



Brittany Chavez
Shop Latinx
Los Angeles, USA

Between 2000 and 2020, there wasn't one state in the US where the Hispanic or Latino population hadn't grown by at least 20%. Hispanic and Latin Americans have accounted for more than half of all population growth since 2010, according to the Pew Research Centre. The US' most populous state, California, with just under 40 million people, has the largest Latino population anywhere in the country. In 2020, there were estimated to be more than 15 million people of Latin descent living in the state.

All of which points to the fact that businesses are paying more attention than ever to the Latino market. And yet, while many are courting the value that this community can offer, it does raise the question: where are all the Latino-owned businesses? Even in LA, most people can count the number of well-known Latino brands on one hand.

Brittany Chavez, a 30-year-old second-generation immigrant Latina from Los Angeles, is seeking to change that narrative with her online marketplace Shop Latinx, which hosts hundreds of independent, Latino-owned beauty, fashion and lifestyle brands.

Nevertheless, it hasn't been an easy journey. 'I am a child of teenage parents,' says Brittany. Her mother and father met while living in the same apartment block in the city's Koreatown, as the children of Guatemalan and Nicaraguan immigrants. She says her family relationships were 'somewhat toxic', describing her father as 'just this fucked-up kid, such a fucked-up kid'. He left her mother and ended up in jail and addicted to drugs. 'I don't have a relationship with him now,' she says.

This parental rift meant that Brittany was raised by her grandmother and mother. 'They moved me to the San Fernando Valley, which is where a lot of the celebrities live, so I went to school with lots of white and black rich kids whose parents have worked and done well in "the industry",' she says. The industry of showbiz, that is.

'From them I got this great duality. My mom is a young mom – she is just 47 – and so I grew up with this amazing, fashionable young woman who was listening to a blend of mainstream and Latin music, like U2, The Cranberries and Alanis Morissette but also Selena. She and I both shopped at places like Anthropologie, Urban Outfitters and J Crew.'

Now Brittany both lives and works in Boyle Heights in downtown LA. The area has become a battleground for the Latino community in particular, as local residents have banded together to fight against gentrification. It is a fitting location for Brittany, who describes herself as 'always walking to the beat of my own drum'.

After struggling with school and college during the peak of the 2016 US presidential election, Brittany was jobless and scrolling on social media. 'I was working as an Uber driver. I must have seemed directionless.' She is forthright about her lack of practical business experience. But what Brittany's CV may have lacked, she made up for by surrounding herself with mentors, advisors and people she could look up to. Most of all, she invested in developing her own skills, including the one she knew she had down pat: building great relationships.

'One day, I was searching through directories of small fashion brands and I thought to myself: I wonder if there is anything like this for my community? Spoiler alert: there wasn't. So I created an Instagram account to service the Latino community. After two years, I had grown this strong Latino audience who trusted me. I tried to do an influencer model where I'd charge brands for exposure – the problem was a lot of those smaller companies were just starting out and they couldn't afford to pay. Long story short, the model wasn't going to work.'

Instead, she pivoted her business model and built a dedicated Latino brand directory. The data firm Nielsen had just put out a report titled