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The Hispanic social media revolution: Spanish-language healthcare pages on Facebook introduction

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Abstract

Although many Hispanics living in the United States do not have a regular health care provider, they are getting healthcare information from the media. The internet is increasingly becoming the place where Hispanics get healthcare information. The number of Hispanics, both Spanish and English speaking, who go online is increasing every year. However, the Hispanic population as a whole is more likely to view videos online and to browse the internet from their mobile phones. The use of social media sites by Hispanics is also growing rapidly. Hispanics look for healthcare information on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. The Mayo Clinic and the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are two organizations that recently developed a Spanish-language version of their Facebook pages. I used comparative analysis to analyze the ways in which Spanish-speaking Hispanics interacted with the pages compared to the English versions of the sites, as well as compared them with *Vida y Salud*, a Spanish-language healthcare page that does not have an English-language parent page. I also compared the localization efforts of the organizations to reach the Spanish-speaking Hispanic audience. The results revealed that, on the whole, Spanish-speakers did not tend to engage with the social media pages more than English speakers. However, Spanish-speakers tend to leave more user-generated comments on the pages than did English-speakers. There appeared to be little conscious localization effort on the part of either the Mayo Clinic or the CDC, which may explain the moderate level of user engagement with the administrator-generated posts on the Spanish language pages. Adjusting their efforts to address this audience, such as presenting more information in videos or fotonovelas, as well as presenting more human interest stories and adjusting the number and types of graphics for a Spanish-speaking Hispanic audience may also increase user participation on the Spanish-language social media pages.

Introduction and Literature Review The Importance of Addressing the Hispanic Population in Health Care Information

United States companies and organizations are starting to realize that to continue to grow and increase their revenue, they must address the Hispanic audience (HPR, 2010, p. 5). For the purposes of this article, I will adopt the 2010 U.S. Census definition of Hispanic: “*Hispanic* or *Latino* refers to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race” (Humes, Jones & Ramirez, 2010, p. 2). Although this population is very diverse, the majority of the Pew Hispanic Center and U.S. census data, as well as the other research collected for this article, use *Hispanic* in this manner as an umbrella term.

Despite the increasing interest in marketing to the Hispanic population and making information culturally correct and linguistically accessible, health organizations have only just begun to add content in the Spanish language or pages that are specifically localized for the Hispanic audience in the United States in the last five years. They have added Spanish language pages on social media sites like Facebook even more recently. For example, the Mayo Clinic just launched its Spanish-language social media page in 2011, and the United States Centers for Disease Control (CDC) followed suit shortly after (Parmar, 2011).

Where Hispanics get health information

Despite the fact that ¼ of Hispanics report that they do not get treatment or health information from a usual health care provider, they do receive health information (Livingston, Minuskin & Cohn, 2010, p. 3). More than 83% of Hispanics reported that they received health information from the media in the last year, such as from television, radio, newspapers and magazines, and the internet (Livingston, Minuskin & Cohn, 2010, p. 3). In addition, Hispanics who lack a regular health care provider are far more likely to seek health information from the media, such as from television or the internet, than those who have a regular provider (Livingston, Minuskin & Cohn, 2010, p. 30). This use of the media represents a real opportunity for technical writers and professional communicators working for health care organizations. They can reach these underserved populations through the media and make a difference in not only their level of knowledge about their health, but also in their long-term health outcomes.

The internet is swiftly becoming one of the places where the Hispanic population turns to for health information. 35% percent of Hispanics reported obtaining health information from the internet in 2010 (Livingston, Minuskin & Cohn, 2010, p. 27). Teens are the age group most likely to look for health information online, although the adult population is swiftly catching up. 31% of Hispanic teens get health information, diet information, or physical fitness information from the internet (Lenhart et al., 2010). Many Hispanic teens are turning to the internet to get health care information that they did not receive from their family, such as information about sexual health topics or drug use (Lenhart et al., 2010, p. 5).

Even more promising to health writers and health organizations is the fact that 79% of the Hispanic population reported acting on the health information they obtained from the internet or other media sources (Livingston, Minuskin & Cohn, 2010, p. 5). A Pew Hispanic Center study found that health information provided by the media, including the internet, has led 57% of

Hispanics to ask a physician questions about a health topic, whether the Hispanic has a usual health provider or not. Information from the media is leading many Hispanics who would not otherwise seek help from a medical professional to visit medical professionals (2010, p.34). Spanish-dominant Hispanics were more likely to seek care from a medical professional than English-dominant Hispanics, which points to the need to provide health information in Spanish online, in the newspapers, and on Spanish-language television (2010, p.34)

In addition to the media prompting Hispanics to visit a health care provider, it is also prompting them to make changes in their health. 64% of Hispanics polled by the Pew Hispanic Center and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation reported that they changed their diet or exercise regimen because of information they found on the internet. 41% stated that the information they gathered from the media affected their decision about the treatment of an illness or medical condition (Livingston, Minuskin & Cohn, 2010, p. 9).

Although both Spanish-dominant immigrant Hispanics and English-dominant native-born Hispanics are equally likely to report getting health information from the media, immigrants are more likely to receive information from Spanish-language sources, such as Spanish television stations or Spanish-language pages online. They are also more likely than native-born Hispanics to report that they made a change in their health or sought help from a health care professional as a result of the information they learned (Livingston, Minuskin & Cohn, 2010, p. 34). Native-born Hispanics are more likely to get their information from English-language sources and are less likely to report acting on the information, possibly because native-born Hispanics are more likely to be insured and to have access to a regular health care provider (Livingston, 2009, para. 2).

