# Shopper's Tourney

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MARS

ost marketers agree that consumers don't really buy products or brands. Consumers buy what those brands promise to do for them — how they make them look, feel and how they contribute to their own self-identity.

So, then, does the everyday act of shopping contribute in some way to the ultimate brand experience of the products we purchase?

While many path-to-purchase models have been developed in recent years, is there something more latent as a foundation for our shopping behavior and

how we perceive the act of shopping?

A new study reveals what our struggle for meaning and identity says about the way we shop.

To begin to answer these questions, we first looked to the social sciences. In one of the best known and frequently cited explorations of mankind's struggle for meaning and identity, Joseph Campbell explored the application of the so-called "monomyth" as a construct for some of the best-known

stories that have been told throughout history.

As Campbell summarizes the monomyth, "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man."

The act of shopping shares the same monomyth structure, containing all the elements of a great story drama, emotion and action. However, in this story, the shopper is the hero, the retailer is the stage and the brand is the prize.

This great adventure, the shopper's journey contains seven distinct phases that capture the universal experience of shopping (see sidebar).

Curious about the application and validity of the shopper's journey as a strategic model and basis to derive true insights into shoppers' behaviors, we embarked on a cross-country odyssey during the late summer/fall of 2008 to better understand and interpret shopping behavior.

This qualitative study consisted of two phases, resulting in input from nearly 60 men and women across the country and more than 200 hours of interviews. The first phase used online journals to record typical shopping patterns and events across a number of categories. These ranged from highly involved and expensive products (e.g., consumer electronics) to categories with relatively inexpensive and routinely purchased products (e.g., alcohol and health-and-beauty).

We then immersed ourselves in the homes and lives of 16 men and women who allowed us to observe several shopping journeys. Our observations included their initial research of products or retailers; their pre-trip preparation; and the in-store trip to select a product from the shelf.

Through these efforts and the resulting metaanalysis, we found that the seven stages of the shopper's journey do, in fact, represent the shared structure of many of the stories and myths that have historically been told and retold across human cultures.

However, while experiencing the stages of the shopper's journey was universal, what varied significantly was the amount of time and level of consciousness afforded each stage. For many low-price and low-involvement categories, the journey is highly subconscious and nearly instantaneous, needing only a spark in the form of a reminder or usage suggestion to ignite a purchase.

By contrast, the gestation period for purchases in other categories can take days or months with a majority of time spent in the initial phases of the journey. This is where less formal shopping takes place by way

of researching professional and user reviews, and consulting friends and family. It also involves sleuthing shopping conglomeration websites in an attempt to "shop" on one's own terms before entering a physical store.

## SIX SHOPPER ARCHETYPES

We identified six broad "shopper archetypes" that relate to the shopper's purchasing motivation and behavioral patterns:

**Task Shoppers** don't necessarily enjoy the shopping trip, and view it mostly as a means to procure the items on their lists.

**Bargain Shoppers** approach shopping as a strategic game to be mastered, and attempt to maximize the return on a personal "value equation."

**Price Shoppers** view shopping as a zero-sum endeavor that's focused narrowly on cash outlays and choosing brands and retailers that meet the need-of-the-moment.

**Discovery Shoppers** may know their needs, but often rely on the store environment as a catalyst for purchases and are open to new products.

**Comfort Shoppers** are focused on mitigating any frustration or anxiety associated with shopping, and have a stronger aesthetic orientation. They are often willing to compromise on price and selection for a more enjoyable experience.

**Experiential Shoppers** are much more engaged while shopping and seek to become immersed in the culture of the category while shopping.

The primary driver for behavior during the shopping journey is the role that the category being shopped plays in a given consumer's life. An individual's general orientation to shopping, defined by which archetype he or she tends to reflect, is a strong secondary influencer.

The combination of these two drivers has significant influence on retailer and brand selection. Shoppers ultimately not only choose brands that align with their value systems but also choose to shop for those brands at retailers that optimize the experience associated with that brand. This can occur through sales associate knowledge and interaction, floor layout or merchandising practices.

