

Singletons: A Consumer Group You Can't Afford To Ignore

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Be they 'freemales', 'parasite singles', or 'regretful loners', singletons are everywhere. Yet in much of today's world, many see singledom as a transitional state. In fact, being married or coupled is actually an increasingly in-between state. With marriage rates still dipping, and divorce up in many nations, the burgeoning singleton population comes as no surprise to social forecasters. They predict that single-occupancy homes will continue as one of the major trends of the next decade, making up 70% of the growth of households in the UK, for instance, by 2026.

Key trends

Freemales;
 Male singletons;
 Home alone: Bachelor pads for bachelorettes;
 Regretful loners?
 Commercial opportunities.

A 2006 survey from Carat: "Singleton" concluded that many brands are failing to cater for the growing base of high-spending single people. "It is clear that, among singletons, there is an untapped need to pay for services and brands that match their lifestyle and life-stage." A recent study from market researchers Packaged Facts reveals that most singles are more receptive to advertising pitches and less likely to zap when TV ads appear. Advertisers should increase the visibility of singles in their campaigns because this study shows unmarrieds "are sensitive to couple-centric marketing";

Tailor services such as travel, banking and insurance services to singletons promoting the cost-effective and future security benefits;Â

The rise of singletons along with the trend to self treat via experiences offers a niche travel market for single people with high incomes, no family and viewing holidays as a fashion accessory;Â

Check out websites that target the singleton market for your marketing purposes. The Packaged Facts study finds singles more addicted to the internet too.Â

Background

A crop of new websites such as quirkyalone have arisen to cater to singleton needs "if you Google the term 'single', all that comes up is dating, dating, dating," says Sherri Langburt, a founder of SingleEdition.com. "But what we're saying is there's a whole other realm of things that go on for a single person who is not dating."

The figures speak for themselves. According to Euromonitor International, in the world's forty largest economies, the number of single person households increased by some 12% to 183 million between 2001 and 2006. Over that period, nine countries recorded 20% and over growth in numbers of singleton households " Vietnam, India, Philippines, Singapore, South Africa, Thailand, China, South Korea and Spain. According to the 2006 USA Census, America's 89.6 million singles head over half of America's households, with some 57% under 45. China has overtaken the USA in terms of numbers of single person households.

Urbanisation is the main cause of these dramatic transformations in household size, but higher divorce levels, the breakdown in traditional family structures, and more women in the workforce are too. Research indicates that singles tend to be younger and more comfortable with technology, while older singles tend to be more luxury focused than their multiple-living equivalents.

Singletons can live in households on their own, but they can also be unattached consumers shunning coupledness yet who may be part of other household types (e.g. a flatshare) or still living at home.

Brands are showing signs of being less couple centric. In the USA, chains including Pottery Barn and Home Depot already offer registries with categories like housewarming as well as weddings. Hilary Clinton's political campaign was aimed at the single women comprising 25% of the US electorate.

Freemales

Increasing numbers of independent women who are opting for the single life over sharing their money and time have been dubbed 'freemales'. One freemale symptom list includes "when your impressive collection of newly bought shoes isn't hidden away at the back of your wardrobe."

Confident, young, working, independent woman can be found in cities across Europe, Asia and North America. In South Korea, 40% of 30 year-olds are single, compared with 14% only 20 years ago. Today's worshiped freemale celebrity icons include Cameron Diaz, 35 and the ladies of Sex and the City.

A report from the UK's Office of National Statistics (ONS) shows that 8% of women aged 25-44 now live alone; double the figure of 20 years ago. This report cited recent research showing that two-thirds of freemales feel that they can enjoy a happy and fulfilled life without a partner.

Predictably, singletons have more money to spend as they choose, unlike cohabiting consumers who shop in a more organised way prohibiting impulse purchasing and self-treating. A new UK poll from Friends Provident has found that young single women tend to be complacent over their finances, with many preferring to shop than to put away money for their futures. More than two in five female singletons aged 25-45 have saved less than £200 over the past year, while over 25% own at least 30 pairs of shoes.

