Latinos and the media: Patterns, changes and ideas for more connection

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The media landscape is constantly, rapidly shifting. However, much of the conversation about what this means has focused on traditional American news organizations and English-speaking news consumers. But what does the explosion of digital news, social networks and mobile connectivity mean for native Spanish speakers and bilingual English and Spanish speakers in the United States? Over the past 12 months, The Center for Investigative Reporting has undertaken a series of experiments to reach native Spanish speakers and bilingual audiences in the U.S. We’ve also compiled the most recent research about native Spanish speakers’ and bilingual individuals’ media preferences, consumption habits and opinions.
There are 55 million Hispanic people living in the U.S., and among that population, 62 percent speak mainly English or are bilingual (Pew 2016). However, even with high English proficiency, there is ample evidence that Spanish-dominant and bilingual speakers consume more Spanish-language media than English and that they trust Spanish-language media more than English. For example, 78 percent of Spanish-language dominant households report that they watch television predominantly in Spanish at home, and 50 percent of multilingual households report viewing about 50 percent of television in Spanish (Nielsen 2011).

Spanish-language media in the U.S. are almost exclusively commercial (as opposed to nonprofit) and thus strive for ratings and advertising dollars. This means that the vast majority of programming, both on TV and for radio, is entertainment. For example, through an analysis of Univision stations’ programming, we found that stations have between three and five hours a day of news programming, including “soft” news shows such as “Despierta América” (similar to “Good Morning America”).

Spanish-language news media tend to more closely cover issues of importance to their audience, such as immigration (Branton and Dunaway 2008). Furthermore, the ways in which Spanish-language media cover issues that are important to Latinos in the U.S. are different from English-language media approaches. A recent ethnographic content analysis found that in news segments about Latino migrants and immigrants on Fox News, MSNBC and Univision, Fox News portrays Latino immigrants in a generally neutral or negative tone, MSNBC in a neutral or positive tone and Univision a positive tone. Fox’s stories often refer to Latino immigrants as a “problem to be solved,” while Univision frames immigration as a problem of global, neoliberal capitalism that creates a need for mass migration and defines activism and social change as a solution (Miller 2016).

While it is important and logical for Spanish media to cover issues salient to their audience, it also presents a risk that other important information, including stories revealed through investigative reporting, will not reach communities affected by the findings of these projects.
Spanish-language television networks in the U.S. reached peak audiences in 2008 and 2009; audience size has been declining since. In 2015, MundoFox shut down its news division and Univision’s news viewership shrank. Univision’s 41 local affiliates also saw a decrease in audience size during the same period. Telemundo’s television audience grew modestly, including for news programs. On the bright side, both Univision and Telemundo’s digital audiences grew in 2015, including for news content (Pew 2016).

The national Spanish-language television networks are (in order of audience size):

- Univision
- Telemundo
- MundoMax
- Azteca
- Estrella TV
Radio continues to be a popular medium for Spanish speakers in the U.S. The history of Spanish-language radio in the U.S. is one of stations built around personalities. Individual people leased time from English stations to broadcast Spanish-language programs, and some stations eventually became fully Spanish.

In 2015, there were 31 stations with a primarily Spanish news format in the U.S. These stations reported that revenue was down 2 percent from 2014 to 2015. For Univision, the largest radio network in the U.S., radio revenue dropped by 9 percent in 2015 (Pew 2016).
There are three daily Spanish-language print newspapers in the U.S. In 2015, circulation was down for the three that reported: El Diario, La Opinión and El Nuevo Herald. However, according to Pew: “Newer platforms and smaller organizations focused on the Latino community fared better by a variety of measures” (Pew 2016). In 2015, almost half of weekly and biweekly Spanish-language papers increased their circulation. The largest of these publications is El Especialito, a weekly based in New Jersey.