Hispanics also report receiving health information from their social networks, such as from their friends, family, community groups, or workplace (Livingston, Minuskin & Cohn, 2010, p. 5). More than 60% of Hispanics reported that they obtained information in this way (2010, p. 33) They received this information in a variety of ways, such as through word-of-mouth, community health fairs or events, or through their social networks or communities online (2010, p. 5).

Hispanic Internet usage

The common perception in business and technical writing is that Hispanics are not online in large numbers, and that they prefer to get their information from other sources of media. This is no longer the case. According to eMarketer.com, a digital marketing research firm, over 52% of U.S. Hispanics are now online. This represents approximately 24 million users in 2009, which is projected to grow to an estimated 39 million users by 2014 (HPR, 2010, p. 27).

The age group reporting the most internet use was age 18 to 34. 77% of Hispanics in this age group use the internet, versus 65% of those ages 35 to 49, 53% of those age 50 to 64, and 25% of those age 65 or older (Livingston, Parker & Fox, 2009). While these numbers are markedly less than similar age groups of non-Hispanic whites, these numbers represent a substantial increase over the past few years (Livingston, 2010).

When the number of users is compared by nativity, 85% of native-born Hispanics go online whereas 51% on foreign-born Hispanics go online (Livingston, 2010). However, the number of

foreign-born Hispanics going online has risen dramatically, increasing as much as 12 percentage points in a single year (Livingston, Parker & Fox., 2009). Because foreign-born Hispanics are more likely to be Spanish-dominant, this growth in internet usage highlights the need to create credible web sites and social media pages in Spanish.

Among Hispanics who are online, the internet is generally viewed positively, and the information gathered from the internet is largely seen as credible and helpful. For example, in a 2012 AOL study, 72% of Hispanics polled reported that they have “great confidence in the information they find on the internet,” and that the product reviews they find online are more credible than information they obtain from their family or friends (HPR, 2010, p. 42). This positive view of information found on the internet increases when it is perceived to come from a credible source of information, such as a trusted authority or a well-known celebrity (HPR, 2010, p. 42). Health writers and professional communicators can work with this positive view of online information to create web pages and social media pages that are seen as factual and credible by this audience.

Projected Internet use by Hispanics

The numbers of Hispanics online is expected to continue growing. Currently, age, nativity, and assimilation are all strongly linked to the likelihood that a person of Hispanic descent will go online (Livingston, Minuskin & Cohn, 2010, p. 31). However, educational differences also play a role in the likelihood of internet use. In 2007, only 31% of Hispanics with less than a high school diploma go online, versus 70% who have graduated from high school and 89% who have a college degree (Fox & Livingston, 2007). However, 2011 data from the Pew Hispanic Center indicates that less educated, low-income Hispanics are the fastest growing group in terms of internet access (Livingston, 2011).

Education also affects the person’s likelihood of seeking health information online. 16% of Hispanics without a high school diploma, 36% with a high school diploma, and 63% with some college education reported looking for health information online (Livingston, Minushkin & Cohn, 2010, p. 31).

The much larger presence of educated Hispanics online might lead health industry experts to believe that the internet may only reach educated Hispanics who are more likely to be insured and have access to a regular health care provider. However, these statistics are compounded by the fact that Hispanics are the fastest-growing group in university enrollments across the country. From 2009 to 2010, the number of Hispanics enrolling in 4-year or community colleges surged a startling 24%, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (Fry, 2011). This number far outstrips the much smaller population growth of only 7% for Hispanics aged 18 to 24. These numbers are expected to continue to increase, and as more Hispanics attend college and are exposed to the internet regularly, more of them are likely to not only go online, but also to seek health information online.

How Hispanics use the Internet

Now that we know that Hispanics are online and are becoming an increasingly important market for health information, we must examine the ways in which Hispanics are using the internet to address them effectively. Several studies indicate that while Hispanics in the United States are

Rhetoric, Professional Communication, and Globalization
December, 2012, Volume 3, Number 1, 36-57.

using e-mail, downloading music, and reading information online, they are also watching streaming video in greater numbers than non-Hispanic whites or African Americans (HPR, 2010, p. 41). We could speculate that this appreciation for online video could have grown from the Hispanic population's tendency to gather information from television and other visual media (Livingston, Minushkin & Cohn, 2010, p. 27). This preference for video has important implications for healthcare organizations and health writers alike. While textual health information will always have its place, presenting health information in video format or webisodes on their website or social media page may be a highly effective way to reach the Hispanic audience (Hernandez, 2012).

Another aspect of the Hispanic online experience for technical writers and health care organizations to consider is how Hispanics are getting online. Hispanics as a whole tend to access the internet more from their mobile phones than their desktop computers (Hernandez, 2012). A Pew Hispanic Center study conducted in 2010 revealed that over 50% of Hispanics accessed the internet through mobile devices, a rate that far outstrips that of other ethnic groups in the United States, 20% of whom report access the internet on their mobile phones (Lenhart, et al., 2010, p. 16; HPR, 2010, p. 43). Researchers have several theories as to why Hispanics may frequently access the internet this way. While Hispanics use their mobile phones more frequently than other ethnic groups for all applications, including e-mail, texting, and instant messaging, they also are less likely to have a broadband internet connection at home, making their mobile phone the most efficient way for them to access online information (Livingston, 2011).

