

## Are Demographics Dead?

**Study suggests looking at 'life stages' could yield greater insight**

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- Steve McClellan



Media behavior in today's fragmented landscape is best evaluated by looking at the "life stages" that people experience as opposed to their demographic profiles.

So says a new study from the Entertainment Technology Center at the University of Southern California (ETC), the Hallmark Channel and E-Poll Market Research.

Released today, the survey is based on an online survey with a nationally representative sample of 1,440 individuals age 13-54 that was fielded in July 2009. It traces the media habits of what researchers describe as eight major life-stage groups: teens, college students, recent graduates, single no kids, new nesters, established families, married couples with no children and empty nesters.

Among the findings: Individuals in different life stages can have very similar demographic profiles but different attitudes and media usage. The study notes for example that the 18-49-year-old demographic, a key audience target for TV advertisers, is made up of people in seven different stages, with college students, new nesters and childless couples comprising nearly equal proportions. Three of the life stages have a median age of 37 or 38.

Yet when examining behavior, the study argues, "the

life stages are distinct and exhibit clear differences." For example, new nesters rate the importance of family relationships very highly with nearly 70 percent saying they consider them "very important" versus just over half (56 percent) of childless couples.

And new nesters value television more than other groups, and have a lot of TV content coming into the home, per the study. As a group they are most likely to have digital/satellite channels, and they place the highest value on devices that filter video content such as DVRs, video-on-demand services and DVD players. They use those devices to locate and display family-appropriate entertainment and screen out unwanted content, the study found.

In contrast, the study notes that childless couples are more engaged with friends and activities outside the home, ranking higher than new nesters in such activities as travel, exercise and spending time with friends. When they do watch TV, dramas, not family fare, tend to be a higher priority, per the study.

Regarding other forms of technology, the two groups show attitudinal differences. Both report similar levels of social networking, but reveal different views about the value and usage of the technology. New nesters are the most satisfied with social networking (33 percent "very satisfied") and use it as a tool to stay in touch with friends and family. The childless couples, in contrast, say they are less satisfied with social networking (20 percent "very satisfied"), and report that the primary reason they use social networking sites is to "maintain/expand my professional network."

Economically, new nesters are more likely to have

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experienced a negative change in their financial situation (30 percent). Couples without kids are less likely to have experienced financial hardship over the past 12 months, per the study, and are more likely to have moved to a new home.

"Despite similar demographics, [consumers in] these life stages clearly have very different attitudes and motivations, and it would be a mistake to communicate with them in the same way," said Gerry Philpott, CEO of E-Poll Market Research.

Jess Aguirre, svp, research, Hallmark Channel, called the findings "eye-opening. . . . While we have known that only 23 percent of American parents are satisfied with the amount of family programming available to them, this new research shows the lengths to which new nesters and established families will go to provide trusted content to their households. These groups are using all technological means at their disposal to protect their families from unwanted content."

K.C. Blake, director of business development at USC's ETC, said, "Life stage research is a new and valuable tool. . . . Importantly, this research provides insight not only for today's market, but also in the future as consumers pass through various life stage groups."

The study co-sponsors said they would field additional studies in the coming months to glean more insights about emerging media consumption patterns.

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