The New Demographics: Mums

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Rather than target mothers en masse as one big demographic advertisers would do better to understand how they differ while focusing on targeting their similarities, Fiona Briggs writes.

Targeting mums as one homogenous group is like using a sledgehammer to crack a nut.

Today's mums are an eclectic bunch: married, living with a partner or single. They are increasingly older and working but they are also younger, working part-time or stay-at-home mums.

They appear to be struggling, coping, controlling or even cruising.

New research has even identified a group of London mums - tech-savvy sophisticates, who post blogs online.

So how does an advertiser cut through the medley?

Demographics are a guide, Jeremy Radcliffe, the head of research at the UK agency Golley Slater, says. "They help to a point, but are a blunt instrument for getting under the skin of a target audience," he says. "They need to be coupled with psychographics and emotional context. It's the job of researchers and planners to drill down and discover the key attitudes and emotional triggers that make people tick."

IPC Media - which, according to the National Readership Survey, reached 67 per cent of UK mums between April 2007 and March 2008 via titles including What's On TV, Woman's Own, Chat, Pick Me Up, Essentials and Woman - claims these mothers share common values.

Amanda Wigginton, the IPC Media director of insight, says: "Our research has shown there are more similarities than differences among mums. Mums are united by the love they have for their children. Family life is a great source of happiness - whatever demographic, it is the area mums give the most priority to, get the most enjoyment from and want to spend the most time on."

Bounty, the UK's biggest parenting club with 2.1 million active members, has researched what moves mothers for its Modern Motherhood report, based on interviews with 4,000 mums in summer 2007.

"We use social status and age to classify mums in the report, but we use stages of pregnancy in our marketing messages," Faye Mingo, the marketing director at Bounty, says. "The report shows that, regardless of age or demographics, mums want the best for their families."

Wigginton argues that, while what a mum's role entails does not differ by demographic, it is influenced by factors that relate to how women think, behave and feel when they are mothers: marital and working status are two of the key definers. "Single parents and working mums have less time and are more exhausted and stressed - they are the ones that need more support," she says.

Further evidence of this pressure-cooker lifestyle comes from an IPC study, which found that mums are 41 per cent more likely than an average woman to say they never thought life would be such hard work.

But media fulfils a vital role, as Wigginton explains. "Media brands act as signposts in this confusing world. They empower women by providing them with tailored and relevant information, advice and support when they most need it."

Bauer Consumer Media, the publisher of Mother & Baby and Pregnancy & Birth magazines, has pinpointed five types of mum through its "iMum" research: struggling, coping, super-striving, controlling (a mum who doesn't let the fact that she's a mum control the way she behaves) and cruising (one who is prepared to sacrifice her needs to focus on mothering).

Struggling mums provide the biggest opportunity, Sam Fitz-Gibbon, the managing director of Bauer's parenting portfolio, says. "All groups are important, but the group we can benefit from the most are those that are struggling a bit and can see brands as their friends," she says.

Bounty, which targets mums from the "baby on board" stage to pre-school, has significant reach via its sampling operation as well as online.

Mingo reports the website attracts 35,000 pre-natal and 60,000 post-natal sign-ups by mothers per month.

"In the early days of pregnancy, mums-to-be are anxious and go online to meet other mums," Mingo says. "That's going to create huge pressure for brands. Branded websites used to be highly regarded, now mums are going to other mums for advice." Integrating brand partners in the sections of its site where mums are "talking" such as forums is now key at Bounty.

Mingo reveals Bounty.com is attracting 18,000 posts a day, on a par with community websites such as Mumsnet.com, which boasts one million unique users and 20,000 posts a day.

This trend has prompted Bauer to relaunch its motherandbabymagazine.com website as www.askamum.com, putting mums at the centre of the site. "iMum identified that media consumption within the parenting market is changing," Fitz-Gibbon says. "The internet is becoming as influential as parenting magazines."

IPC, meanwhile, has launched www.goodtoknow.co.uk. While the website is aimed at all women, much of its audience is mass-market mums, Wigginton says, and the main topic areas are health, diets, food, family and chatting.

George Bryant, a founding partner at the ad agency Brooklyn Brothers UK, warns that advertisers underestimate mums' online use and consumption at their peril.
"We think of mums at the school gates, doing the washing and watching EastEnders, where, in reality, they are vociferous connectors, the driving force behind Facebook and masters of eBay," he says.

"I say 'gamers', and you think spotty teenagers with consoles, but the biggest online gaming communities are actually the preserve of a new generation of more connected, experience-seeking mothers." New research by Microsoft into mums' online behaviour supports Bryant's view. It found nine out of ten mums use the internet on a daily basis and mums spend 40 per cent of their total media time online - more than on any other channel.

Microsoft identified four key motivations for mums using the internet: keeping in touch, family organisation, personal fulfilment and entertainment.

Julie Forey, the head of research at Microsoft Advertising UK, says: "If you understand how mums are using the internet and what they are looking for, you can provide the tools and gadgets that resonate with them and draw them into your brand."