Hispanics and social media

Despite their lower rates of internet usage, the Hispanic population in the United States uses social media more frequently than non-Hispanics (Kulkarni, 2011; NPR, 2010, p. 23; Stroeve, et al., 2011). Furthermore, Hispanic use of social media sites is growing rapidly each year, according to a study conducted by the Florida State University Center for Hispanic Marketing Communication (Zerafa, 2010). From 2005 to 2009, the Hispanic population's use of social media sites has more than quadrupled (Stroeve, et al., 2011). Researchers have many theories for this growing affinity for social media sites. One theory is that there are a limited number of Spanish websites online that contain localized, culturally relevant information (2010, p. 23). As a result, many Spanish-speaking Hispanics go to social media websites to look for information from the Spanish-language versions of company and organization pages.

Another theory is that Hispanic populations in general tend to be more collective in nature. According to Geert Hofstede (2012), collectivism:

Represents a preference for a tightly-knit framework in society in which individuals can expect their relatives or members of a particular in-group to look after them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. A society's position on this dimension is reflected in whether people's self-image is defined in terms of 'I' or 'we.'

This collective tendency extends into the realm of healthcare because Hispanics are more likely than non-Hispanics to seek advice from their friends and family about health issues. Social

media sites may be an extension of their face-to-face social networks, leading many Hispanics to turn to health information sites on Facebook or other social media sites for information (HPR, 2010, p. 23; Zerafa, 2010).

The extension of social networks to online spaces, such as social media sites or online support groups has not escaped the notice of health care providers, which are increasingly creating pages on Facebook and Twitter. Most health organizations, such as the Mayo Clinic and the CDC, first developed social media pages in English, then developed a separate Spanish page designed to address the Spanish-speaking Hispanic population (Gato, 2011).

The Spanish-language social media sites are not necessarily replacing the use of Spanish-language websites, however. Spanish-speaking Hispanics are still utilizing these websites, but they are also visiting the Spanish-language sites on social media websites because they are an easy-to-use and accessible way to get information and to connect with other people (HPR, 2010, p. 19). Currently, Facebook alone has over 10 million registered Spanish speakers in the United States alone (2010, p. 9).

Benefits of placing health Information for Spanish-speaking Hispanics on social media platforms

Social media is not just the newest tool for pushing information out to a wide audience; it has several distinct benefits for the Spanish-speaking Hispanic audience. As previously mentioned in the last section, Hispanics engage with social media sites in an active way, which may increase the probability that they read and use the health information they find on social media sites. The shift to web 2.0 and interactive sites has been a great benefit to the Hispanic audience, which tends to prefer social interaction and social engagement over static information (Gibbons, 2011).

Social media is also a benefit to many Spanish-speaking Hispanics because it is free. Hispanics who lack insurance or a regular healthcare provider are able to access social media sites to get credible health information for credible healthcare and government organizations. This ability to access the information is especially crucial for the Spanish-speaking Hispanic population because, as previously discussed, they are likely to find this information authoritative and use it to change their habits (Livingston, Minuskin & Cohn, 2010, p. 9). These factors can lead to more positive health outcomes for this group (Chou, et al., 2009).

Social media platforms also fit in effectively with the Hispanic population's desire for a personal, interactive relationship in healthcare. The Institute of Medicine, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and other health organizations have begun to emphasize the need to deliver health information in a variety of formats for the patient, particularly in instances where they can interact with health professionals (Chou, et al., 2009; Gibbons, 2011). Social media sites allow them that opportunity, as well as the chance to build an online social network of people with similar health concerns, which has been demonstrated to improve health outcomes (Chous et al., 2009).

Social media platforms allow Hispanics to participate in their own health decisions. Because they can build a real or perceived relationship with a specific healthcare organization and/or their

spokesperson but the relationship is not intense or one-on-one, many Hispanics may feel more empowered to take charge of their own healthcare decisions rather than passively accept what a physician tells them out of respect for their authority (MSH, 2012). The locus of control is, therefore, shifted from the healthcare provider to the patient, which not only prompts the patients to learn more about their conditions and their treatment options, but may also prompt them to ask richer, more detailed questions when they visit a physician (Boucher, 2010; Hawn, 2012).

The benefits of health care information on the internet and on social media sites are so pervasive and far-reaching that many experts, such as Jackie L. Boucher, Editor of *Diabetes Spectrum*, hail it as a step toward revolutionizing health care. According to Boucher, social media can:

Help patients learn more about their health or medical conditions, assist in coordinating care, inform patients about medical decisions, improve or reinforce their memory regarding instructions given at clinic visits, increase patients' participation in care, help them learn how to cope with disease and make health behavior changes, reduce medical errors, and, in general, improve the quality of care patients receive (31, p.143).

This description of the potential benefits of placing health care information on social media sites is convincing enough to prompt many healthcare organizations to create Spanish-language versions of their social media pages.

Methods

Objectives and research questions

My primary objective in this small pilot study is to begin to explore the ways in which Spanish-speaking Hispanics use healthcare sites on Facebook. I chose Facebook as the social media platform to study because it is the social media site that is most frequently visited by Hispanics in the United States. Twenty nine percent of U.S. Hispanics report visiting Facebook regularly, which far outstrips their usage of competing sites such as Twitter (HPR, 2010, p. 50).

