

“thatmylife”

Qualitative
research report on
rural teenagers

Regional TV...Effective TV



Rural teenager summary

Just like teens from all around the globe, those living in rural Australia enjoy hanging out with their friends, listening to music, using their mobile phone, shopping for clothes and making plans for their future.

Recruited from small towns in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria, the three teen interviewees were selected to meet the following requirements:

- Aged 15 to 19 years
- Studying
- Has career aspirations or university
- Is a born and bred local from smaller regional town or rural property
- Household has middle income or above

The stand out quality of these rural teens was their down to earth and mature attitude concerning everything from drought, to religion and the environment. They appreciate the peace and relaxation that regional Australia provides and when speaking about the urbanisation of their surrounding regions, make the point that while they don't see it as being particularly negative, they have certainly noticed the impact it's had upon the landscape and their lifestyle.

They may not know exactly where the future will take them but they certainly have plans, which include travelling overseas in the short term and ultimately settling back in regional Australia.

Distance and lack of choice for shopping or socialising are probably the biggest pitfalls of rural life but they're not insurmountable problems, particularly as the younger ones get older and are able to obtain their drivers licenses. In the mean time they simply rely on parents to transport them around and no one thinks that an hour is far to travel for anything.

Generally they are very busy combining work with lots of sport, community activities and catching up with friends. They may save up for specific items but mostly they end up spending their hard earned money very quickly on the standard teenage fare – clothes, music, socialising and techno gadgets, which of course includes the must have iPod.

Socialising includes going to the movies, shopping, catching up for lunch, hanging out at the local pool or a friends place, and for the older teen, going to the pub. They are avid texters, relying heavily on their mobile phones to communicate with friends.

Their main media source is undoubtedly TV. However, their repertoire may also include radio, magazines, occasional cinema, or for the older university student, the newspaper. Due to the slowness of dial-up or other general time pressures, accessing the internet for personal use didn't rate highly for any of these rural teens. As a result the internet is unlikely to have impacted considerably upon their TV viewing or other media consumption habits.

Rural teenager 1

- Mark, aged 17 years
- Single, lives at home
- 1st year apprentice plumber – 1 week out of 3 at TAFE
- Clears approx \$220 per week
- Born & bred in Jindera a small town, approx 25-30km from Albury
- Parents run a farm (mainly sheep, some cattle)
- Mum also works as a teacher and dad teaches part-time at TAFE
- Approximate household income \$100k
- 3 siblings, two still at home with him

“I try to put some away but that doesn’t always happen because it’s gone first.”

Small town life

Mark loves Jindera because it’s not too busy but still has everything he needs close enough to hand. There’s nothing much to dislike except for the urban sprawl that is slowly creeping out from Albury.

“It’s not too busy, peaceful I would say but you can still get everything you need.”

“It’s good because the houses are worth more now but it just means it’s going to get busier. Not straight away but in another ten years it might be a problem.”

Aspirations

Like most teenagers he’s not exactly sure what the future holds for him, so for now he’s keen on completing his trade, travelling and then seeing where life leads him. One thing he is sure of is that it will be in the country.

“Five years from now I’ll probably be travelling for six months to a year (like my brother is now) and then come back to work my trade. I might work back on a farm too one day, I just don’t know yet.”

“I’ll definitely settle somewhere around here. It’s nice and relaxed.”

The most important people in his life are family and friends, with his biggest worry in life being the potential loss of them. He names his dad as the person he admires most. He says that life on the land has its moments but the ups and downs are something you get used to.

“Dad, because of how hard he works and how he raised us. He’s done a really good job.”

“The drought affects you for sure but you’re prepared for it. We’ll have to buy some water in soon but we have enough feed put away to last. You just plan for it.”

Lifestyle & leisure

The toughest part of Mark’s life is getting up and going to work each day and even that’s not too bad because he enjoys it. The rest of the time he’s busy socialising or relaxing with music or TV.

“I get up, go to work, come home and watch TV or socialise with my mates. It’s pretty relaxed. The hardest part would be getting up for work every day but even that’s not that bad because I like it.”