The three Spanish-language daily newspapers in the U.S. are:
- El Diario (New York)
- La Opinión (Los Angeles)
- El Nuevo Herald (Miami)

Wire services

The major international Spanish-language news wires are:
- Notimex
- AFP
- EFE
- AP
- Reuters

U.S. national podcasts (news only)
- Democracy Now
- Radio Ambulante
- CNN en Español
Internet

Nielsen, a global information and measurement company, has noted that the U.S. Hispanic online market is the fastest-growing online segment, though it is less clear what the demand for news is among this segment (Boyle 2009). In 2007, Portada.com shared Google research results that found the following regarding online Spanish content with regard to native Spanish and bilingual Spanish and English speakers (Boyle 2009):

- Spanish content must be unique and relevant.
- Spanish performs at a higher level than English.
- Spanish appears more authoritative.
- Hispanics are more usage intensive, viewing 25 percent more pages daily and spending 20 percent more time online than the general market.
According to the 2010 U.S. Census, the nation’s Latino population grew to more than 50 million, more than double its size in 1990 and up 46.3 percent since 2000 (Pew 2011). In 2013, the Hispanic population had grown to 54 million, accounting for 17 percent of the U.S. population.

The Latino population also is the nation’s youngest ethnic group. The median age of Latinos is 27; it’s 42 for non-Hispanic whites and 32 for non-Hispanic blacks. Among Latinos, a majority are bilingual. However, as births account more for Latino population growth than the arrival of new immigrants, the nation’s Latino population is also becoming more U.S. born. All these factors could pose a threat to Spanish-language media operations. So far, the contrary has occurred; Spanish-language newspaper circulation rose through 2013, until it decreased slightly in 2014 and again in 2015. And while Spanish-language TV networks’ audience size and radio stations’ revenue have been decreasing, digital audiences have been growing.

In 2011, Nielson reported that while 77 percent of U.S. Hispanics speak English well (according to current American Community Survey estimates), 61 percent ages 18 and older told Nielsen that they prefer to speak Spanish in their homes, versus 17 percent who say they speak only English. Furthermore, English-speaking Latinos report that they watch significant amounts of TV in Spanish (Nielsen 2011).

According to a 2012 data from a Pew survey, Spanish speakers in the U.S. believe that Spanish-only news outlets do a significantly better job covering topics specifically relevant to Hispanics in the country than English news outlets (see figure below). These survey results have been supported by numerous academic studies using varied methodologies (e.g., Branton and Dunaway 2008; Kerevel 2011; Albarran 2009). Monica Lozano, CEO of ImpreMedia, emphasized that their audience trusts Spanish news more deeply than English in a 2011 interview on NPR.
According to Pew, when compared with other segments of the U.S. population, Latinos are most likely to have a smartphone, to live in a household without a landline phone and to access the internet from a mobile device. Ninety-four percent of English-dominant Pew survey respondents reported using the internet, 86 percent of bilingual English and Spanish speakers and 74 percent of Spanish-dominant respondents (up from 36 percent in 2009). Furthermore, 91 percent of U.S.-born Latino adults use the internet, 78 percent of foreign born (Pew 2016).

The digital divide used to refer to the gap between those who had access to technology and those who did not. In the U.S. today, while there is still a divide in access, more often researchers are looking into a digital split in terms of use of technologies and, more specifically, why different segments of the population choose to use different technologies in different ways to access information.

One recent study found that Latinos and African Americans reported significantly greater information expectancies for network television than Caucasians, meaning their past experience leads them to have a particular expectation about what they will learn in the future (Eastin et al. 2015). The same was true for radio, for which Latinos and African Americans also reported greater information expectancies than Caucasians.

English- and Spanish-language media portrayals of Latinos vary greatly. Latinos are consistently underrepresented on English-language television (17 percent of U.S. population, 5 percent of TV characters depicted on prime time). Latina women “are characterized by higher verbal aggression and a lower work ethic. Latino men are judged as less articulate and more hot-tempered than White men. Further, Latinos are portrayed as lazier and as less intelligent than their White and Black counterparts” (Ortiz et al. 2015). On Spanish-language media, women appear in almost equal numbers to their male counterparts. While men hold more professional jobs, women hold more “parental/familial positions” (Mastro & Ortiz 2008).