To explore the differences in the way Spanish-speaking Hispanics use healthcare pages on Facebook, I asked the following research questions:

1. Are Spanish-speaking Hispanics interacting with the content on the pages more frequently or in a different way than English-speakers?
2. What are the ways in which the healthcare organizations are localizing content for Spanish-speaking Hispanics?
3. What are some opportunities for improving these social media pages to optimize them for a United States Spanish-speaking audience?

Sample: Healthcare organization pages

I chose three healthcare organization pages on Facebook to explore. The Mayo Clinic and the United States Centers for Disease Control (CDC) are both well-known organizations with a significant amount of visibility for the American public. Both organizations launched their Spanish-language versions of their Facebook pages in 2011, which made them good candidates

for study because their method of disseminating information to the Spanish-speaking audience represents some of the newest efforts to address this audience.

In addition to the Mayo Clinic and the CDC pages, I selected one Facebook website, *Vida y Salud*, that addresses only a Spanish-speaking audience, without an English-language parent site. I chose this site for comparison because it is created for Spanish-speaking Hispanics and is not a translation or a companion site for an English-language site. Because *Vida y Salud* does not represent a localization effort from a dominant-culture English-speaking organization, I theorized that there may be differences in how they present their information.

The Mayo Clinic on Facebook

The Mayo Clinic is one of the largest non-profit healthcare facilities in the United States. Over a million people from all across the country and from 150 countries internationally come to the Mayo Clinic for care (Mayo Clinic, 2012a). The Mayo Clinic also hosts one of the largest and most comprehensive health care websites in the United States.

The Mayo Clinic launched the English-language version of its Facebook site on December 17, 2007 (Mayo Clinic, 2012b). Because of the large number of Spanish-speaking Hispanics who visit the Mayo Clinic each year, as well as the fact that 30% of the international visitors to the Mayo Clinic speak Spanish as their primary language, the Mayo Clinic launched the Spanish version of their Facebook site in June of 2011 (Parmar, 2011; Mayo Clinic, 2012c).

The CDC on Facebook

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is a United States government agency with the mission of “Collaborating to create the expertise, information, and tools that people and communities need to protect their health – through health promotion, prevention of disease, injury and disability, and preparedness for new health threats” (CDC, 2012a). The CDC is unique among government agencies in that it has both a research function and a public education function.

Unlike the Mayo Clinic website, the primary function of the CDC website is not to provide general healthcare information, but to provide a comprehensive database of academic articles on the latest in health research, as well as the most current information about epidemics and health threats facing Americans.

The English-language version of the CDC website was founded on May 1, 2009 (CDC, 2012b) and the Spanish language versions, *CDC en español*, was founded on November 11, 2010 (CDC, 2012c). Since then, the CDC has launched several other specific Facebook pages devoted to one health topic, such as “CDC Tobacco Free.” According to the CDC’s *Social Media Guidelines and Best Practices* pamphlet, the primary purpose of the CDC Facebook pages is to “is (. . .) to be part of a larger integrated health communications strategy or campaign developed under the leadership of the Associate Director of Communication Science (ADCS) in the Health Communication Science Office (HCSO) of CDC’s National Centers, Institutes, and Offices (CIOs)” (2012d). The CDC, like the Mayo Clinic, considers Facebook and other social media outlets to be just one channel of communication to the public.

Vida y Salud on Facebook

Rhetoric, Professional Communication, and Globalization
December, 2012, Volume 3, Number 1, 36-57.

Vida y Salud is a health information website produced by *Vida y Salud* Media Group, Inc. (*Vida y Salud*, 2012a). *Vida y Salud* is the “largest source of health information and wellness tools in Spanish on the internet,” according to Mequoda Group’s Managing Editor, Copywriter and Community Manager, Chris Sturk (Sturk, 2010). The *Vida y Salud* website was primarily designed with U.S. Spanish-speakers in mind, but since then has expanded its content to include items of interest to users from other Spanish-speaking countries in the Americas and Spain (2010).

In 2009, *Vida y Salud* launched its Facebook page. According to Carl Kravetz, co-founder and CEO of *Vida y Salud* Media Group, Inc., the purpose of developing the Facebook page was to increase its channels of communication and to gain additional revenue through advertising (Sturk, 2010).

Methodology

I used comparative analysis to discern the differences between the three social media sites and between the sites and their English language companion sites. Comparative analysis is a method in which the researcher compares two or more instances of communication such as texts, or in this case, Facebook pages, and attempts to explain the differences he or she encounters (Pickvance, 2001, p. 11). Comparative analysis is frequently used by communication researchers who seek to compare and contrast different language versions of the same text, or of a similar text (Kaplan, 1966).

Specifically, I compared the three Spanish-language sites to one-another and to their companion English-language sites in terms of the topics discussed, the frequency of posts, the number and types of user responses, the way in which the page establishes credibility, the format of the contents, and the use of graphics. I began my analysis with posts starting on January 1, 2012, and ending on October 15, 2012. I chose January 1 as a starting point because it gave both the CDC and the Mayo Clinic Spanish pages approximately six months from the time they were established in July of 2011 to build an audience and become established.