“I listen to music, pretty much any sort I can. I go to sleep listening to the radio too.”

He plays plenty of sport and is a member of all the local clubs.

“I play footy (AFL) and tennis depending on the season. I play golf too and am a member of the local AFL, tennis and golf clubs.”

Socialising with his friends includes being at each other’s houses, fishing, going to the local swimming pool or driving into Albury for other activities.

“We go to the movies, bowling, fishing. We swim at the local pool. Pretty much anything really.”

Spending

After paying for his board and petrol for his car (an old Mitsubishi Magna which he bought himself), Mark tries to put some money away but admits that’s often hard because it’s easy to spend it first.

“I spend it on movies, CD’s, credit for my phone and any other social stuff we do.”

“I try to put some away but that doesn’t always happen because it’s gone first.”

“I save for anything really - desperate needs, future events, maybe my trip overseas, just anything I might want down the track.”

“I buy clothes in both summer and winter.”

He owns an iPod and mobile phone. He has access to a home computer but prefers to see, speak with or text his friends. He hardly ever uses the internet for email but does shop on eBay.

“I mainly talk to people or use texts. We also socialise heaps and just hang out.”

“Out of all of them (digital devices) I couldn’t live without the TV.”

Both grocery and personal shopping are generally done in Albury.

“Mum does the grocery shopping, usually once a week in Albury. If I shop for anything it’s in Albury too. They have all the chain stores and everything you need.”

Media consumption

Mark watches TV, listens to the radio, reads the local paper each day and buys the occasional magazine. He can’t see himself spending more or less time with any particular media in the future.

“I listen to the radio in the car and at work and watch TV for an hour or two each night. I buy the paper pretty much every day.”

“I watch sport, any kind of sport. We have Austar which I watch mainly sport on and the other (FTA) channels for pretty much everything else.”

“I watch mainly comedies and some reality shows but they’re just all repetitive now – Idol’s just more of the same now, so’s Big Brother.”

He thinks TV is a good source of local information along with the local paper, which combined let him know what’s going on in the community.

“I watch the local news to find out what’s happening around here. It’s more important to know what’s happening in Albury than to know there was a big accident somewhere in Melbourne today.”

“The local newspaper and TV let you know what’s going on in the community.”

Mark has been to the cinema four to five times this year but also watches movies on DVD, partly because of the distance and because they are cheaper – there’s only so much you can do on an apprentice wage!

“I like movies. We watch a lot on DVD because it’s cheaper.”

“I’ve just seen Borat at the movies, it was pretty funny.”

He buys the local paper almost every day and the occasional men’s magazine if it takes his fancy.

“I start with the sport section then look at the news section at the front.”

“I don’t buy any particular magazine regularly, just whatever looks good at the time.”

Home internet is dial-up so it’s a bit slow. He might go on-line once a week with his favourite use being eBAY and searching on Google. He prefers not to use email.

Rural teenager 2

- Diane, aged 15 years
- Just finished year 9
- Planning to go to university and become a pilot
- Casual employment at KFC, earns approx \$200 per fortnight
- Lives at home with parents in Sale, born & bred
- Approximate household income \$60,000
- 2 sisters and 1 brother, ages 12, 11 and 8
- Mum and Dad both work. Dad's a manager for retail outlet and Mum's a school aid, working in the library
- Lived in current house on 8 acres for last 5-6 years, previously lived on more rural farm

"I'm hoping to get an iPod at the Boxing Day sales."

Small town life

Diane is not your typical teenager but then again she is. After being home schooled for many years she now attends the local high school and has grand plans for her future as a pilot. She works at least twenty hours per week at KFC and is also very involved in the church community. Amongst that and her studies she finds time to hang out with her friends listening to music and watching DVD's. She is positive about most things, Sale included.

"It's a good size, it's not too big, it's not too small. It's not so small that everyone knows what you're doing. There's a lot of sport things, a main street and shopping centre, the movies, an indoor pool."

"It's a bit dirty, the roads are a bit yuck and the public toilets are pretty bad!"

