardson

QRCA group offers tips on conducting qualitative research with Latinos

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readers and prospective readers of *Sports Illustrated's SI Latino* magazine in New York and Los Angeles.

The research showed that baseball is very popular in the Caribbean islands of Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Cuba, as well as in countries that border the Caribbean basin like Venezuela, Colombia, Panama and Nicaragua. However, soccer is more popular in the rest of Latin America and South America including Mexico. In many countries where soccer is extremely popular, baseball is not, and vice versa. This phenomenon has fueled baseball/soccer segmentation among U.S. Latinos from different countries of origin.

The research explored Latino attitudes regarding the *SI Latino* cover. Similar to other magazines, the cover of *SI Latino* is crucial in eliciting reader interest, and the most important aspect is the person/sport featured on the cover. Not surprisingly, covers depicting soccer players immediately turned off the Caribbean readers and covers depicting baseball players were strongly disliked by most Mexican participants.

As a result of the research, *SI Latino* started publishing the magazine in 2007 with split covers. While the content of the magazine remains the same and appeals to all Latinos, areas with larger number of Caribbean Latinos receive a baseball player photo on the cover, while cities with more Latinos from Mexico and Central America receive a soccer player cover. Both sports continue to be covered in the magazine.

"When we started *SI Latino*, we knew that we were targeting a large, diverse group of people," says Steve Montgomery, research manager for Time Inc. "Through the focus groups, we found that our readers' interest increased significantly when we targeted our magazine covers to the specific sports preferences of different Latino ethnicities."

Levels of acculturation

After considering the ethnicity

question, the QRCA Latino SIG suggests that marketers should consider the many levels of acculturation of American Latinos. Latino opinions and preferences vary widely depending on several factors:

- How long have they lived in the United States?
- Were they born in the United States or did they immigrate here?
- How old were they when they moved here?
- Do they primarily consume media in English or Spanish?
- What language do they speak at home?
- What language do they speak with their friends?

Rose Marie Garcia Fontana, a QRCA member and president of Garcia Fontana Research, Half Moon Bay, Calif., recently conducted qualitative research for California's Monterey Bay Aquarium. The research consisted of 148 in-person interviews over a three-month period in four different northern Californian cities.

The main purpose of the research was to determine if there were major differences between the perceptions, motivations and barriers between Spanish-dominant and bilingual/English-dominant Latinos. The aquarium also hoped to improve overall communication to the Latino market with the goal of increasing attendance.

The research found that Spanish-dominant respondents were more likely to be concerned about transportation for getting to the aquarium and knowing how to get there. Having an automobile, auto insurance and a driver's license was simply not possible for some of the respondents. This was not as much of a concern for acculturated Latinos although they still were concerned with the distance driven to get to the aquarium. Respondents also cited bilingual signage inside the aquarium as being very important to them.

Few respondents were concerned about admission costs, and children were by far the most important mo-

tivation for going to the aquarium. Another key finding of the research was that mothers may suggest going to the aquarium but it was the father who is usually the ultimate decision-maker particularly in Spanish-dominant households.

"Having this type of information helped us to further fine-tune our messages and create customized communication to reach all Latinos regardless of acculturation," says Lorraine Yglesias, manager of diversity and partnership marketing for the aquarium.

The Latino Special Interest Group also stresses that acculturation levels are important when recruiting participants for focus groups. "Mixing unacculturated/Spanish-dominant and partially acculturated/bilingual participants can create problems if a bilingual begins to use 'Spanglish' that the Spanish-dominant individuals do not understand," says QRCA member Marta Bethart of Bethart Bilingual Research Inc., Miami.

The moderator should pick one language and stick to it and they should require participants to do the same. That includes any written material. "Many bilingual Latinos who grew up in the United States were never taught in school to read or write in Spanish," says Hispanic Research Inc.'s Rodriguez.

