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A Fresh Look at Hispanic Lifestyles: Social Cocooning, Stress, and Struggle

By Patricia Graham, CMO

Our view of our personal lifestyle affects our behavior. Marketers know that and use such information in their planning to reach and communicate with specific populations including Hispanics. So how do Hispanics in the U.S. feel about their lifestyles today – and how do their views differ from non-Hispanics? New findings by Knowledge Networks provide some valuable answers for anyone who needs to understand the multifaceted Hispanic marketplace.

KN conducted 22,565 nationally representative gen-pop online interviews from October to December 2008 and 12,550 from January to April 2009 – including 2,657 and 1,316 in each of the two periods with Hispanics – and analyzed results from period to period.

We found that 53 percent of Hispanics agree that they “love to shop,” a level unchanged from 2008 to 2009 and 18 points higher than their non-Hispanic counterparts. Yet 72% of Hispanics say, “I just don't have enough money to live the life I would like to live” – a level seven points higher than non-Hispanics. *(Note: All differences cited are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.)*

For Hispanics new to the U.S., settling here usually involves a dream of some kind – the wish for something better. The same is true for Hispanics who have

lived in the U.S. for decades – to have a lifestyle that they want to lead. Is this not true for us all, regardless of ethnicity? The search for a more comfortable financial situation is only one aspect of this dream, though an important one; but other elements of our lifestyle – more time with family and other intangibles – also play into the mix.

What is the status of this dream for Hispanics in the U.S.? We found that Hispanics ended 2008 with more confidence that they were “living the American Dream” than did their non-Hispanic counterparts (35% versus 32%, respectively, agreed “strongly” or “somewhat” with this statement). Yet while this top-two-box perspective has been relatively stable among Hispanics from October-December 2008 to January-April 2009, it is improving among non-Hispanics – up a statistically significant two points to 34%. Let's look at what the further indicators might be among Hispanics of how they view their lifestyles and what is changing.

We found, for example, that Hispanics have a higher baseline of struggle in their lifestyle than do non-Hispanics: 50% of Hispanics in the 2009 period agree (“strongly” or “somewhat”) with the statement, “No matter how hard I work, I can't seem to get ahead” – up from 46% in 2008; but among non-Hispanics, the level is 41%, essentially unchanged since last year.

Similarly, about 47% of Hispanics in each year agree that “so much of my time is spent working that I have very little time left for myself,” but the proportion among non-Hispanics is 33% – statistically lower than the 35% seen in 2008. This gets to a core element of quality of life, where the need to make money intersects with the wish for more time alone or with family and friends.

Accompanying the shift in Hispanics’ view of loss of personal time, we see a narrowing of their cross-ethnic social circle; in 2009, 57% report top-two-box agreement that “most of my friends are from the same racial or ethnic group as me,” up five percentage points from last year. This puts Hispanics below the level for non-Hispanics, which has stayed at about 60% agreement.



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Further, in 2009, 43% of Hispanics strongly or somewhat agree with the statement, “Life is so busy that I find I have less time to spend with family and friends” – up 6 points from 2008. This pace likely contributes to 50% of Hispanics saying “I feel stressed most of the time” in 2009 – up 5 points from 2008 and at a level 11 points higher than that for non-Hispanics.

And there are shifts in how Hispanics are keeping in touch – driven perhaps by changes in technology availability more than anything. Hispanics were pretty much on par with the general population in reporting use of cell phones – but their use has dropped, from 74% to 69%, whereas it rose slightly among non-Hispanics, from 75% to 77%. Hispanics reporting email use also declined, from 40% to 36%; the non-Hispanic level remains much higher (67%) and statistically unchanged since 2008.

Hispanic use of online communities for communications grew, however, with 8% reporting use in 2009 versus 5% last year; this may be due to the availability of more relevant community options. The level of online community use also rose, as well, among non-Hispanics, but less so – from 5% to 6%.

The robust sample and well-designed survey that produced these findings make them a good portrait of Hispanic views of their lifestyles and the directions they are taking. Clearly, their perceptions can diverge strongly from those of non-Hispanics – and those divergences have grown in some cases. Keeping these insights in mind could serve marketers from many quarters who need to understand lifestyle in the U.S. Hispanic community.

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