Topics Discussed

First, I counted the number of posts generated by the page administrators on each page for this time period. Upon my initial reading, I noticed that the posts fell into one of four general categories: *events*, *general news*, *human interest stories*, and *health information*. To determine the types of posts that the page administrators were generating, I read each post carefully and assigned it a category. Then, I counted the number of posts the page administrator had posted in each category during this time period. I then determined the relative percentage of posts that fell into each category on the page by dividing the number of posts in the category by the total number of posts on the page. This gave me a percentage, which allowed me to compare the types of information the page administrators were posting most frequently.

Frequency of Posts

I then sought to determine how frequently the site administrators posted content. To do this, I counted the total number of posts and divided that number by 289, which was the number of days between January 1, 2012 and October 15, 2012. The resulting number equaled the number of posts the site administrator posted each day. Because one key to success in social media is

Rhetoric, Professional Communication, and Globalization
December, 2012, Volume 3, Number 1, 36-57.

posting fresh content frequently, I theorized that the more successful pages would post content more often. I was also interested in determining if there were any differences between the frequency of posts on the English and Spanish pages.

Activity Level

After I counted the number of posts, I sought to determine how popular each of these categories of posts was with their respective audiences. For example, I wanted to know if English-speaking and Spanish-speaking users engaged more with a particular type of post, and if there were differences in the level of interaction with the posts between the two groups in terms of the types of information or posts. This analysis could offer valuable insights into the type of information that these audiences preferred. Facebook offers users the opportunity to *like* a page. *Liking* a page is similar to bookmarking it because once you like the page, their posts appear in your newsfeed and are saved in your profile so you can revisit the page. Each Facebook page that I analyzed had a different number of *likes*, or fans of the page. This made it more difficult to compare the number of people who had *liked* each post or left comments. For example, if one page had only 2000 likes, or people who bookmarked the page and one had 150,000, it stands to reason that the page with the larger number of followers would generate more traffic for each post.

As a result, I adjusted the number of likes or comments for population, so I could more easily compare the popularity of individual posts with their respective audiences. For example, because the English version of the Mayo Clinic Facebook page had a substantially larger amount of likes than the other sites, I divided the number of likes for the Mayo Clinic page by the number of likes for each of the other pages. At the time of my analysis, for example, the English Mayo Clinic Facebook page had 152,262 likes, whereas the Spanish CDC page only had 19,827 likes. By dividing the number of likes on the English Mayo Clinic page by the number of likes on the CDC Spanish page, I calculated that the English version of the Mayo Clinic page had approximately 12.723 times as many likes. I then multiplied the number of posts, likes, comments, or other measure of analysis for the CDC Spanish page by this number. In this way, I had an *apples-to-apples* comparison that allowed me to compare the number of post, likes, and comments for each page.

Ethos

I compared the rhetorical strategy of each page. I looked for several factors. First, I compared the visibility of the page administrators. For example, because Spanish-speaking audiences rely heavily on the credibility of the author or administrator, I theorized that the more successful Spanish language pages would have a highly visible site administrator who, in theory, wrote the posts and moderated comments and discussion (St. Germaine-McDaniel, 2011).

Format of Contents

Next, I compared the format of the contents. Because U.S. Spanish-speaking Hispanics have tended to prefer videos and multimedia content over articles, I was interested in determining if there was a difference in the format of the contents between each of these pages (Hernandez, 2012). To do this, I counted the number of videos and multimedia features on each page. I then analyzed the popularity of these items by determining the number of likes and comments and adjusting this number for the population, or the number of users who had *liked* the page.

Rhetoric, Professional Communication, and Globalization
December, 2012, Volume 3, Number 1, 36-57.

Use of Graphics

I also compared how the sites used graphics by examining each photograph to look for differences in presentation. Because Spanish-speaking Hispanics in the United States have tended to prefer photographs of people who look like them as well as photographs of people in social situations versus pictures of Caucasians, African Americans, or photographs of objects, I was interested in whether the site administrators attempted to localize the content in any way to accommodate for these preferences (Forslund, 1996; St. Germaine 2009).

Results and Discussion

Topics Discussed

Each social media page presented information that could be broken down into four general categories: events, general news, human interest stories, and health information. Every page I examined had categories that could be broken down into events, general news and health information, but the English version of the CDC page and *Vida y Salud* did not contain any human interest stories (see Tables 1a and 1b for a breakdown of the contents of each social media page).

Table 1A
Breakdown of types of posts.

Page	Total Posts	# Events	% Events	# Human interest	% Human interest
<i>CDC English</i>	164	49	29.88%	0	0%
<i>CDC Spanish</i>	111	12	10.8%	3	2.7%
<i>Mayo Clinic English</i>	169	48	28.4%	46	27.2%
<i>Mayo Clinic Spanish</i>	89	6	6.74%	2	2.25%
<i>Vida y Salud</i>	101	17	16.83%	0	0%

Table 1b
Continuation of the breakdown of the types of posts

Page	# General News	% General News	# Health Information	% Health Information
<i>CDC English</i>	21	12.8%	94	57.32%
<i>CDC Spanish</i>	1	0.09%	95	85.58%
<i>Mayo Clinic English</i>	48	28.4%	46	27.2%
<i>Mayo Clinic Spanish</i>	6	6.74%	74	83.1%
<i>Vida y Salud</i>	17	16.83%	73	72.27%

Events

Posts that fell under the *events* category consisted of information about national or global days of recognition, such as the CDC’s October 15 post about Global Handwashing Day, special events in specific locations, such as the opening of clinics, or live Facebook chats or radio programs that

Rhetoric, Professional Communication, and Globalization
December, 2012, Volume 3, Number 1, 36-57.

the user can participate in or listen to through the Facebook page. Posts that were categorized as *human interest* contained personal stories about patients who have survived an illness, people participating in fitness programs, or profiles of physicians or medical researchers. General news posts contained information about phone applications the user could download, photographs of various locations from Google Earth, job announcements, and other general news items. Health information posts covered a specific disease, condition, food, or exercise.