Given this reality, Spanish and bilingual speakers might choose to watch Spanish-language media to bolster their ethnic social identity (Harwood 1999) and as a means of protecting their own self-identity (Abrams & Giles 2007). In one study, as consumption by Spanish and bilingual speakers of English-language content increased, so did general perceptions of prejudice, discrimination and legitimacy of treatment (Ortiz et al. 2015). Important for society as a whole, representations of Latinos in English-language television not only negatively influence whites’ evaluations of Latinos, but it also “may play a role in influencing Latinos’ perceptions of intergroup relations in the United States” (Ortiz et al. 2015).

Some research points to a correlation between civic engagement and local Spanish-language news coverage. For example, researchers Felix Oberholzer-Gee and Joel Waldfogel found a larger voter turnout (5 to 10 percent increase) of Latinos in communities with a dedicated local Spanish-language TV news source (2006). However, research has not been carried out to determine whether the same effect is present with Spanish-language daily newspapers.

“It might seem that the Hispanic population is divided among those who get their news in English or in Spanish. Instead, choices of news media are much more fluid. ... Many Latinos pick and choose not only among different types of news media but also the language of the media. In their choices Latinos exercise a far greater...
level of bilingualism than they do in reading and writing” (Velázquez 2015).

Eighty-six percent of Latino adults say that on a typical weekday, they get their news from television (Pew 2013). That is down slightly from 2006, when 92 percent said the same. More than half of Latinos surveyed by Pew say they get their news from radio (56 percent) and/or the internet (56 percent), while less than half (42 percent) say they get news from print newspapers.

Given the large audience for Spanish-language radio in the U.S., as well as the audience for international radio streaming over the web, it is perhaps surprising that there are so few Spanish-language podcasts. For this report, we found only two news podcasts that focus on U.S. news: Democracy Now and CNN en Español. There are a few other news and entertainment podcasts, such as the magazine-style Radio Bilingue. Most other Spanish-language podcasts cover sports, religion or Spanish-language instruction. Radio Bilingue streams its programming live through iTunes and on its website, but it does not provide a downloadable podcast.

CIR’s experiments

Over the last year, CIR has produced four investigations to serve Spanish-speaking and bilingual audiences. We have experimented with different platforms and distribution models and identified opportunities to leverage partner content to serve Spanish-speaking audiences. In addition to the work CIR already has published, there are several other projects underway, which are described in the “Future Plans” section of this report.

Many of the investigations that CIR undertakes have Spanish-speaking sources and are important and relevant to Spanish-speaking communities in the U.S. To create content in Spanish from these investigations, CIR hired a bilingual reporter/producer in 2015 and a bilingual sound designer and audio engineer in 2016. Over the course of 12 months, CIR has conducted the following content production and partnership experiments.
On June 23, 2015, we launched *Rape on the Night Shift*, a collaboration between Reveal from The Center of Investigative Reporting, Univision, the Investigative Reporting Program at UC Berkeley, KQED and PBS FRONTLINE. This project builds on the revelations of a previous story we produced with those same partners, *Rape in the Fields*, which led to new legislation in California designed to protect female farmworkers from sexual abuse.

Unique versions of Rape on the Night Shift were distributed on multiple platforms in order to reach a wide range of audiences. The one-hour documentary aired on Univision in Spanish and on FRONTLINE in English. CIR published both English-language and Spanish-language text stories on our website. Univision published the text of the Spanish-language story on its website.
CIR also produced an English-language episode featuring this investigation for “Reveal,” our weekly public radio program and podcast. In October 2015, that investigation formed the basis for CIR’s first Spanish-language Reveal podcast in this series. The podcast was made available on Reveal’s SoundCloud page.

The project resulted in significant real-world change. In December 2015, ABM Industries Inc., a leading provider of janitorial services, announced that it settled the San Francisco Ferry Building rape case featured in our story that it long had been fighting. As part of the settlement, the company agreed to implement a much more thorough process for investigating and reviewing any allegations of rape or attempted rape by any current or former janitorial worker in California.

