

## **The marketing major and Hispanic students: An occupational stereotype?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Despite the Hispanic population growth in our country, only 7% of those earning a college degree in business each year are Hispanic. Within that 7%, only 5% major in marketing. The reason why so few Hispanic college students are interested in marketing is of interest. Students seek many sources of information when choosing a college major and the stereotype of members of occupations may represent one of those sources. Often college majors are chosen while students are still in high school. Therefore, a group of high school students completed a questionnaire in order to determine whether the stereotypical marketing manager's attributes were different between Hispanic and non-Hispanic white students. No significant differences were found between the two groups or between genders within each group.

Keywords: Occupational stereotypes, marketing major, Hispanic higher education

According to Carnevale et. al, (2011, p. 75) business is a popular major for college graduates and accounts for 25% of all degrees awarded each year. However, only 7% of individuals graduating with a degree in business are Hispanic. Within the business major, about 12% of graduates earned a degree in marketing or marketing research. However, only 5% of those earning a degree in marketing are Hispanic. Gender-wise, the male to female ratio of marketing majors is approximately equal, 49% and 51%, respectively.

Given the Hispanic population expansion in the U.S. and the corresponding increase in the proportion of middle class households within his group (Bernstein Research, 2010, p. 15), this population segment represents a growth opportunity for marketing goods and services. According to the study, the average Hispanic household spends less than non-Hispanics and the manner in which the income is spent is somewhat different between the two groups. Given this information, with so few Hispanics earning degrees in marketing, the question arises as to whether non-Hispanics have the ability to market these goods and services successfully to the Hispanic portion of our population. As indicated by Di Giovanni (2011), marketing messages and images need to be created to carefully avoid any Hispanic stereotype, such as an association with chili peppers or sombreros. He also indicates that Hispanic businesses are growing at three times the rate of business of other ethnic groups, but the Hispanic market is largely ignored and untapped, often because of misperceptions regarding its members. Di Giovanni found that one particular misperception is their questionable legal residency status in the U.S. and Abeyta and Hackett (2002) found that another misperception regards a universal Spanish proficiency in the Hispanic population. Dale (2008) offers advice about marketing to Hispanics and indicates, among other important issues, that the easiest way to access the market is from within the Hispanic community.

In addition, Hispanics, who represent our largest minority, are on average younger than non-Hispanic whites and are often bicultural which results in marketing challenges that do not exist for other groups (Martinez 2011). Martinez (2011) also states that although Hispanics represent 16% of our population, only 4% of the total advertising market is directed toward them. This seems to be a sign of wasted opportunities to reach an ever-growing segment of our population through appropriate marketing techniques. In 2009 Singh and Bartikowski indicated that although Hispanics are important consumers in our country, little research has been conducted in the area of U.S Hispanic advertising. Rizkallah and Truong (2010) later surveyed Hispanic American adults and listed implications for marketing managers interested in the Hispanic market, especially in Southern California. Pieraccini et al. (2010) indicated that due to the diversity and multicultural aspects of U.S. Hispanics, an integrated marketing campaign to reach the entire Hispanic population may be futile. They recommend focusing messages to a specific Hispanic subgroup in order to increase their effectiveness. Adams et. al (2008) investigated marketing strategy for Hispanics by assessing the locus of control among Latino and Anglo college students. Their results indicated that educated Hispanics are more acculturated and have attitudes more in line with other young educated consumers. They also felt that marketing efforts targeting young Hispanics separately could backfire if these efforts become a reminder of cultural values that this group is trying to discard. These results support the suggestion that more Hispanic business students should be encouraged to earn a degree in marketing.

A good choice of college major is important for all students and their decisions about a major could be the result of racial and gender differences (Song and Glick 2004). College major selection processes have previously been studied (Porter and Umbach 2006, Cohen and Hanno 1993, Kim et. al 2002) and methods to enhance students' role identity as marketing majors have

been identified (Kleine 2002). The relationship between personality traits and vocational choice (Garcia-Sedeño, et. al, 2009), and between personality traits and major declaration (Wikoff and Kafka 1978) has been investigated, but little has been done to determine the process of business major selection made by Hispanic students.