Both the Mayo Clinic and the CDC appeared to adjust the types of content they presented to their Spanish-speaking audience. Each organization posted a greater proportion of events on their English pages than they did on their Spanish pages. Events posts composed 28.4% of the Mayo Clinic’s English page newsfeed, whereas is composed only 6.74% of the posts on the Spanish page newsfeed. Similarly, the CDC English page’s newsfeed consisted of approximately 29.88% event announcements, whereas events only composed approximately 10.8% of the Spanish page newsfeed.

This difference is unlikely to represent a conscious localization effort on the part of the Mayo Clinic or the CDC, given that I could find no evidence that Spanish-speakers were not interested in the events. In fact, when adjusted for the number of posts and the greater number of participants on the English-speaking pages, Spanish-speakers were more likely to *like* or to comment on the events posts than the English-speakers (see Table 2a for a breakdown of the number of *likes* for each category and table 2b for a breakdown of the number of comments). Both the Mayo Clinic and the CDC retained posts about global and national days of interest as well as some information about local events of note on the Spanish pages, but they both removed references to live interactive events such as internet radio interviews or live chats. This omission may have been purposeful because of the fact that these events are in English.

Table 2a
Breakdown of the number of “likes” per type of post, adjusted for the number of users on each page

Page	# Likes Events	#Likes human interest	# Likes general news	#Likes health information
<i>CDC English</i>	119.20	N/A	122.58	138.17
<i>CDC Spanish</i>	371.09	203.57	127.23	247.28
<i>Mayo Clinic English</i>	7001	929.41	602.46	33.343
<i>Mayo Clinic Spanish</i>	1171.07	667.508	18.71	13.52
<i>Vida y Salud</i>	177.41	N/A	281.96	337.38

Table 2b

Breakdown of the average number of comments per type of post, adjusted for the number of users on each page

Page	# Comments Events	# Comments human interest	# Comments general news	# Comments health information
<i>CDC English</i>	18.72	N/A	19.77	22.75
<i>CDC Spanish</i>	10.60	67.86	0	20.49
<i>Mayo Clinic English</i>	11.5	27.28	46.6	56.5
<i>Mayo Clinic Spanish</i>	4	3	4.86	3.64
<i>Vida y Salud</i>	11.07	N/A	22.17	11.60

Vida y Salud, on the other hand, maintained a newsfeed that consisted of approximately 16.83% events. The types of events listed on *Vida y Salud* were similar to what could be found on the Mayo Clinic and CDC newsfeeds in that they consisted of global and national days of interest. The notable changes between the types of events on *Vida y Salud* are that no local events were covered. This is probably because the page has such a diverse, widely spread, and international audience. In addition, many of the events listed were advertisements for *El Consultorio de la Dra. Aliza*, the internet-radio program hosted by the spokesperson for *Vida y Salud*: Dr. Aliza A. Lifshitz.

Human Interest

In addition to events, the CDC and the Mayo Clinic differed in their use of human interest stories. The English version of the Mayo Clinic page made heavy use of human interest stories, profiling dozens of patients who have been successfully treated at one of the clinics, physicians who work at one of the clinics, or researchers. Approximately 28.4% of the Mayo Clinic’s English page newsfeed consisted of these stories. In contrast, the Spanish version of the page contained only 6.74% human interest stories (see Table 1a). It is important to note that the human interest stories contained in the English and Spanish versions of the Mayo Clinic newsfeeds were not the same. Both of the human interest posts on the Spanish version of the *Mayo Clinic Facebook* page featured a Hispanic patient, which indicates that the Clinic did make an effort to localize the information for the Spanish-speaking Hispanic population. However, the relative lack of human interest stories on the Spanish language page indicates that either the administrators of the Mayo Clinic page did not think they were of interest to the Spanish speaking audience, or they simply did not invest the time to write or translate stories in Spanish.

The CDC newsfeeds contained very few human interest stories, probably because these stories serve as advertisements for a clinic or program and the CDC does not need to do that because they do not treat patients. *Vida y Salud*’s newsfeed also did not contain human interest stories. This result was surprising, because most of the Latin American cultures are collective in nature (Hofstede, 2012) and this collective tendency often translates to the desire to make the health information relatable by showing groups of people in graphics or by explaining how the disease impacts the patient on a personal level (St. Germaine, 2009).

Rhetoric, Professional Communication, and Globalization
December, 2012, Volume 3, Number 1, 36-57.

It was difficult to confirm the fact that Spanish-speakers *liked* or commented more on the human interest posts, given the fact that neither the CDC's English page or *Vida y Salud* featured any human interest stories, as well as the fact that the CDC's Spanish page only contained three human interest stories and the Mayo Clinic's Spanish page only contained two of these stories. The sample was too small and uneven to draw firm conclusions. However, given the fact that previous research (St. Germaine, 2009) does indicate that Spanish-speakers in the United States react well to attempts to personalize medical information, the lack of human interest stories may represent a missed opportunity on the part of the CDC and the Mayo Clinic.