In March 2016, after seeing the documentary “Rape on the Night Shift,” California Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez announced that her office would introduce legislation to increase protections for female janitors. And in the wake of the investigation, women janitors around California banded together to hold demonstrations throughout the state, have been arrested for blocking traffic in an act of civil disobedience, have fasted near the state Capitol, and posted messages on billboards in the San Francisco Bay Area that depict a female cleaner who is being grabbed and silenced.

As a result of this pressure, in September, Gov. Jerry Brown signed that bill proposed by Assemblywoman Gonzalez into law. It requires sexual assault training for all janitorial company employees and will create a registry of janitorial firms in California, which worker advocates say makes it easier to hold problematic companies accountable for violations ranging from wage theft to sexual assault.

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has held public screenings of the documentary to bring attention to the issue.
In December 2015, Telemundo aired the Spanish-language hourlong documentary “Batalla en la Frontera,” and MSNBC aired an English-language version. The project – “Battle of the Border” in English – was a co-production of Telemundo, MSNBC and CIR that examined the U.S. Border Patrol’s use of deadly force along the U.S.-Mexico border. CIR contributed reporting and production for the documentary.

Highlighting specific shootings involving agents and how a hiring surge that began more than a decade ago contributed to these issues, the investigation charted several incidents along the border in Arizona and Texas.

The Telemundo audience in the 18-34 age range was 379,000.
The Investigative Fund conducted an investigation into privately owned immigrant prisons in Texas, which was adapted to be a “Reveal” radio piece. The text story was published by The Nation.

The Feb. 6 episode of “Reveal” featured the co-production, which focused on uncovering new information regarding immigration and the border. We featured three groundbreaking stories, including a segment focused on the inadequate medical care at privately operated federal prisons housing noncitizens. Relying on extensive medical files obtained by Investigative Fund reporter Seth Freed Wessler, this investigation exposed numerous cases of medical negligence, which in some cases led to fatalities. We revealed that of the nearly 23,000 inmates in this shadowy prison system, 40 percent are serving time for immigration crimes, mostly “illegal re-entry,” or crossing back over the border after being deported. Wessler's
investigation shines a light on the inequitable care many migrants receive while in U.S. federal custody and draws attention to the lack of accountability by the government for the conditions in privatized prisons.

Reveal is currently producing a Spanish-language podcast featuring this investigation. Our bilingual reporter/producer is serving as lead producer and is working with The Investigative Fund on an upcoming examination of the au pair industry.

On Aug. 18, the U.S. Justice Department announced it would end its use of private prisons after officials concluded the facilities are both less safe and less effective at providing correctional services than those run by the federal government. In the announcement, Deputy Attorney General Sally Yates cited The Nation’s reporting about deaths under questionable circumstances in privately operated facilities.
Reveal’s investigation of temp agencies’ hiring practices found a pervasive pattern of discrimination based on race, gender and age in the industry. As tensions mount over racial injustice in America, we found that racist, sexist and otherwise discriminatory hiring is endemic in that fast-growing industry. The story – which made evident that companies are outsourcing illegal discrimination to temp firms – was published on CIR’s website and was featured as the lead story on a January 2016 “Reveal” show.

Following the episode, the company at the center of the investigation launched an internal inquiry and created an anonymous hotline for victims. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission reached out to us to say it would look into the matter.

To extend the investigation’s reach and ensure affected communities saw the story, CIR provided reporting resources and support to Univision’s Chicago and New Jersey affiliates. The New
Jersey affiliate produced a two-part television series, which included original reporting from the reporter based on information CIR uncovered.

With CIR’s assistance, Univision in Chicago produced a two-part series on the topic in Spanish, which aired during sweeps week in February 2016 and reached a key audience for the information.
Reveal’s investigation into student debt in the U.S. found that while Congress privatized a student loan program intended to give more Americans access to higher education, lawmakers created a profit center for Wall Street and a system of college finance that has fed the nation’s cycle of inequality. Step by step, Congress has enacted one law after another to make student debt the worst kind of debt for Americans – and the best kind for banks and debt collectors. Today, just about everyone involved in the student loan industry makes money off students – the banks, private investors, even the federal government.