Male singletons

US bachelor, Carl Weisman, tired of being pigeon-holed as a playboy, a loser or a commitment-phobe set out to find out why a growing band of eligible men were steering clear of marriage. He surveyed 1,533 heterosexual men online to research a book to explain why some intelligent, successful men opted to stay single. He concluded that men weren't afraid of marriage, but of bad marriage. Weisman says US figures showed that in 1980 about 6% of men in their early 40s had never been married, but that this figure had now swelled to 17%. His research blew away any idea that single men were unhappy – A compelling issue was how many of them had found contentment in a never-married life. They had created lives full of careers, friends and ambitions.

Home alone: Bachelor pads for bachelorettes

Camilla Dell of London's Black Brick Property Solutions says increasingly single women are looking for the "same things as men" – a cool pad with space where they can entertain their friends. Why? "Women are staying single for longer and empowered to buy on their own and own the ultimate female bachelor pad," says Dell. Lucy Russel, MD of high-end property service Quintessentially Estates agrees: "It's the same trend across the luxury brands too" even with jewellery. Women aren't embarrassed to buy for themselves.

Interior designers point out that romance in the home arena has gone hi-tech. An inviting blend of music, warmth and dimmed lighting can be created at one push of a pre-programmed button, even remotely via SMS. Interior designer Luigi Eposito says the increasing numbers of wealthy singletons investing in property "demand all the seductive high-end technology to reflect their status in life." The modern developer is more sensual stylist than decorator and the style is noticeably more feminine. "We're seeing the return of texture and colour. Women in particular want a lot more romance in interior design," says property developer, Alex Michelin. Chic nomenclature aimed at fashion-conscious single professionals extends to the names of international stylish living schemes like Yoo and Zenith, sounding more like exclusive clubs than places to crash in with ready meals.

In the USA, a June 2006 report from the Joint Centre for Housing Studies at Harvard University stated: "For decades, housing professionals have thought of the typical home buyer as a married couple," although unmarried female homebuyers now comprise 20% of the market.

In Israel, the trend is similar. A report by property company Bedek Bayit in October 2007 noted that 13% of homebuyers last year were single woman buying apartments.

While bachelorettes want slick design and proximity to entertainment hubs, they also stress security. Where women differ too is in the emotional attachment they form with their homes. Claire Coulson, author of "House Rules", a book on stylish living, agrees: "Every time I walk into my flat I absolutely love it. It's like being in a relationship." She adds "I do feel more settled. I'm just not someone who would wait around until I got married to buy a house."

Regretful loners?

According to Mark Penn, co-author of "Microtrends: The Small Forces Behind Tomorrow's Big Changes", there was a brief moment, around the end of the last millennium, when singletons seemed to be out and proud. "Why am I being selfish if there's only me?" asked singleton Will Freeman in "About a Boy". The author is convinced that era is now over. A report published in 2006 dubbed British people living on their own, especially men aged 25-44 as "Regretful Loners". Penn maintains that singletons are now warned that their lives are lonely, miserable and short. A blogger writes: "Do you believe any single woman over 30 is being honest when she claims to be happy that way? I don't. What's really going on behind that confident demeanour and fulfilled exterior is crushing loneliness."

Indeed, in Japan, the backlash is such that young singletons are now tarred with the media brush of "Parasite Singles". Between 1994-2004, the number of unmarried Japanese women aged 24-29 living at home soared from 40% to 54% largely due to Tokyo's expensive housing. Interestingly, this derogatory term has morphed into a cool badge.

According to Cahoot, the UK internet bank, singletons don't benefit from the economies of scale and the additional

income that being in a couple brings. Other studies have shown that single people often lose out, from being expected to work longer hours to discrimination when it comes to credit card applications and even car insurance. One of the key singleton rip-offs is travel. Single occupancy rooms often cost the same as for a couple.

Marketers, like society, often pity the unwed. Bella DePaulo, author of *“Singled Out: How Singles are Stereotyped, Stigmatised and Ignored, and Still Live Happily Ever After”*, stresses how even a recent feature for singles about “getting the dream kitchen you deserve” was patronising. She's coined the term “singlism” for how the unmarried are given short shrift by employee spousal health benefits and the tax system.

According to a recent survey carried out by Coca Cola, the happiest segment within the Spanish population are those aged 25-36, married or in a relationship, with kids and without major financial troubles - only 5% of those who live alone declaring themselves “every happy”.

Outlook

The world is set to feature more younger singleton households with the disposable income to spend on themselves. Brands that sensitively meet the needs of their lifestyles and product and service needs are more likely to enjoy the loyalty of this growing band of consumers.

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