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## Latinos Go To The Movies: A Survey and Comparison of Latino Film Audiences in Austin

### **Introduction**

The film audience is a complex, heterogeneous mass made up of multiple smaller audiences, each of which seeks out films and information about them in different ways. This paper seeks to examine these constitutive audiences—particularly the Latino audience—in order to understand what people know about the films they see, how they learn about them, what sources of information are most influential, and how frequently they attend the movies. By presenting the results of an in-theater survey conducted in Austin, Texas over nine days in July, I will seek to determine how contemporary film audiences are behaving in terms of factors that influence film selection.

In particular, I will highlight Latinos' answers to this survey, and consider them in comparison with the wider film audience, as well as with other ethnic groups. I will focus on several key factors, such as Latinos' high patronage of independent films, and what sources of information are most influential across the community. Above all, I will problematize the notion of a single Latino "audience," and suggest why the Hollywood film industry needs to give greater consideration to potential Latino viewers in the wider film audience. This study is, by its nature, largely exploratory. There is little recent or relevant in-theater research of audiences that has been conducted in an academic setting from a critical, cultural studies perspective. Most scholarship on film audiences tend to consider them as a homogenous mass, failing to consider how issues such as age, sex, race, income, education or other factors might heavily influence their exposure to information and eventual film selection.

Instead, this project combines in-theater marketing research techniques with a theoretical approach that considers the audience as a wider social phenomenon. Differences based on specific films' marketing campaigns and individual viewers will thus be subsumed into the larger pool of data, comprised of approximately 300 responses per question, from viewers who reported on their decisions to see twenty-five different films. Thus, any statistical significance cannot be attributed to any one individual or film, but rather the audiences, and their demographic categories. The following data presents some of the more interesting and significant findings particularly as they relate to Latino audiences here in Austin. I will discuss the demographics of the audiences surveyed, why they chose to see their films, what information they had about their films, the sources of this information, and overall frequency of attending and renting movies.

## **Methodology**

Before presenting the results, I will explain my methodology. This paper presents the results of a survey administered in the Austin, Texas area during nine days in July on seven total occasions at four different locations. At each theater patrons were approached inside the lobby or while in line to purchase tickets and asked to take the survey as part of a school project. The survey took approximately seven minutes for each respondent to complete on his or her own. Ultimately, 350 surveys were collected and 341 were found valid for analysis. Results were input into SPSS, with crosstabs and average means analyzed for statistical significance where relevant or necessary.

## Demographics

First, let us consider the demographics of who responded to this survey, and how they compare to the overall demographics of Austin, as determined by the 2006 American Community Survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. Clearly, nearly all minorities

<b>Race</b>	<b>Audiences Surveyed</b>	<b>Austin, TX</b>
Caucasian	79.3%	59.1%
Latino	11.6%	35.9%
Black	1.7%	8.5%
Asian	2.4%	5.5%
Multi-Racial	3.8%	2.2% <sup>1</sup>
Alaskan / Native American	1.4%	0.3%

are underrepresented in the sample. This, I believe, is due to the theaters and locations available to conduct the survey. Though I initially contacted every movie theater in Austin, only four were willing to permit me to conduct my survey in their lobby: Theater A, an upscale eight-theater house specializing in independent, foreign, and art cinema; Theater B, a suburban, four-theater house specializing in mainstream films; Theater C, a ten-theater house specializing in mainstream films; and Theater D, a four-theater house on the campus of the University of Texas, specializing in both mainstream and independent films. The rest refused, citing various corporate policies, or asked for exorbitant access fees. Only one of the four theaters surveyed was located in a predominantly-Latino neighborhood, and this theater was only surveyed once due to scheduling difficulties. Thus, without full access to the larger multiplex theaters, as well as theaters with greater geographic diversity, it will be difficult to gather more representative data. However, of the Latinos surveyed, there are several interesting and important trends. For the purpose of presenting the following results, I have aggregated all non-Latino and non-Caucasian respondents into one group, simply because there are too few individuals in each category to consider each individual ethnicity. This amounts to 27 total respondents.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on census data that 97.8% of Austin population is one race; ergo, 2.2% can be multi-racial.

## Mainstream vs. Independent Films

First, let us consider the kinds of films these audiences were attending. Due to the disproportionate representation of Caucasians in the audience, I will consider only how each racial group broke down between mainstream and independent films. Independent films were classified as such due to their production and distribution: namely, any film made by a studio understood to focus on independent cinema, or distributed by a company that deals specifically with independent cinema. While this may seem nebulous, in practice there were no films included in the sample that could not easily be classified as independent or mainstream.

<b>Table 2: Mainstream vs. Independent Film Audiences</b>		
<b>Race</b>	<b>Mainstream</b>	<b>Independent</b>
Caucasian	35.2%	64.8%
Latino	52.9%	47.1%
Other Minorities	51.9%	48.1%

As this data shows, nearly half of Latino audiences surveyed were attending Independent films. These numbers are similar for the rates of other minorities. However,

Caucasian audiences attended independent films at a vastly higher rate. This data suggests that while the audience for independent films is overwhelmingly Caucasian—as it is traditionally assumed to be—there is still strong support for independent cinema among Latinos and other ethnic groups. While Latinos were underrepresented in the overall sample, those surveyed did demonstrate a strong propensity to attend independent cinema. Notably, none of the films included in the sample were Spanish-language, so that was not a factor in positively influencing attendance.

