

# New media study refutes stereotypes about Hispanics

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WASHINGTON — Myths about the lifestyles of Hispanics and how they view the media have been refuted in a massive study, the first systematic and comprehensive examination of Hispanic Americans ever done.

The 15-month project, the work of Michigan State University and funded by Gannett Co., Inc., will be released here today.

Project CASA (Communication and Spanish-speaking Americans) found that "the myth of the alienated and hostile Hispanic is due for revision."

Hispanics aren't all that much different from Anglos in their evaluation and use of the media, including newspapers and television. They do not have less trust for TV and newspapers, nor do they see the media as being more biased or racist than do Anglos. In fact, the study found that Hispanics indicate more overall satisfaction with local newspapers and local TV news than do Anglos.

Those who think that Hispanics are interested only in soft news, features and advertisements are wrong, the study found.

The study, a multi-volumed work, collected answers and other data from Hispanic adults, adolescents, children and community leaders and from Anglo media executives in cities with Hispanic populations of at least 20 percent — Tucson, Ariz., Santa Fe, N.M., El Paso, Texas, and Salinas, San Bernardino, Stockton and Visalia, Calif.

It was aimed specifically at the mass media orientations of a key segment of the fastest-growing minority ethnic group in the country. It also took a look at the content and style of coverage of Hispanic news and Hispanic citizens.

"The major finding is that Hispanics have a far more favorable perception of the media and more acceptance of the media," said Judee Burgoon, one of the principal investigators with husband, Michael Burgoon, Bradley Greenberg and Felipe Korzeny.

Michael Burgoon was blunter: "Conceptions of Hispanic media use simply do not conform to reality."

Contrary to popular belief, Hispanics do read hard news, although the study found that they have less interest in national and local politics, business news and humorous stories when they appear. They tend to be more occasional print media consumers than Anglos, but both groups spend the same amount of time reading newspapers.

Anglos and Hispanics are no different in their preference for news of the local economy, agriculture, real estate and housing, the changing roles of women, consumer information, things to see and do.

Hispanics did, however, report higher interest in news about crime, accidents, Mexico and Latin America, job opportunities, immigration, discrimination, drug and alcohol problems, bilingual education, problems in the schools, union activities and other topics.

In television, the study found that Hispanics watch more morning and afternoon television entertainment, but join the Anglos in the same amount of prime time, evening TV. Equal percentages of both

groups watch local and national news broadcasts.

The study reported that the stereotype of the Hispanic as distrustful of and uninvolved in English-language media is just that, and countered the belief that Hispanics are more broadcast-oriented than print-oriented.

"In these seven cities at least, the typical Hispanic appears to be not alienated and hostile, but rather receptive and positively disposed toward the media," said the study.

The Burgoons said that Hispanics do see the media as a monolithic, powerful structure, but they also see it as competent and relatively unbiased. They do question coverage of crime news which involves Spanish surnames, and Michael Burgoon said that will lead to First Amendment discussion: "If they're unhappy about the way crime news is reported and yet use it as a part of the social register, what's a newspaper editor to do? You're damned if you do and damned if you don't."

He added, "This is an important minority and we don't know much about them. The more information you have about people, the better you can serve them with a newspaper."

The Burgoons said the study also debunks the stereotype of the Hispanic as a happy-go-lucky, lazy sort who reads only comics and keeps one eye on TV shows and one ear glued to a radio and is likely to pack up and leave town at the drop of a hat.

"They're rather a heterogeneous group," said Judee Burgoon. "They have the same common

threads that run through the rest of the American public."

Michael Burgoon said that television has been the major culprit in stereotyping, citing Greenberg's research which shows that TV shows depict Hispanics most often as crooks, comics or cops, with restaurant ownership being the highest occupational step.

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