Major selection appears to be driven by many factors, including job availability, earnings potential, interest, and aptitude in the subject matter. Students have many methods for gathering information about potential college majors. Perceptions about individuals currently practicing the occupation may impact this decision and it is possible that college students already have preconceptions about members of occupations as they begin their academic career. Further, these preconceptions, or stereotypes, may actually impact a high school student's decision about choice of college major. Many students decide their college majors as early as high school (Booker, 2005); therefore their perceptions of members of the profession may influence their decision about whether to major in marketing. The purpose of this paper is to shed light on Hispanic high school students' perceptions of individuals in the marketing occupation.

## **PRIOR RESEARCH**

Cory et. al (2010) measured young Hispanic college students' perceptions of the members of three business occupations: (1) accountants, (2) bankers and (3) marketing managers and compared them to those of non-Hispanic white students. They found more differences in perceptions for the marketing manager between the two groups than for either of the other two occupations in their survey. Leppel (2001) determined that Hispanics were more likely to major in business than members of other minorities, but she did not focus on a particular major within business. Erlach (2000) expressed concern regarding the underrepresentation of Hispanics in the business professoriate and offered measures to address the issue. Maceli and Box (2010) focused on retention of Hispanics as business majors in higher education and determined characteristics which contributed toward their persistence. However, choice of major within business was not addressed. Simpson (2001) found no significant differences in choice of academic major between Hispanic, African and Native Americans, but discovered that gender is one of the primary determinants of major choice for all racial categories she investigated.

According to Macrae et. al (1994), stereotypes are ingrained in our society and are culturally transmitted. Our society uses them for filtering, organizing, and remembering information. Stereotypes come from a variety of sources. They are useful because they allow us to have expectations about individuals who are members of a common group, which then allows us to adapt our behavior because of our expectation that all group members share common characteristics (Lee et. al, 2007). Stereotypes exist in many forms, including ethnic, gender, age, racial and occupational. Occupational stereotypes have been found in several prior studies (McLean and Kalin 1994; Coate et. al 2003; Akbulut-Bailey 2009). Powell and Kido (1994) hypothesized that individuals may be interested in joining occupations where a stereotypical member demonstrates personality traits they find appealing. Conversely, individuals may not be interested in joining occupations where members demonstrate personality traits they find unappealing.

Stereotypes based on occupations are usually "inoffensive" (Schneider 2004, p. 522), but Cory (1992) feels they may impact the recruitment of qualified college graduates to certain occupations. Spranger identified occupational stereotypes as early as 1928, when he wrote ". . . no power in adult life moulds (sic) a man so strongly as his vocation. The whole mentality of the

agriculturist is entirely different from that of the stock raiser; the artisan differs from the clerk and the fisherman from the miner. Nature seems to stamp the soul with the special conditions under which he (man) wrests his livelihood from her” (cited in Guilford 1967, p. 57). Further, Coate et. al (2003) found that one source of information shown to influence individuals to enter a particular occupation is their preconceptions about members of that occupation. These preconceptions may be determined by the perceptions of personality traits (e.g., the stereotype) exhibited by its members. Sutin et. al (2009, p. 23) state that “Jobs . . . are more than just a source of income; they often become a core aspect of identity. . . ” Therefore, selection of a college major, which leads to a graduate’s occupation, has many implications, both intrinsic and extrinsic. This is further demonstrated by Decker (1986), who pointed out that our first impression of an individual is often affected by learning of his or her occupation.

## **METHOD**

A semantic differential instrument, similar to that used by Cory et. al (2010a) was designed to gather information about perceptions of the personality traits of members of four occupations: (1) accountants, (2) bankers, (3) marketing managers and (4) stockbrokers. These occupations were selected based on their similarity to those used in prior research (see, for example, Cory et. al 2007 and Cory et. al 2010b). These four occupations all provide services as opposed to goods. The Bureau of Labor Statistics has predicted growth in 15 of the 16 service-providing industries for the ten-year period 2008 to 2018, which is where most individuals entering the job market at that time will seek employment. Therefore, it was felt that study participants should be familiar with these occupations.