General News

Both the CDC and the Mayo Clinic posted fewer general news items on their Spanish pages than on their English pages (see Table 1b). *Vida y Salud*, on the other hand, posted a similar proportion of general news items as the English CDC and Mayo Clinic pages. Given that these notices tended to be advertisements for books or notices about mobile applications, such as the September 14 post about the Apple iPad and iPhone health app on the Mayo Clinic's English language page, the administrators might assume that the Spanish-language users would not be interested in these news items. This would be a mistake, given the fact that one in 10 cell phone users have a health application on their cell phone, and that Hispanic cell phone users are even more likely to use applications on their cell phones than non-Hispanic users (Fox, 2012).

Because of the low number of general news items, it was impossible to generalize about the Spanish-speaking audience's preferences for these posts. The CDC Spanish page contained only 1 general news post and the Mayo Clinic Spanish page only contained 6 of these posts.

Health Information

Both the CDC and the Mayo Clinic had a much greater proportion of health information posts on their Spanish pages than on their English pages. The CDC appeared to generate its own Spanish-language content that was localized for the Spanish-speaking audience, such as posts about the incidence of type 2 diabetes among United States Hispanics. However, the Mayo Clinic produced little of its own content, which is surprising given the wealth of health information on the main Mayo Clinic website and the English version of their Facebook page. Most of the links on the Mayo Clinic's Spanish page were originally posted by Spanish-language sources, such as *Vida y Salud*, *CNN en español*, or *Huffington Post Voces*. *Vida y Salud* produces all of their own original content for their Facebook page.

Spanish-speakers respond well to these health information posts in general. Spanish speakers on the CDC Spanish page liked and commented on these posts with the same general frequency as English speakers on the English-language versions (see tables 2a and 2b). The Mayo Clinic's Spanish-language version of the site saw fewer likes and comments, but the page saw less frequent activity among the Spanish-speakers across the board.

Frequency of Posts

The CDC and Mayo Clinic posted only approximately half to 2/3 as frequently on their Spanish language pages as they did on their English language pages. (52.6% and 67.7% as frequently, respectively. See Table 3.) The lower amount of posts on the Spanish sites reflect the lack of a complete translation effort on the part of either the CDC or the Mayo Clinic. The Spanish sites

Rhetoric, Professional Communication, and Globalization
December, 2012, Volume 3, Number 1, 36-57.

have less information than the English language sites, particularly in the area of events, human interest stories, and general news items (see Tables 1a and 1b). However, as previously mentioned, both the CDC and the Mayo Clinic post more health information items on their Spanish language sites.

Table 3
Frequency of posts

Page	Number of posts, January 1, 2012 to October 15, 2012	Average number of posts per day
<i>CDC English</i>	164	0.567
<i>CDC Spanish</i>	111	0.384
<i>Mayo Clinic English</i>	169	0.585
<i>Mayo Clinic Spanish</i>	89	0.308
<i>Vida y Salud</i>	101	0.349

Activity Level

Judging from the amount of *likes* or comments on posts, the activity level of the users on the Spanish language pages did not match the research that suggests that Spanish-language users are more active with posting on social media pages (Livingston, Minushkin & Cohn, 2010). However, a number of issues might explain this. First, we do not know if Spanish-speakers in the United States are more active with posting on social media sites in general, or if they reserve the majority of their activity for their friend’s pages or other socially-oriented pages rather than post on pages that they see as informational, such as these health information pages.

A second confounding factor is the newness of the CDC and Mayo Clinic Spanish-language pages on Facebook. Both of the pages are less than two years old, which may mean that they are not well established in the United States Spanish-speaking community. However, when you consider the number of user posts on the pages left by users, it would appear that Spanish-speaking users post directly on these pages slightly more often. On both the CDC and Mayo Clinic pages, the Spanish-speaking users posted slightly more frequently, as is apparent when the average number of daily posts was adjusted to accommodate the smaller number of users on the Spanish-language sites.

The *Vida y Salud* page was an exception to this finding. Even though this page is well established among international Spanish speakers and has a greater number of users, the number of posts left by users approached that of the English language sites (see Table 3). This difference may be explained by the diversity of cultures represented on the *Vida y Salud* page, since it has an international audience. Because a large proportion of the users on this site are from countries other than the United States, these results cannot be generalized to United States Spanish speakers.

Table 4

Number of user-generated posts from September 1, 2012 to October 15, 2012

Page	Average number adjusted for population
<i>CDC English</i>	2.41
<i>CDC Spanish</i>	5.36
<i>Mayo Clinic English</i>	6.07
<i>Mayo Clinic Spanish</i>	21.85
<i>Vida y Salud</i>	4.09

Ethos

Because of the Hispanic preference for a personal relationship with a physician and the success of using celebrity spokespeople on Spanish-language websites (St. Germaine-McDaniel, 2011), I theorized that many of the Spanish language pages would use a celebrity or another recognizable moderator figure to lend the page credibility. *Vida y Salud* was the only page that used this tactic. Doctor Aliza Lifshitz, a well-known physician who has appeared on a variety of Spanish language television shows such as *Hola América*, *Al Mediodía*, and *Noticias y Más* on Univision, is the celebrity moderator and visible face of *Vida y Salud*. She posts articles, responds to user comments, and interacts with the community on the Facebook page.