CIR partnered with Consumer Reports to distribute this story through both organizations’ websites and in Consumer Reports’ magazine. Additionally, Consumer Reports translated the story into Spanish and made it available to its partner ImpreMedia. ImpreMedia ran the full story in its properties El Diario, La Raza, La Opinión and La Prensa.
Future plans

CIR is currently producing a series of Spanish-language podcasts with the goal of releasing a pilot podcast season. The series will include the Rape on the Night Shift podcast that was released in October 2015, as well as one focused on the outsourcing discrimination investigation and an episode inspired by The Investigative Fund’s immigrant-only prisons story. CIR is producing two additional podcasts based on two radio episodes in English that have not yet aired. There are leads for other stories, but it is too soon to say which will mature into podcast episodes in Spanish.

Findings

1. Reporting should happen in both English and Spanish.

It’s vital to have reporters and producers who can work in English and Spanish and who understand both cultures. Interviews with bilingual sources can be done in the same sitting in both languages, allowing the production to be extremely efficient and providing sound bites and stories in both languages. For stories such as those discussed above, some sources speak only one of the two languages. This allows the same journalists to do both interviews without having to get additional resources for translation. As a result of CIR increasing its bilingual and bicultural staff in the past year, the organization has been able to immediately tackle important stories as they arise, such as the spread of Zika virus in Puerto Rico and the U.S. This increased reporting power has led to stories for Reveal in English that might not have otherwise been possible and has highlighted the experience Latinos in the U.S. for English-speaking audiences that otherwise might view these communities and individuals through the unfavorable media coverage discussed earlier in this paper.

2. Even with bilingual journalists, a Spanish-language show requires significant internal capacity to be built.

The production of a high-quality Spanish program also requires audio engineers and editors who can operate in both languages. CIR hired a second audio engineer in January who is bilingual. Still, she was hired, along with our lead audio engineer, to handle the heavy demands of producing the weekly English show. Moving to a regular Spanish-language show would require dedicated staff to produce its programming. A single reporter/producer overseeing Spanish segments — while also being responsible for producing English segments — has meant that production of “Reveal” in Spanish is slow-going, even when Spanish-language tape is readily available.
3. As with any media product, successful distribution and engagement requires sophisticated audience development.

CIR has a fully developed distribution network for Reveal (in English) that has been built slowly over time: public radio stations, a podcast, all of our social media channels and our website. The organization had none of these in Spanish while conducting this year-long experiment. When CIR distributed the Spanish-language stories directly through its English-language channels, the stories gained little traction. The best option was to partner with existing Spanish-language outlets to ensure the important stories would reach their audiences. However, if CIR aspires to build a Spanish and bilingual audience for its investigative reporting, it will need dedicated staff to lead audience development beyond potential media partnerships, especially staff who can engage with audiences in Spanish through online and offline social networks.

4. Existing Spanish-language outlets need a partner to help them figure out long-form audio.

Content partnerships can be fruitful for both parties. CIR can reach Spanish-language media outlets’ audiences, and these organizations can benefit from CIR’s expertise in producing long-form podcasts. Given the high cost of producing Spanish-language content and building relationships with Spanish-speaking audiences, CIR has worked with partners that have capacity, audiences and relationships. Through these partnerships with organizations such as Univision and Telemundo, CIR has reached large audiences with stories of critical importance to Spanish speakers and bilingual audiences in the U.S. Furthermore, these media outlets’ brands are strengthened in the eyes of their audiences through the high-quality content. When CIR’s Reveal reporters worked with local Spanish-language reporters to localize stories and produce new content, the stations automatically increased their investigative reporting capacity.

5. There is huge opportunity for Spanish-language and bilingual media.

Native Spanish-speaking and bilingual audiences in the U.S. are consuming Spanish-language media content at increasing rates. As these audiences look for news and information in the digital space, big Spanish-language media outlets are hustling to fill the gap. But there’s opportunity, especially in the audio space, for more Spanish-language content. And while the assumption used to be that English-only and English-dominant audiences in the U.S. would not read subtitles, scripted shows such as “Narcos” (Netflix) and “Jane the Virgin” (The CW) are proving that there are new possibilities for truly bilingual content, especially for younger audiences.
Bibliography