## Reasons Audiences Chose Their Films

Audiences were given a checklist of reasons why they chose to attend their given film and asked to select all that apply. Results are below, in terms of percent of each group that answered in the affirmative for each criterium.

<b>Table 3: Reasons Audiences Chose Their Films</b>			
<b>Selection Criteria</b>	<b>Caucasian</b>	<b>Latino</b>	<b>Other Minorities</b>
Stars	17.6%	29.6%	23.5%
Genre	36.5%	23.5%	22.2%
Director	13.3%	11.8%	11.1%
Producer	1.7%	2.9%	3.7%
Source Material	18.9%	11.8%	3.7%
Sequel to Earlier Film	11.2%	8.8%	14.8%
Reviews	30.9%	38.2%	7.4%
Advertisements	17.6%	23.5%	37.0%
Word of Mouth	26.2%	32.4%	22.2%
Companion Chose It	20.2%	11.8%	37.0%

This data suggests several interesting things about the Austin-area film audience. First, Latinos seem to have a higher rate of knowledge of the stars of a film, and report greater influence by reviews and word of mouth than other groups. Second, knowledge of directors and production companies is relatively stable across all three groups. Finally, Latino audiences seem much less likely to attend a film because their companion chose it. This data suggests that Latino audiences are highly knowledgeable about the films they see, and have had exposure to significant promotional and informational sources about their films, such that they personally feel confident in selecting their own film.

### **Measuring Audiences' Knowledge of Their Films**

Next, audiences were asked for specific information about the films they chose to see to measure what kind of information they actually knew, and whether or not it was correct. First, audiences were asked if they knew how the film ends. The percentage that replied in the affirmative is reported below. Second, audiences were asked to name up to three actors in a film. The percentage that replied correctly for one, two, and three actors is reported below. Audiences were also asked to name the director and producer or production company. The percent of correct answers is listed below.

<b>Table 4: Measuring Audiences' Knowledge of Their Films</b>			
<b>Information</b>	<b>Caucasian</b>	<b>Latino</b>	<b>Other Minorities</b>
How the Film Ends	7.4%	5.9%	14.8%
Name of One Actor	36.7%	30.3%	42.3%
Name of Two Actors	14.5%	6.5%	16.0%
Name of Three Actors	9.6%	3.3%	8.7%
Director's Name	18.1%	17.6%	12.5%
Production Company	6.0%	3.1%	16.7%

Though Latinos listed stars as one of the main reasons they selected a film, they demonstrated a lower percentage of ability to name the star. When asked if they had seen other films with the

stars in question, Latino audiences also had lower rates of affirmative response. It is possible that Latino audiences recognize stars but do not recall their names. However, Latinos demonstrate a very high ability to correctly name the directors of their films, demonstrating again their wide exposure to information about their films. Of those who named the director, 85.7% had seen other films by him or her, the highest rate of repeat viewing amongst the three groups. Finally, while there appears to be stark discrepancy amongst groups' abilities to name the producer or production company, there was a large group of Asian audience members attending an anime film who all correctly named the film's director and were highly knowledgeable about him. This data was enough to skew that particular metric.

**Influence of Sources of Information**

Audiences were surveyed about their sources of information about the films they saw, and then asked to rate their influence. The following table presents the percentage of respondents in each group who affirmed exposure to each source:

<b>Table 5: Rate of Exposure to Sources of Film Information</b>							
<b>Group</b>	<b>Previews</b>	<b>TV Ads</b>	<b>Print Ads</b>	<b>Internet Ads</b>	<b>Word of Mouth</b>	<b>Reviews</b>	<b>Promotional Appearances</b>
Caucasian	43.3%	40.9%	47.6%	43.4%	36.3%	51.3%	11.4%
Latino	55.9%	58.8%	38.2%	53.3%	35.5%	55.9%	26.5%
Other Minority	57.7%	53.8%	57.7%	50.0%	42.3%	33.3%	14.8%

As the data shows, Latinos reported higher rates of exposure to TV ads, Internet ads, reviews, promotional appearances, and word of mouth than other groups. The Internet ad measurement is particularly interesting, as it suggests that the Digital Divide may not be as big of an issue for Austin-area Latino filmgoers, who evidently learn about films frequently from the internet. Interestingly, all non-Caucasian audience members reported a higher rate of exposure to previews, TV ads, Internet ads, and promotional appearances. This suggests that there is a clear increase in overall media consumption amongst these groups.

Furthermore, audiences were asked to rate their positive impression of each of these sources of information. Overall, Latinos rated Word of Mouth the most positively, followed by Previews and Promotional Appearances. They also had the most positive attitude of the three groups towards Previews, Print Ads, Promotional Appearances, and Word of Mouth. Thus, the data suggests that Latino film audiences are eager to learn about films and have a high positive response to the materials they see.