One's orientation to shopping also has a dynamic quality, depending on one's enjoyment and involvement of the product being purchased — whether it's a need or a want. Decisions are made and trips planned



# **1** The Awakening

A message breaks through the noise, snagging a consumer's attention. Now the shopper is ready to heed the call and embark upon a journey.



# The Call

The quest begins with the hero receiving a call to action, a new desire or a need that transforms him or her into a shopper—an individual with a purpose.



# 3 The Crossing

Our hero enters a world full of tasks, trials, temptations and decisions. The shopper pursues his or her quest, exploring, seeking, researching and ultimately entering the store.



# 4 The Path

The shopper now faces a succession of brand, retail and messaging distractions, seeking clues to help navigate the path to the prize.



### The Reckoning

Presented with various choices, the shopper becomes gradually more confident and a decision is made, with his or her emotional pulse-points in sync.



# **6** The Prize

This is the ultimate moment, when a shopper touches a brand. It's a sliver in time that no marketer can influence. This moment is solely about shoppers fulfilling their quests.



# The Homecoming

The shopper returns home with his or her prize, sometimes filled with excitement or perhaps simply content with the mission. The shopper experience then radiates outward to friends, family and co-workers.

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either to mitigate the experience of shopping for rote needs or enhance the experience of the product for emotionally driven wants.

### SHOPPING AS BATTLE

An additional and important finding from this study was the emergence of a cultural model of shopping where shopping is thought of and experienced as a type of "battle." This manifested itself in two variations of the model. The first variation of the "shopping as battle" cultural model is "shopping as a battle of self-control."

Central to this concept is the notion that shoppers are conflicted within themselves—harboring a more responsible and deliberate self that is at odds with a more primitive self, driven by impulsive desires. Classically, this manifests itself as "what I want versus what I should get."

As we observed throughout the research, people often experience a high degree of ambivalence throughout the shopping process. A spike in emotion occurs in the final stages of the "purchase," the "reckoning" and the "prize," that largely relates to the culmination of these conflicting orientations.

The second variation of this model is "shopping as a battle against the *other*" — namely retailers and manufacturers. Here, shoppers view their shopping goals as contrary to those of the retailer or manufacturer. In this variation, shoppers view themselves as vulnerable to the obstacles, distractions and temptations to make unplanned or unnecessary purchases created by the "other."

Additionally, there is a common undercurrent and latent fear that they will find a better product or lower price after making the purchase, having "been had."

Most interesting of these, however, was the prominence of shopping a category *after* a purchase had been made as an important reinforcement of a purchasing decision. This happened most often with larger purchases, but not exclusively so. In some instances, the research and shopping continued with the same fervor as it did in the stages of the journey leading up to the purchase.

It continued until shoppers finally decided to use the product and resigned themselves to living with their decision — and were satisfied that they, in fact, had made the right purchase—or until they realized that a better product or better price was available and they had "been had."

These emotions can be addressed in a number

of ways, although providing a level of competitive transparency or communicating a limited guarantee would go far towards establishing loyalty and trust.

### ALIVE WITH STORIES

While changes in our approach to shopper marketing may need to be transformational, some fundamental applications can be immediately implemented.

One opportunity is to view shopping more holistically, as encompassing the vacuum between the time when a brand has predisposed a consumer and created a demand and when the shopper physically enters the store to shop for, and buy, the brand.

Many opportunities exist to influence a purchase along the shopping journey before a retailer has been chosen or a product has been selected. It's important to understand how that comes to bear in your categories and your stores, and to align your merchandising and marketing communication efforts accordingly.

Allow the store environment to come alive with stories. While there is certainly a proliferation of instore vehicles and messages, thoughtful and resonant interruptions that demonstrate an understanding of shoppers and allow them to participate in a broader narrative are powerful motivators for purchase. They should not always be categorized as unnecessary clutter.

And lastly, we can collectively ask the right questions as they relate to framing what will make our categories and brands grow—what is it that the shopper desires of this retailer in this category?

In the end, it's shoppers who ultimately wield the true power. The more we can move beyond an understanding of simply what they are doing in the store to understanding the motivations for those behaviors and the journey that led them there, the better we are positioned to anticipate their needs.

Only then can we begin implementing practices that create a meaningful shopping experience that aligns the ethos of brands, retailers and shoppers as a basis for devotion.



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