

paul jorgensen

L. Sarigiani

English 1A

10 May 2007

Why Do We Shop for What We Do Not Need?

Consumer – One who delights advertisers by acquiring unnecessary products in accordance with the motto “I spend, therefore I am.” – The Cynics Dictionary

All people shop for things that they do not need. When asking a person why he needlessly goes shopping, a typical answer is “because it makes me feel good.” In fact, there are many reasons why people, particularly in America, feel compelled to shop, spend, and buy things in an almost mindless automation where the consumer rationalizes the question of *need*. However, why do we shop for a twentieth pair of shoes? Why shop for another gadget that we *might* need? Why do people spend hours shopping for unaffordable stuff that is merely garnish?

Shopping, apart from a practical need, is an *emotional* experience.

This very real phenomenon is as serious as it is intriguing to those interested in this type of behavior. According to Pamela Danziger, a consumer industry consultant, “There is a desire to satisfy a need [. . .] that is the simple answer to a profoundly challenging question” (27). In clarifying the meaning of the word “need” in Danziger’s assertion, it is important to understand that this fundamental aspect pertains to an *emotional* need rather than a practical one. Further, to help answer this question of why people shop needlessly, marketing scientists who study shopper behavior define *emotional need* as motivators. With this understanding, the question can be addressed: What motivates us to shop for what we do not need?

- Shopping is fun and exciting: Perusing, trying-on, and trying-out dazzling new wares at a pulsing *metropolistic-wonderland* of fashion departments is an ecstatic experience with its mixture of excitement and adrenaline. Comparable to going to an amusement park, it is an *occasion* where there are people, places, and things to see, do, and . . . buy.
- Shopping is an escape: Dr. Drew Pinsky, a coping strategies specialist at Las Encinas Hospital in Pasadena, California, professes, “Shopping is a way of managing unpleasant feelings.” Similar to attending a museum or a movie theater, shopping allows us to take our minds off our problems. “Time heals” and we can give ourselves ample time at the mall interacting with salespeople as if they are museum guides, or spending a few hours window-shopping as if we are watching it all on the silver screen.
- Shopping allows us to feel like a celebrity: Generally, whether we are shopping at a warehouse home improvement store, an uptown fashion mall, or the local car dealership, *starry-eyed* salespeople roll out the red carpet for prospective buyers. This is truly an available fantasy world for an indulging shopper. As shoppers, we can walk into a *showroom* (as this is our celebrity privilege) greeted by our fans and receive all of the attention we deserve; pampered and fussed over, our *stardom* is at hand.

The above emotional motivators are well-founded characteristics of shopper’s behavior per the findings of extensive research by marketing academics. Gary Witt, Professor of Marketing at Western International University, attests, “[Shoppers] do not want your product or service; they

want [. . .] a secret door to their heart's desires.” This is now common knowledge among marketing strategists who work with advertisers to appeal to shoppers. In this way, we are incessantly subjected to marketing and advertising designed to entice us to shop and buy. All people, even those with the most resistant of base psychological mechanisms regarding this behavior, are in some way influenced by the persistent, ubiquitous bombardment of various media and its message of commanding people to shop.

In addition, shopping mediums such as catalogs, the internet, and The Home Shopping Network on cable television, intended to offer convenience allowing a devoid of the annoyances of conventional shopping such as parking and disgruntled salespeople, are only defeating to the communal shopper and the emotional experience a shopping trip provides. Shopping at home does not compare to the *escalatored* big-city, big-room department store with its buzzing energy and exciting glamour where a shopper is there seeing and being seen.

This is the essence of modern shopping. As a an activity in and of itself, shopping is a relatively recent development in which masses of people venture out and seek to moddycoddle their desire to satisfy an emotional need. Shopping provides not just a means to the necessities of life, but a meaning for life. As cleverly promoted by marketing and advertising, shopping is a cultural condition legitimized as “the good life” and “the American way.”

Works Cited

Bayan, Rick. "The Cynics Dictionary." New York: Hearst Books, 1994.

Danziger, Pamela. "Why People Buy." New York: Paramount Books, 2002.

Pinsky, Drew. "Community Forum." Dr. Drew Website. 2003. 19 Nov 2003

<<http://www.drdrew.com/community/login.asp?id=5004§ion=1033/>>

Witt, Gary. "Meeting Customer Needs Is Not Enough." Marketing Psychology Group Website.

1998. 19 Nov 2003. <<http://www.marketingpsychology.com/article2.htm>>