The CDC and Mayo Clinic Spanish pages, in contrast, did not have a visible moderator or persona, celebrity or otherwise. This represents a missed marketing opportunity for these organizations. A well-respected physician could lend a great deal of credibility to the Spanish pages as well as given them a recognizable *face*, which is so important with United States Hispanic audiences.

Format of Contents

None of the Spanish language pages made any special effort to include more multimedia on the page. From January 1, 2012 to October 15, 2012, the CDC posted 2 videos on its English page and 2 videos and 1 podcast on its Spanish page. The Mayo Clinic posted 16 videos on its English page and 7 on its Spanish page. Even *Vida y Salud* failed to accommodate the U.S. Hispanic market's preference for video, posting just one video since January 1, 2012.

The CDC Spanish page did include one fotonovela, which is a story illustrated with photographs. This sort of visual story is a popular method of conveying information in Latin America in particular, and may be an effective way to capture user interest in a topic.

Use of Graphics

Facebook is a highly visual medium. Most of the articles on all of the pages studied included at least one photograph. These photographs are meant to capture user interest, and they are especially effective for a United States Hispanic audience, who consider photographs an essential element of medical information (St. Germaine, 2009; Forslund, 1996).

None of the Spanish language pages made a special effort to include photographs of people who appeared to be of Hispanic descent, however. The same stock photos, or similar stock photos, were used on both the English and the Spanish pages. This lack of localization could be a negative for the U.S. Hispanic audience, who prefer to see photographs of people who look

Hispanic over ambiguous photos or photos of people who appear to be non-Hispanic (HPR, 2010, p. 30).

Limitations of the Study

Because I only sampled the contents of three healthcare sites on Facebook, from January 1, 2012 to October 1, 2012, and the user-generated posts from September 1, 2012 to October 15, 2012, the results of this small pilot study cannot be generalized to all healthcare sites on Facebook, or to other social media platforms.

The results of this study only present a general picture of the preferences and online activity of the selected Spanish-speakers in the United States. Because there is no way to determine the national origins of the posters, the results cannot be generalized to a specific national group, such as Mexicans, or to a regional group, such as Cubans living in Florida.

In addition, because the Spanish versions of the Mayo Clinic and the CDC pages generated fewer posts than the English versions, it is not possible to generalize the frequency with which the Spanish-speaking audience interacted with the pages to all Spanish-speakers. *Vida y Salud*, the website I chose as an example of a social media page designed in Spanish rather than translated to Spanish had an audience consisting mostly of Spanish-speakers from Mexico, Central America and South America. As a result, the frequency and types of interactions were not generalizable to Spanish-speakers in the United States.

Further research is needed to address more pages and other sites, especially once the Spanish-language versions of the CDC and Mayo Clinic sites become more established and attract more followers. However, this study presents insights into the ways in which some healthcare organizations, i.e. The Mayo Clinic, the CDC, and *Vida y Salud*, localize or create content for Spanish-speaking Hispanics as well as the ways in which Spanish-speaking Hispanics interact with the content on the pages.

Recommendations

The fact that the uneven number of posts and the relative newness of the Spanish language pages meant that the results of this study cannot be generalized to the U.S. Spanish-speaking audience as a whole. However, the results do lend themselves to a tentative discussion of best practices that technical and professional communicators working in the health fields can follow when they set up a Spanish-language social media health page.

- Engage the Spanish-speaking users in a conversation. Ask them questions and give them interactive elements such as polls. United States Spanish speakers respond well to these elements (HRP, 2010, p.19). Social media pages should engage the audience and present health information as a discussion rather than as a repository for articles (McNab, 2009).
- Encourage user co-creation of content by encouraging them to engage with the page (HPR, 2010). For example, have a contest to get them to tell their health stories.
- Create multimedia content that U.S. Spanish speakers can engage with. Videos, webisodes, fotonovelas, and the heavy use of graphics are all successful ways to present information to the U.S. Spanish speaking audience. Include images and multimedia elements that depict Hispanic-looking people as well (HPR, 2010, p.29).

Rhetoric, Professional Communication, and Globalization
December, 2012, Volume 3, Number 1, 36-57.

- Strive to make the information personal for the Spanish speaker. Try not to come off as overly slick or commercial or users may find your page difficult to relate to (HPR, 2010, p.35).
- Market the page on radio and television to aid in community building and use a celebrity of trusted physician as a spokesperson. Medline Plus used this strategy when they hired Don Francisco, star of *Sabado Gigante*, to advertise their new Spanish-language site on the radio and in television spots (Medline Plus, 2007).
- Use search engine optimization to make sure that the contents of the page comes up high in search engine results. Spanish is the third most used language online, and many users will find the Facebook page through searches (HPR, 2010, p. 27).
- Update frequently. Fresh content keeps users of all language groups coming back for more information (2010, p. 35).

Directions for Future Research

Once more health organizations develop Spanish language pages on social media, a wider scale study is needed to determine if United States Spanish-speaking users interact with health pages on social media platforms differently from English speakers. If enough data is available, statistical analyses can help determine which differences are statistically significant. In addition, focus group testing could provide a richer analysis than simply analyzing posts. For example, focus groups would be necessary to determine which formats of information and types of posts are most useful for a Spanish speaking audience in the United States. These focus groups could also serve to tease apart differences among sub-groups of the Hispanic population, such as Hispanics of Mexican origin living in Texas or Puerto Ricans living on the East Coast, for example.

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