The terms for the semantic differential were obtained from the Sixteen Personality Factor (16 PF) Questionnaire (Cattell et. al 1993) which has been used extensively since the mid-1940s to determine individual personality traits (e.g., Garcia-Sedeño, et. al 2009). In the current study, rather than using the 16 PF Questionnaire to determine participants’ actual personality traits, the terms used by the 16 PF to describe one’s personality were used in a semantic differential, which was presented to study participants. Results were compiled to determine participants’ perceptions of personality traits for members of each of the four occupations in this study. This approach has been used successfully in prior research studies (Cory et. al 2008; Cory et. al 2010a; Cory et. al 2010b).

The sample was comprised of high school seniors attending one of four different schools located in the Southwestern U.S. The instrument was carefully explained to participants and they were given an opportunity to ask questions prior to completing the questionnaire. A total of 365 responses was received, but 11 were not complete, which resulted in 354 usable surveys. Of the 354 usable surveys, 177 (50%) were completed by Hispanic students and 47 (13%) were completed by non-Hispanic white students. The analysis was restricted to the total of 212 surveys completed by these two groups. The high school students ranged in age from 17 to 19. For Hispanics, 48% were males and 52% were females. For non-Hispanic whites, 57% were males and 43% were females. The sample was restricted to high school seniors, and was not random. However, each school was selected from a different part of the city and should represent a good cross section of individuals in their last year of high school.

The students were presented with pairs of personality traits, based on the 16 PF questionnaire, which could be descriptive of a member of each of the four occupations. The semantic differential presented each pair of terms separated by a seven-line measuring stick. Participants chose which of each pair of words they felt was more descriptive of a member of the

occupation indicated. Participants were told to think of a member of the respective occupation and then to place a mark between each pair of descriptive terms based on the strength of the member's association with the term. For example, the terms "Cool" and "Warm" were presented to the students in the following format:

Very Fairly Slightly Neither Slightly Fairly Very  
Cool \_\_\_\_\_ Warm

If the term on the left was selected, the response was coded -3, -2 or -1, based on the strength indicated (i.e., very, fairly or slightly, respectively) and 3, 2 or 1 if the term on the right was selected, again based on the strength indicated (i.e., very, fairly or slightly, respectively). If the response was "neither," the response was coded as a zero. The terms and coding methods were those used by Cory et. al (2008). The last comparison asked the participants to indicate whether they thought a member of the occupation was more likely to be male, female or neither. The terms and definitions provided to the participants are shown in Table 1(Appendix). This information was printed on each page of the survey.

## RESULTS

T-tests were computed in order to determine whether any of the attributes were different for the marketing manager for two groups: Hispanics and non-Hispanic Whites. The results are presented in the first and second column of Table 2 (Appendix) respectively. The term found to be significantly different from zero is underlined in the first column. The results for Hispanic students indicated that 10 of the 16 terms were descriptive of a marketing manager. As shown in the first column, Hispanic students perceived that a marketing manager is an abstract thinker, emotionally stable, dominant, conscientious, bold, tough-minded, trusting, self-assured, following self-image and more likely to be male. The results for non-Hispanic white students indicated that 8 of the 16 terms were descriptive of a marketing manager. As shown in the second column, non-Hispanic white students perceived that a marketing manager is cool, dominant, conscientious, bold, tough-minded, self-assured, following self-image and more likely to be male. In all but two cases, (Sober/Enthusiastic and Practical/Imaginative) the direction of the t-tests was identical between Hispanic and non-Hispanic white student, which may indicate a general consensus between the two groups. Therefore, t-tests were computed to determine whether any significant differences between the two groups were found. The results are presented in the third column, indicating no significant differences in perceptions were found between the two groups.

Attention was then focused on analyzing the responses based on gender. T-tests were computed to determine any differences in response between males and females for both of the groups in the study. Only two significant differences were found for Hispanics, as shown in Table 3. Males felt that the marketing manager would be described as cool, but females did not. Male Hispanics also felt that a marketing manager was more likely to be male than did the females. No gender differences were found for the perceptions of the non-Hispanic white students.