Comfortable with nuances

Recruitment is key to the success of any research conducted among U.S. Latinos. The group suggests several techniques. First, use someone who can recruit in the variety of Spanish used in the target community. The recruiter and interviewer should be comfortable with the certain nuances of that particular community.

The markets are vitally important as well. With the wide differences in Latino markets, clients cannot conduct research in one market and use the results to infer the opinions of other markets. "Clients and researchers need to be careful in selecting markets. Miami is a great market if you want to primarily sell

your product or service in Miami, but Miami often has very little to do with any other market – not even the rest of Florida,” says Hispanic Research Inc.’s Lopez. “Texas and Southern California are as different within their Latino communities as they are in the general Anglo market.”

Reacted unfavorably

Marketers should keep in mind that not all Spanish is the same. In a recent project for American Express, Rodriguez tested several taglines developed for a new Latino ad initiative. He found that Mexican-Americans reacted unfavorably to phrases that appealed to Latinos of Caribbean descent and vice versa. And although complying with all of the different language variations can be time-consuming, the research suggested that the overall results were well worth the trouble.

Rodriguez found that many taglines that were successful in campaigns targeted to Anglo Americans flopped when they were translated into Spanish of any variation. He also found that Latinos preferred the use of formal Spanish rather than more colloquial phrasing. For instance, participants were more favorable to the formal *Usted si puede* than the informal *Tu si puedes* – both meaning “Yes you can.” The finding was particularly true for companies like American Express that participants considered a “trusted” financial institution.

“The exploratory qualitative study that we conducted in four key U.S. Latino markets provided us with extremely vital information on how to properly target and better understand the many complexities of this market,” says Ana Palmer, director of account development and U.S. Commercial Card Services for

American Express. “The findings from this research initiative clearly validated many of our initial concerns and were instrumental in the creation of a very successful advertising campaign. Using the services of a research firm that specializes in this market segment proved pivotal in the overall success of the study.”

Rodriguez conducted the research in Miami, New York, Houston and Los Angeles using several projective techniques including picture sorting and personification exercises to assign personal characteristics to the brand. “Because participants had never seen or heard a Spanish-language American Express advertising campaign, they tended to choose powerful, fierce images to describe American Express, showing that they did not consider the company as one of their own. This helped American Express better target its new campaigns,” says Rodriguez. “These techniques worked extremely well among Latinos because they were entertained and engaged at the same time.”

Other tips

The group suggests several other tips to consider before starting a qualitative research project with U.S. Latinos.

- Consider holding the focus group on a Saturday. Latinos might have varying work schedules during the week, making after-work sessions difficult.
- Providing babysitting services is recommended, and providing transportation to and from the group can increase participation.
- Holding a raffle to further reward participants for showing up early can curb the amount of late arrivals.
- Having a bilingual host meet

participants in the lobby can make them feel more comfortable instantly.

- Moderators should dress informally to avoid being perceived as someone of higher status than the participants. Let them know up front that you don’t have any stake in the product and that you value their honest opinions even if they are negative towards the product.
- Less formal settings are often more productive. Many Latinos have never been in a large corporate building and might feel intimidated entering this type of structure. Some researchers find designing the room like a living room is effective. Ethnography is also very effective if the researcher fits easily into the household setting.
- Mixing genders in focus groups can be a problem. Many Latino households, especially Spanish-dominant families, have very clear roles within the family structure for men and women. As exhibited in the aquarium case study earlier, men are often the decision makers. This can inhibit women from expressing their true opinions in a group situation.
- Non-linear exercises tend to work better. Written exercises and linear exercises like laddering are generally ineffective with this group.
- Use a simultaneous interpreter who is able to pick up nuances and emotion in the participants’ voices. Also, provide an interpreter booth and headphones for the clients to minimize cross-talk and ensure that all of the participants’ comments are being heard. Do not use someone from the client’s company as an interpreter as they could be biased toward a certain finding and they likely do not have professional training as a simultaneous interpreter. | Q