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LIFESTAGES

THE BEST WAY
TO THINK ABOUT
WHAT MATTERS TO
PEOPLE



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How does your organization look at segmentation? If the whole reason for doing market research is to understand “what matters to people” (a mantra of mine for three decades) then looking at what matters at key lifestages might be the best thing for you.

And yet since around 1992 lazy thinking by marketers and their research partners has focused on “generations” as the defining way to look at and understand people. How many times have you used “generation X”, or Y, Z, Alpha etc without thinking if segmentation like that makes sense. Fortunately some major market research companies like PEW in the USA and IPSOS are finally realizing that focusing on “generations” to define people is very tactical and actually misleading. As the Pew organization announced late last year .. describing people with broad generational banner tags just leads them to answer questions as they believe their tag should answer.

(SHHH.. here is a trick... ask anyone who ever uses the term “generation X” if they have ever read the novel where the name comes from. In my experience 90% have not. And they certainly don’t understand that it was not implying everyone born in a certain fifteen year period hold the same views and lifestyle. It was illustrating that among young adults of any generation there are “X” people, those who don’t fit in, drop out and live alternative lives)

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True understanding starts with what matters — not what generation you were born into. It’s time to rethink lazy segmentation and focus on real human journeys

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A BETTER WAY... think about people in terms of the stage of life they are passing through and what matters to them.

Almost exactly 30 years ago I was asked to move to Bangkok and start a continuous qualitative program studying the core lifestages first in Thailand and then across Asia Pacific countries. And over the decades I have seen that with a couple of modifications rather than think of people as “gen X or Y or Alpha” it is just much more strategic and sensible to understand which lifestage they are in and how that lifestage affects what matters to them.

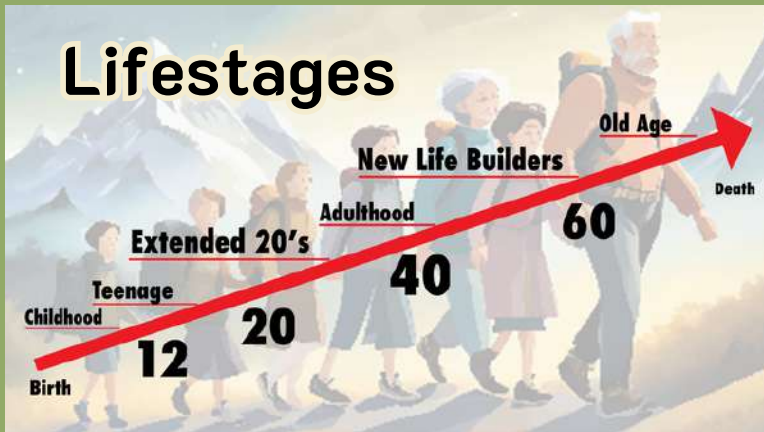


**LIFESTAGES THAT WE ALL GO THROUGH
ARE EACH DEFINED BY KEY
AND UNIVERSAL TRAITS
NO MATTER WHICH DECADE YOU WERE BORN IN**



**RETHINK LIFE STAGES:
WHAT MATTERS TO PEOPLE**

Lifestages



1000s of focus groups and surveys done across countries tells us for example that a Thai person goes through all these stages with very similar focus and life drivers.

1

Childhood

Birth to teens and **dependance** of parents



Identity Builders

Teens to early 20s, not a child anymore, but maybe not a fully independent adult, who is focused on **discovering** themselves, their identity and what life offers

2

3

Career Builders

That first decade of working life when finding, getting, **managing** a job is the priority along with figuring out how to use money, find longer relationships



Family Builders

That couple of decades when it is all about having, educating children, making the payments, trying to not be too stressed

4

5

New Life Builders

Late 50s through to 75+ when the children have grown up, and you start wondering and acting on “what do I do now” for the next twenty odd years



However since I started that program in 1995
a “new” lifestage has surfaced :

Extended 20s

First noted over a decade ago in Japan and now a global and increasing Thailand alternative to becoming a Family Builder and revolves around consciously deciding not to have children and to move in to your 30s, 40s and beyond as single or a couple (yes it was pet food makers who first noticed it).

6



Now Dave has been tracking these lifestages across dozens of countries for three decades. He has been collecting research on them going back to the 1950s. and together we have been looking at them here in Bangladesh since 1997. And guess what ... **across “generations things don’t change much”.**

“Ah but” you say .. each generation is different. Well yes cosmetically they are. The style of music or fashion 19 year old identity builder will change every few years. But the themes will not. When I recently asked 200 Thais of different ages what was THE song that they remembered when they were 19 they were all songs about “longing for love” or “finding myself”. Did not matter whether that was a “joe and Kong” song from 1995, or the Carpenters singing “top of the world” in 1975 or “yours forever” by Cocktail last year.

In fact in collecting research studies in to Identity Builders (again roughly 15-22 years old) globally going back to the 1950s the findings are nearly always the same everywhere. **The need to feel “rebellious” because “I don’t fit in” is always there.** How it is presented changes. For example in the late 1990s young Thais told us they wanted to rebel ... “ into the middle class” and sought out better quality and more famous brands to show they were “different”.

