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For: Media and Marketing Europe

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Date: 15 July 2011

Wordage: 380/400

Draft: 1.0

They still have segments at their age, you know

We're all used to refined, ultra narrow youth fashion segments and to the detailed profiling of consumer brand targets but life doesn't end at 55 as Dr. Bill Nichols explains.

Pity the poor customer. For 40-years plus her every preference, intention, behaviour and association is tracked, dissected and analysed. And then at 55 or thereabouts, she is pitched into darkness and filed away in a cold, empty place. For respectability's sake, this place is labelled 'silver generation'.

True, self-respecting marketers acknowledge this group's potency. They can recite a litany about 'baby boomer spending power', rapidly ageing demographics etc. But segmentation? They're all the same, aren't they: 55? 105? All the wonders of lifestyle analysis and psychographics fade and are forgotten. It's the marketing equivalent of 'does he take sugar?'

Welcome then to gerontographics: one of marketing's likely principal boom areas over the next couple of decades. Campaigns will turn on differentiating 70-something silent-generationers from their 90+ 'great generation' forebears. In turn narrow formulations to mimic 'tweens' may emerge – say 'nonaturions' (90-somethings on the cusp of a century). And that's only partly tongue in cheek!

Gerontographics is, counter-intuitively, a very individual world. What young people may indelicately call 'cussed' or 'cantankerous' is older folk shedding the inhibitions of 'socially normative behaviour'. Good-bye helpful group stabilisers! My 89-year old mother now admits to a farrago of wholly unsuspected likes/dislikes. Decades of her normatively-controlled polite behaviour have blown away.

Similarly out should go a presumption that price dominates value-judgements. Even among the less well-heeled, it is trust, reliability and expectations management – the non-financial or hassle factors – which hold sway among potential attributes.

Beyond these points, research suggests that key gerontographic measures may include optimism/pessimism (outlook), materialism, shopping enjoyment and nostalgia. However, although 'cognitive age' (how young do you actually feel) has many proponents, it is not well supported in recent research.

For the marketer, this is new and exciting territory. There is much to be done to create the type of segmentation platforms available among younger generations. Businesses and brands will turn on success/failure. And my mother will continue to relish both her new found individuality and, with a few more passing years, the increasing respect of marketers.