Aspirations

Her immediate plans for the future centre around becoming a pilot, which she developed a passion for after seeing the F18's during the Commonwealth Games. She'd also like to travel once she's finished school. Ultimately she'd like to settle in Sale.

"When we had the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne, we had some F18 planes out here and I thought they were awesome so I decided then that I wanted to be a pilot. In 2008 you can do it as part of your BCE program, so I'll be in year 11 that year so I can start it then."

"I would like to travel around the world a bit. I would probably go to Europe. I hope to still be living in Sale, I just like it here, I know lots of people here, my family's here."

The most important people in her life are her family, friends and God. Religion plays a major part in her life with most of her social network and opinions being directly related to it. She worries for little on a personal level but displays concern for the world around her.

“I’m very comfortable with myself and my relationship with God and everything is falling into place.”

“I sometimes worry about the leaders in Australia and the decisions they make. I think that with the decisions they make one day it will turn bad. I believe in God and the bible and all that and it doesn’t line up.”

“I buy music, I listen to Christian rock.”

Lifestyle & leisure

A typical week for Diane is action packed:

“Monday morning, go to school, come home. 5.00pm go to dance classes for church and Christmas classes, then goes to work until 8.30–9.00pm. Tuesday go to school, 6.00pm music practice for church then to work from 7.00pm until close. Wednesday go to school, 5.00pm piano lesson, then come home and do homework. Thursday go to school, work from 5.30pm to 8.30pm or 9.00pm. Friday go to school, 4.30pm I do this thing with church, 6.30pm youth group until 8.00pm. Saturday work from 8.00am until 2.00pm. Then visit a friend or do things at home. Nothing much Saturday night, sometimes go out for tea with the family. Sunday go to Church in morning then in the afternoon I go out with friends then work from 5.30pm until about 9.00pm.”

“I do activities with the church, we have like a Friday night program called You Can and it’s just like a youth hang out. I’m part of the music team on Sundays. I play the piano and sing. They do rehearsals. Friday nights I am one of the leaders but I usually just hang out. Sometimes we run games and things like that.”

“I hang out with my friends and we go to each other’s houses. We go to the local pool and shopping. “

Town is about an hours walk away but that doesn’t interfere with Diane’s busy schedule. For now she just relies on mum and dad to chauffeur her around.

“It is about an hours walk. I sometimes walk but it’s about a 5-10 minutes drive. Next year I can get my L’s. Right now Mum and Dad mostly drive me into town.”

Spending

Diane banks all of her money and then dips into it as required, which still seems to be quite often. Because the movies are so expensive Diane and her friends usually watch DVD's instead.

"I usually save all of my money but dip into it. I'm going to Malaysia in September next year for a youth conference, which I have to pay for. It goes for ten days. I'm hoping to get an iPod at the Boxing Day sales."

"I go shopping probably once per week. I usually buy things for other people, like my brother."

"Yeah, I buy clothes too, sometimes jewellery."

"I watch DVD's more. I usually stay at friend's houses and we see something at home. The movies are really expensive."

She has access to most of the standard digital equipment and while she thinks she could live without all of it, if she had to pick one to keep it would be the TV.

"We've got a DVD player, we've got computers, lots of them - two PC's and one laptop. My sister's got a digital camera. I think we've got like a 64cm TV, which is about a year old. It's just a really big TV."

Media consumption

Diane watches TV, which she likes because there is usually something to watch at any time. She accesses the internet but mainly for schoolwork. She doesn't listen to the radio or buy magazines. She reads the captions she likes in the local paper, which her mum and dad buy.

"I watch TV. My Dad likes to watch crime shows, I like them too. CSI, Law & Order, Murder by Numbers. I usually have to work when Idol is on."

In recent years the content she watches has changed but she doesn't think that the actual mediums will change much in the future.

"The things I watch, probably a few years ago I would have watched kids shows and stuff, now I watch crime shows and I watch the news all the time."

"I might use the internet a bit more for school. Mum sends emails to everyone from home to keep in touch with friends but I don't because I'm really busy. My brothers and sisters use it for playing games like SIM city but I don't very often. I just work heaps, I'm too busy."