## DISCUSSION

The results are interesting in that Hispanic students have definite perceptions regarding marketing managers' attributes. Ten of the 17 attributes are statistically significant from zero. Hispanic students feel that a marketing manager is (1) an abstract thinker (more intelligent), (2) emotionally stable (faces reality, calm), (3) dominant (assertive, aggressive, stubborn, competitive, bossy), (4) conscientious (conforming, moralistically staid, rule-bound), (5) bold (venturesome, uninhibited, can take stress), (6), tough-minded (self-reliant, no-nonsense, rough, realistic), (7) trusting (accepting conditions, easy to get on with), (8) self-assured (secure, feels free of guilt, untroubled, self-satisfied), (9) following self-image (socially precise, compulsive), and (10) more likely to be a male. It is also interesting that non-Hispanic white students have similar perceptions. Eight attributes are statistically significant for the second group of participants, and include seven of the same attributes. The only differences found were that non-Hispanic whites felt the marketing manager was cool (reserved, impersonal, detached and aloof), and did not feel the marketing manager was an abstract thinker or emotionally stable. Further, no differences between the two groups were statistically significant. These results indicate that differing perceptions of marketing managers would not necessarily explain the disappointing number of Hispanics who choose to major in marketing.

Looking at perception differences between genders is also interesting. No differences were found in the perceptions of males and females for non-Hispanic whites and only two were found for Hispanics. Hispanic males felt the marketing manager was cool (reserved, impersonal, detached and aloof) and more likely to be a male than did their female counterparts. These results indicate that differing perceptions of marketing managers between genders would not necessarily explain an inability to recruit male or female Hispanics to the marketing major.

There are many elements and information sources that influence choice of major, and the perceived stereotype of those already in the profession makes only one contribution toward that decision. Keeping in mind that individuals may be interested in joining occupations where a stereotypical member demonstrates personality traits they find appealing, one must ask whether the attributes agreed upon by the two groups would be appealing to Hispanics. Also, Hispanics may erroneously believe that they do not have the attributes associated with their perception of a marketing manager. These are matters for future research.

In the meantime, recruiting Hispanic students to the marketing major continues to be of concern and importance. As with all students, this target population should be informed about the personal and professional attributes required in order to be successful in the field and made aware of career opportunities for marketing graduates. Providing this information requires dedication on the part of all business school faculty as well as those in administrative positions in higher education. But employees in higher education need assistance from those in the "real world." Individuals in the marketing occupation could become more active in the recruitment of Hispanic students to the marketing major. This process could begin when the students are college freshmen or even while they are still in high school. If high school or early university years are the times when students decide their college major, it makes sense to expose them to successful Hispanics currently in marketing. Therefore, business school faculty should reach out to the Hispanic community and encourage those with a marketing career to serve as classroom speakers. The American Marketing Association (AMA) and the National Society of Hispanic MBAs (NSHMBA) are both ideal organizations to assist faculty in this endeavor.

Hispanics in the marketing occupation should readily agree to participate in recruiting programs. They could also arrange office visits, marketing internships and job shadowing opportunities. These activities should stimulate more interest in, knowledge of and enthusiasm for a career in marketing. Organizations of all sizes and affiliations need qualified individuals in their marketing departments and Hispanics are strategically aligned to promote goods and services in this segment of our society. As the Hispanic population grows in our country, everyone has a stake in their professional success in all fields, and marketing seems to be especially advantageous for this group of students.

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## APPENDIX

Table 1: Definition of Terms Provided to Participants

<b>Term on the Left Side of the Semantic Differential</b>	<b>Term on the Right Side of the Semantic Differential</b>
1. Cool: Reserved, impersonal, detached, aloof	Warm: Outgoing, kindly, easy-going, participating, likes people
2. Concrete Thinker: less intelligent	Abstract Thinker: More intelligent
3. Affected by Feelings: Emotionally less stable, easily annoyed	Emotionally Stable: Faces reality, calm
4. Submissive: Humble, mild, easily led, accommodating	Dominant: Assertive, aggressive, stubborn, competitive, bossy
5. Sober: Restrained, prudent, taciturn, serious	Enthusiastic: Spontaneous, heedless, expressive, cheerful
6. Expedient: Disregards rules, self-indulgent	Conscientious: Conforming, moralistically staid, rule-bound
7. Shy: Threat-sensitive, timid, hesitant, intimidated	Bold: Venturesome, uninhibited, can take stress
8. Tough-minded: Self-reliant, no-nonsense, rough, realistic	Tender-minded: Sensitive, over-protected, intuitive, refined
9. Trusting: Accepting conditions, easy to get on with	Suspicious: Hard to fool, distrustful, skeptical
10. Practical: Concerned with “down to earth” issues, steady	Imaginative: Absent-minded, absorbed in thought, impractical
11. Forthright: Unpretentious, open, genuine, artless	Shrewd: Polished, socially aware, diplomatic, calculating
12. Self-assured: Secure, feels free of guilt, untroubled, self-satisfied	Apprehensive: Self-blaming, guilt-prone, insecure, worrying
13. Conservative: Respecting traditional ideas	Experimenting: Liberal, critical, open to change
14. Group-oriented: A joiner and sound follower, listens to others	Self-sufficient: Resourceful, prefers own decisions
15. Undisciplined: Lax, careless of social rules	Following self image: Socially precise, compulsive
16. Relaxed: Tranquil, composed, has low drive, not frustrated	Tense: Frustrated, overwrought, has high drive