Every generation of young adults is focused on “me”
and thinking they are different
**The music/fashion/tech changes, the themes, desires, needs ...
stay very similar**



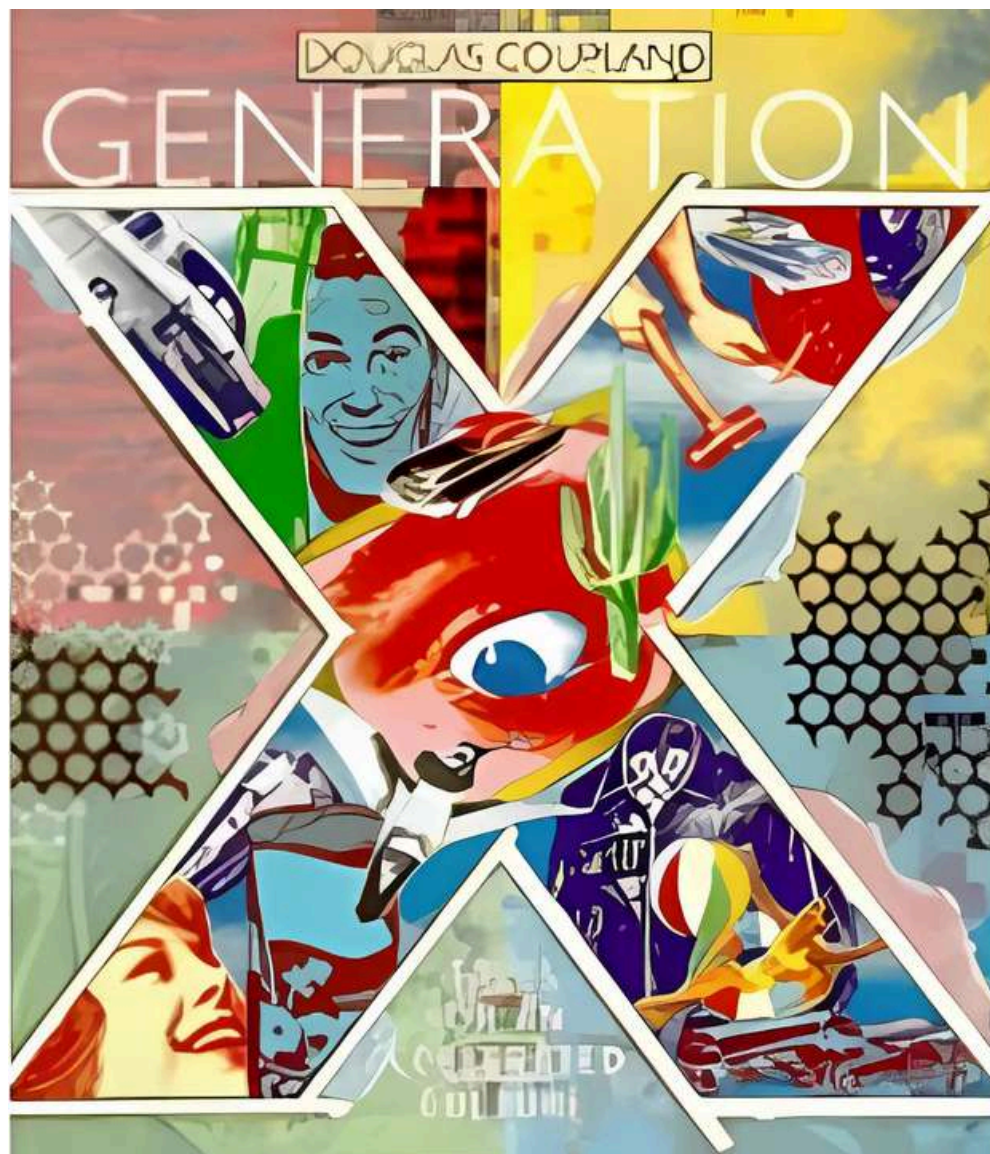
Similarly New Life Builders, those over 60, have been telling me for decades that their focus was on **“what is next”** and **“what can I do next”**. Whether they were living in Asok or a village up in Isaan. That is a life stage that people in their 60, 70 and increasingly 80s go through where their focus is on the future, the next few years and how to make something of it.

Recently a client showed me research in to young mothers here in Thailand. The big finding among “gen Y” mothers (women around 30 having their first and often only baby) was **“they are looking to their mothers for good advice** and don’t think their husbands will be all that much help day to day but need to support them long term” ... No news there. Just normal for that lifestage.

So here is the lesson : don’t be lazy. It is easy to try and be “trendy” but maybe understanding what does not change and what really matters to people is what matters. So go deeper in to understanding lifestages

Dave runs workshops on “Rethinking Lifestages”





Labels like “Generation X” are lazy thinking based on misinterpretation of the 1991 novel

There are generations X types in every age group