Rural teenager 3

- Jemma, aged 19 years
- Studying Marine Biology & Ecology at University of QLD, Brisbane
- Employed casually as market research interviewer and regularly participates in surveys herself, earning \$300 per week on average
- Lived for past 17 years at Brightview, a semi rural area between Brisbane and Toowoomba
- Large house on one & half acres
- Born in Maryborough
- 2 younger sisters
- Household income approximately \$60k per annum
- Dad works as Welder, mum stays at home

“It doesn’t stop me from driving out there though. When you live here your whole life, 20 minutes is like nothing now”

Small town life

Jemma has the best of both worlds. She lives in the country and studies at university in Brisbane so she has a good appreciation for the pros and cons associated with where she lives.

“It’s quiet, you don’t have all the busy cars driving past, no traffic lights. It’s good.”

“It’s bad that everything is so far away. I think it’s like 20 minutes for me to get to some kind of town. It doesn’t stop me from driving out there though. When you live here your whole life, 20 minutes is like nothing now.”

The estate where she lives has also become more developed which she sees as a negative.

“The area’s a bit more built up, there’s not as much woodland and stuff anymore, they’ve kind of chopped it all down. Lots of dogs have eaten all the wildlife, you don’t see the koalas and the possums like you used to.”

“It is still fairly quiet, you still get the birds and stuff but there’s more traffic in our estate and that’s kind of annoying. We’ve got an acre and a half, the person who’s living behind us has got I don’t know how many acres and he breeds horses and there’s a guy to our left, he runs cattle. To the front and the right of us is housing estates. We were the first people to build here and it’s like 17 years later and the place is completely built up.”

Aspirations

She's grown up a lot in the last five years so life has changed fairly dramatically for her, especially now that she can drive. And while she's still likely to settle somewhere with land around her, at 19 the country has lost its appeal.

"I suppose I've got a lot more independence now because I do have a car and I can travel to uni and I suppose I've travelled around a bit more. I've been overseas and I can go to places whenever I want, so I've seen lots more stuff."

"The country's kind of changed to me because when I was growing up there was heaps of space for you to run around but now that I'm a bit older it doesn't really have that kind of charm to it anymore. It's kind of just a bit more, boring."

"It definitely wouldn't be the city, if I was going to settle down somewhere it would have to be in the suburbs at least. I don't like my neighbours being able to see through my windows."

Jemma is ambitious and excited about her job prospects as a marine biologist. The person she most admires is ecologist, David Ireland. She believes her passion stems from holidays at the beach growing up and life in the country providing her with an appreciation of nature.

"In five years, hopefully I'll have my degree and my honours, be out on the boat somewhere researching something. I know it doesn't give me much money so while I'm still young enough I'd like to be able to go out there and research what I want. And I think once that got a bit much I could go back and perhaps teach."

"I think growing up in the country's had a big influence on that, because we were surrounded by a lot of animals, our parents always taught us respect for those kind of things. And the beach is my favourite place in the world. The beach is always something special for us kids, it's always like Christmas equals beach, so those two put together probably had a big influence on it."

She is able to clearly define the positives in her life today as well as her concerns for the future.

"The best thing about life right now is the fact that I can make my own choices and I do have the freedom to do what I want. I'm not tied down with a house or kids or anything like that."

"I worry that I'm not going to be able to support myself when I'm older or I don't achieve what I want to in my lifetime."

Lifestyle & leisure

Jemma couldn't live without her car, a little 1986 Holden Gemini. She needs it for just about everything she does. Like most teenagers her other lifeline is her mobile phone which she uses to arrange her social life. She doesn't own an iPod yet because she's always driving her car and listening to music on CD.

"Mobile phone is always the best way to go, SMS, I do talk to some people through the internet, MSN."

"No I don't own an iPod yet. If I was travelling on public transport or something then I'd probably have one by now but I spend all my time in the car so my CD player is fine."

"I really like stuff like Butterfly Effects and Papa Roach. I don't mind more mainstream stuff like Snow Patrol and Eskimo Joe too."

In her leisure time she likes to play sport and also enjoys regular weekends away but to really relax she'd like to just do nothing at all.