Unilever is one brand owner doing just that in the US market. Its "in the motherhood" campaign for the Suave shampoo brand features stories written by real mothers, and streams on MSN.com. It generated 21 million video views and has been picked up by the TV network ABC to turn into a series.

Trevor Gorin, the Unilever global media relations director, says: "If the series is shown by ABC, it would represent the first branded entertainment campaign to leap from the web to television." Laura Klauberg, Unilever's global media director, reports the campaign has been "outstanding", with a double-digit impact on brand favourability.

Simon Rothon, the senior vice-president of marketing services, adds that Unilever is paying more attention to ROI in new media than other channels, and is working on a proprietary methodology called "dynamic tracking" to determine its productivity.

The shift to new media means advertisers need to consider context, too - when and how mums are behaving online.

It's back to Radcliffe's psychographics, then, plus a point from Bryan Urbick, the chief executive of the Consumer Knowledge Centre, a research agency that works with insight groups of mothers and children.

According to Urbick, there are four segments of mums: nurturing/bonding; controlling/chief executive; permissive; and teaching/mentoring - and all mums are all segments, but at different times. Urbick maintains that the trick lies in recognising the roles and triggers that push mothers in and out of those different modes, and that advertising messages must talk differently to the various segments. It's the same message for new and traditional media - be aware of mums' differences but focus on their similarities.

As Mingo says: "All mums are really hard-working, thrifty and are using technology to help them out, but the key strand is that they just want the best for their kids."

JOANNA

You know how some gay men keep a "beard" - a woman in tow to conceal their gayness? Well, Boudicca and Lysander are Joanna's beard. They prevent her from being outed as a slacker and a snob.

Joanna, you see, is a stay-at-home mother. And the kids consume all her time and energy. Well, at least up to 8.30 most mornings, when Anna comes to take them off her hands.

For former PA Joanna, stay-at-home motherhood is a status thing. It shows everyone that her husband Johnnie, who's an accounts (sic) director or something in advertising, earns more than the partners of almost everyone in her book group.

But, as a mother, Joanna is naturally concerned to provide only the very best for her children. So it's premium this and premium that at hers. And she's never too busy to fire up the Cayenne (that's a Porsche, to the uninitiated) to ferry the children the 300 yards to the park.

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Anna's a help of course (although Lord knows she needs enough managing). Her greatest contribution is freeing up the afternoons so Joanna can spend quality time with her laptop. As "Gaia1", she's a semi-permanent fixture in Mumsnet chatrooms and gaming sites, while she flicks through Chat, Pick Me Up, and Essentials, dreading the moment at 6pm when Anna goes home.

AQUAFRESH

GlaxoSmithKline thought outside the box or, rather, tube when it launched a children's toothpaste under the Aquafresh brand.

Rather than spend money on a TV campaign, the leading healthcare brand owner channelled its ad budget online.

GSK used the strategic and creative agency Kids Industries to develop a campaign, which was geared to helping mums tackle the problems they sometimes face in getting kids to brush their teeth. "To not do a straight 30-second spot is like reinventing the wheel for GSK," the Kids Industries' director, Gary Pope, says. "But our aim was to keep it as real as possible and tap the link that all mums have, which is wanting what's best for their kids."

The campaign followed a child's oral journey, starting with a leaflet and sample in Bounty packs and leading to the brand's website, www.aquafresh.co.uk. Mums can register to receive an activity book - 80,000 have been sent out to date - offering tips on tooth-brushing and visits to the dentist.

A family of toothpaste characters, called the Nurdles, was created to represent key tooth stages and, in a tie-up with Turner Entertainment's pre-school channel Cartoonito, GSK is featuring the Nurdles in a daily "brushing your teeth" song called The Nurdle Schmurdle.

The TV activity has been supported by advertorials in parenting titles, which promote developmental aspects of tooth-brushing, and sampling at London Zoo, including a "Big Teeth Challenge", in which children are invited to discover how animals use their teeth in different ways.

Such activity, like the website, provides less overt plugs for the Aquafresh brand. Pope says: "The campaign is not about Aquafresh, it's about children brushing teeth and helping mum."
So what of the results? GSK claims: "The campaign has enabled Aquafresh to become the leader in the children's oral care category with a volume share of 49 per cent." Nothing Nurdley about that.

LEADING MEDIA BRANDS
TV
BBC1 (EastEnders, The Apprentice)
ITV1 (Britain's Got Talent)
Channel 4 total

PRESS
PARENTHOOD
Emma's Diary Pregnancy Guide
Village Life (Center Parc's customer magazine)
Your Family (NSPCC magazine)

LIFESTYLE/FASHION
Debenhams Desire
Source (John Lewis/Waitrose)
Glamour
Essentials

WOMEN'S WEEKLIES
Take A Break
OK! Magazine
Closer

RADIO
Classic FM
Heart 106.2FM
Magic 105.4

WEB
Glam Media
iVillage.com: The Women's Network
Conde Nast Publications - CondeNet Network

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