Table 2: T-tests for Attributes and Differences between Hispanics and Non-Hispanic Whites

<b>Attributes</b>	<b>Hispanics</b>	<b>Non-Hispanic Whites</b>	<b>T-Test for Difference</b>
1. <u>Cool/Warm</u>	-1.35	*-2.07	1.03
2. Concrete Thinker/ <u>Abstract Thinker</u>	**3.05	1.61	0.05
3. Affected by Feelings/ <u>Emotionally Stable</u>	*2.26	1.38	-0.20
4. Submissive/ <u>Dominant</u>	**3.65	**3.33	-1.09
5. Sober/Enthusiastic	1.49	-0.17	0.86
6. Expedient/ <u>Conscientious</u>	*2.75	*2.03	-0.54
7. Shy/ <u>Bold</u>	**6.78	**4.44	-0.62
8. <u>Tough-minded/Tender-minded</u>	**4.04	*-2.06	-0.19
9. <u>Trusting/Suspicious</u>	**3.54	-0.84	-1.03
10. Practical/Imaginative	0.18	-0.94	0.90
11. Forthright/Shrewd	0.44	0.60	-0.27
12. <u>Self-assured/Apprehensive</u>	**2.81	**3.62	1.61
13. Conservative/Experimenting	0.44	0.23	0.00
14. Group-oriented/Self-sufficient	-1.21	-0.14	-0.42
15. Undisciplined/ <u>Following Self Image</u>	**3.82	**2.60	-0.46
16. Relaxed/Tense	1.49	0.24	0.51
17. Female/ <u>Male</u>	**4.02	*2.95	-0.55

\*significant at 5%

\*\*significant at 1%

Table 3: T-test for Gender Differences

Attributes	Hispanics	Non-Hispanic Whites
1. <u>Cool</u> /Warm	** <u>-3.03</u>	1.21
2. Concrete Thinker/ <u>Abstract Thinker</u>	-1.49	1.47
3. Affected by Feelings/ <u>Emotionally Stable</u>	-0.98	-1.30
4. Submissive/ <u>Dominant</u>	0.25	-0.51
5. Sober/ <u>Enthusiastic</u>	-0.87	0.55
6. Expedient/ <u>Conscientious</u>	-0.81	0.78
7. Shy/ <u>Bold</u>	-0.39	-0.42
8. Tough-minded/ <u>Tender-minded</u>	0.26	0.21
9. Trusting/ <u>Suspicious</u>	0.34	0.77
10. Practical/ <u>Imaginative</u>	-0.54	-0.11
11. Forthright/ <u>Shrewd</u>	0.13	0.08
12. Self-assured/ <u>Apprehensive</u>	-0.35	1.44
13. Conservative/ <u>Experimenting</u>	0.44	1.51
14. Group-oriented/ <u>Self-sufficient</u>	-0.44	-0.56
15. Undisciplined/ <u>Following Self Image</u>	-1.01	-0.89
16. Relaxed/ <u>Tense</u>	-1.29	0.68
17. Female/ <u>Male</u>	* <u>2.26</u>	0.28

\*significant at 5%

\*\*significant at 1%

A negative t-score indicates that males chose the term on the left (underlined) more than the females chose it. A positive t-score indicates that males chose the term on the right (underlined) more than the females chose it.