"I go to the gym and I swim and I play soccer when that's on."

"I kind of just like chilling out, going out to the pub with Dad or my friends or something. Going to the movies, doing nothing, I hardly ever get to do nothing."

Jemma enjoys socialising with her new uni friends in the city but most of the time it's close to home and there's not a whole lot of choice.

"The pub obviously is the only place you have to go around here. The pub is 20 minutes away, well it's probably only 10 minutes away but I don't like it so I travel the extra 10 minutes to get to the other one."

"It's usually Friday nights because no one has to work the next day. Weekends away I normally do once every couple of months. I usually take my friends from Brisbane who don't really get out to the bush very much and take them out for a weekend. Sometimes we go out to the beach sometimes we go bush, it really depends."

She's keen on travelling having spent some time overseas already. If she could go anywhere Jemma's pick would be Vienna.

"I went to America, I travelled all the way up the Californian Coast. Tijuana Mexico to Vancouver in Canada. A bunch of us from school went through this G'Day USA program. I have the travel bug now. I want to probably go to Europe next."

Spending

She tries to save money but it seems to go out of her account as fast as it goes in. After spending money on her car it's all the standard teenage fare - alcohol, clothes and music.

"Petrol, alcohol and at the moment it's like Christmas presents and parts for my car. I seem to spend a lot of money on tyres and stuff for my car. When I have a bit of extra cash I buy clothes and music, clothes before music. My favourite shop is Ice."

"I try (to save) but it doesn't really work. I always spend it when I save it. I'll save up for a weekend away or I'll save up for a clothes shopping trip."

"I have \$20 that automatically comes out of my accounts every time I get paid so I just wait until I've got enough money to go do something and then I go."

There's not a lot of choice for clothes shopping locally so Jemma prefers to drive into Toowoomba or Brisbane when she gets the urge.

"The shops are about 20-25 minutes away. That's at Gatton. There's a Coles and a Country Target but that's about it. When I go shopping I usually go to Toowoomba and that's about a 40-45 minute drive. Sometimes Brisbane but it's harder for parking and it takes longer. In Toowoomba you have this huge Myer Centre and like Grand Central where I've got Ice, Just Jeans, Supre, and all those types of stores."

Media consumption

Jemma's main media sources are TV and radio. She also goes to the cinema fairly regularly. While she uses the internet regularly, it's mainly for her university work. She rarely buys magazines but does like to read the newspaper. And, she doesn't anticipate any of her media habits changing much in the future.

"I do watch a lot of TV, and I read the newspaper, I don't really buy magazines. And the radio, I listen to the radio a lot as well. At the moment I watch TV more than usual. When I'm at uni it's usually just in the evenings from 7-9.30pm, that's all I really have time for."

"My favourite shows would be House, definitely. That 70's Show, Rove, and Grey's Anatomy. When I'm not at uni I usually watch a movie during the day if I've got nothing to do but it's usually still the same, I'll just wait until the good shows come on at 7pm and then watch until whenever."

"Radio, just in the car. Probably up to 14 hours a week at times but I go through fazes where I only listen to CD's and then go back to radio."

"I have (internet) access at home. When I'm at uni, I'm on there at least two to three hours every day, all schoolwork. For leisure, an hour a week, if that. After uni you kind of get sick of the internet."

“Maybe once in a blue moon, I might get Cosmopolitan or something.”

“I usually go to the movies probably on average, once a month, probably a bit more than that, but not much. The nearest one would be Ipswich, that’s a 30 minute drive.”

“I don’t need to buy them, Dad buys the Sunday Mail for me. I usually read the whole thing apart from the boring business section. I get The Sunday Mail for the fact that it’s got everything in there.”

Jemma likes to catch up on the news through both the newspaper and TV. If it’s TV she prefers national news but that’s mainly through lack of choice.

“I usually watch the Today show in the morning while I’m getting up and trying to wake up and stuff. You don’t really get much local news out here, I kind of prefer national stuff, I don’t really like hearing about America and stuff, unless it’s really big, it’s got no relevance to me. I read the local newspaper, that one’s free.”