### **Frequency of Film Attendance and At-Home Viewing**

The survey also looked to determine if there are any discrepancies between these three groups in terms of attendance at movie theaters, at-home viewing, and membership in video rental outlets. First, we will consider frequency of theater attendance:

<b>Table 6: Frequency of Theater Attendance</b>				
<b>Group</b>	<b>Once a Month or More</b>	<b>Every 2-4 Months</b>	<b>Every 5-8 Months</b>	<b>Every 9-12 Months</b>
Caucasian	73.4%	4.4%	3.1%	4.3%
Latino	91.2%	0%	2.9%	5.8%
Other Minorities	88.9%	0%	3.7%	7.4%

This data shows that the majority of audiences surveyed are frequently theatergoers, attending at least once a month or more. Latinos have the highest rate of

frequent attendance amongst these three groups. Audiences were also surveyed out the source of their movie showtime. Options included Called This Movie Theater, Called Movie Information Line, This Movie Theater's Website, Generic Movie Website (Fandango, Yahoo, etc.), Newspaper Listings, Came Early to Theater to Look, or Just Showed Up. Responses were grouped according to medium: Phone, Internet, Newspaper, In Person.

<b>Table 7: Source of Movie Showtime</b>				
<b>Group</b>	<b>Phone</b>	<b>Internet</b>	<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>In Person</b>
Caucasian	2.2%	55.9%	33.9%	7.9%
Latino	9.1%	39.4%	24.2%	27.3%
Other Minorities	3.7%	51.9%	7.4%	37.0%

As the data shows, there are serious differences between these three groups. Latinos used the phone at a much higher

rate, and the Internet at a much lesser rate. The decrease in use of the Internet to determine showtime is further interesting given Latinos' high exposure to Internet ads for films. Latinos also use the newspaper at a vastly higher rate than other minority filmgoers. Furthermore, all minority filmgoers have a vastly higher rate of determining showtime in person than Caucasian filmgoers.



To provide context to these audiences' attendance at films, respondents were also asked about

their at-home movie viewing habits. This data suggests that while Caucasian subscribers to Netflix or other home-delivery rental systems still outpaces that of non-Caucasians, there is a clear similarity between Latinos and other

<b>Group</b>	<b>Netflix</b>	<b>Rental Chain</b>
Caucasian	37.5%	67.8%
Latino	23.5%	67.6%
Other Minorities	22.2%	53.8%

Minorities in their rates of membership. In terms of in-person rental chains such as Blockbuster, however, Latinos keep pace with Caucasians.

<b>Group</b>	<b>Once a Month or More</b>	<b>Every 2-4 Months</b>	<b>Every 5-8 Months</b>	<b>Every 9-12 Months</b>
Caucasian	88.2%	4.4%	3.1%	4.3%
Latino	91.2%	0%	2.9%	5.8%
Other Minorities	88.9%	0%	3.7%	7.4%

Analysis of respondents' frequency of at-home viewing also demonstrates interesting trends. Again, as with in-theater viewing,

Latinos outpace other groups. However, the discrepancy is much less in terms of at-home viewing. This suggests that Latinos are indeed highly film literate and consume films at a rate greater than that of Caucasian audiences and other minority audiences.

## **Conclusion**

The results of this in-theater survey have generated interesting results about Latino film audiences in the Austin, Texas area. Of the theaters surveyed, Latinos and other non-Caucasian audiences were vastly underrepresented. This is most likely a function of theater location (which itself was limited due to theaters' policies) but merits further study to determine if this is a phenomenon that holds true across the Austin metropolitan area. Nearly half of Latinos surveyed

were attending independent cinema, demonstrating that in this city there is a vibrant market for independent cinema among non-Caucasian audiences. Latinos tended to put more emphasis on stars, reviews, and word of mouth in why they chose to see their films. However, they had a lower rate of recall of the names of stars in their films. This stands in sharp contrast to Latinos' knowledge of the directors of their chosen films, which, along with their rate of viewing that director's previous film, was high.

Latinos reported high rates of exposure to television and Internet ads, and also reviews, promotional appearances, and word of mouth. They also had an overall highly positive attitude to the sources of information they were exposed to. Finally, Latinos comprise the most active and frequent filmgoers of the groups surveyed, attending the theater and watching movies at home at a much more frequent rate than Caucasians and other minorities.

This data suggests several things, which film scholars and the motion picture industry should be well aware of. First, there is a vigorous Latino audience for all films, mainstream and independent alike. Even when there are not directly Spanish-language or Latino-oriented independent films, audience members still seek them out. Latinos demonstrate a high knowledge of their films, thus studios should be sure to direct sufficient marketing materials towards them, as they have both extensive recall and positive opinions of such exposure. Thus, we must henceforth consider the Latino audience in a broader context, as a group that exhibits marked differences from Caucasian and other minority audiences, and also a group that within itself demonstrates a wide variety of interests, exposures, and knowledge about films.