EXPLORING
THE EVOLUTION OF
CONSUMER JOURNEYS
INTRODUCTION

Consumer journeys have been around since we first started to buy and sell from each other! The terminology and models may change, but marketers have been trying to accurately track paths to purchase for more than 100 years. Nevertheless, the focus on journey research has undeniably grown over the last decade.

From the introduction of linear purchase funnels in the late 19th century to today’s complex consumer journey maps, the evolution of such frameworks shows how useful they’ve traditionally been for agencies and brands. That utility is based on the fact that a framework allows us to explicitly state our goals. What do we want to influence and when?

But why have consumer journeys risen to prominence in recent years? And what options are available for marketers hoping to enhance their journey strategies? To answer these questions, we must go on a little journey of our own...

DIGITAL DISRUPTION

For decades, marketers enjoyed largely unfettered control over how consumers engaged with brand messages and communications. Funnels provided a simple methodology for tracing paths to purchase from early awareness and consideration through to purchase and loyalty.

Digital technologies have disrupted these basic models, as the general public gained access to new tools and information to open up dialogues with brands. We can offset trust concerns towards an unknown brand with trust in the consumers who recommend it. We can buy at the lowest price with total market visibility or spend $10 on a single cup of coffee based on our belief in what it stands for. In our multichannel, multi-device and social media-driven world, marketers’ jobs are more difficult than ever before.

Various organisations have created consumer journey models to help brands and agencies manage their insights into customer behaviours and target areas of improvement. Most frameworks reflect the specific and sometimes narrowly defined interest of their sponsors. This results in a demand for a comprehensive overview of the key behaviours, needs, emotions and decisions that influence individuals as they navigate their journeys. Marketers may be ignoring vital factors that could affect communications planning and activation.

OPTIMISING JOURNEY RESEARCH

Pointlogic has created Commspoint Journey to fill this void. While we don’t claim to be reinventing the wheel (or funnel or spiral), our strategic-planning tool can provide agencies and brands with in-depth journey research at a price and scale unavailable anywhere else. The insights gained from Commspoint Journey offer the foundation to strengthen brand strategies, inform agency pitches and support the development of creative strategies.

This whitepaper will explore the history of consumer journeys, the shortcomings of existing systems and how Commspoint Journey can support your approach to marketing communications.
A HISTORY OF PATHS TO PURCHASE

If you’ve been involved in marketing since the turn of the century, you’ll probably have witnessed first-hand the emergence of complex consumer journey models. However, it’s less likely you’ll have been present when purchase funnels were originally developed in the 19th century!

EARLY CONCEPTION

The first theoretical model for journeys is commonly attributed to Elias St. Elmo Lewis, an American marketing advocate and Advertising Hall of Fame member. Lewis’ framework, which was created in 1898 and became known as the AIDA model in the 1920s, summarised four stages in the path to purchase:

- Attention (or awareness)
- Interest
- Desire
- Action

By the 1960s, the AIDA model was morphing into a funnel; a metaphor that businesses continue to use today, albeit less frequently. Many variants have arisen over the years, with additional or alternatively named steps often included, such as consideration, purchase, loyalty and advocacy. The emphasis was clear though - consumers could be moved down the funnel through the unconquerable power of marketing.

MODERN CONSUMER JOURNEYS

Purchase funnels remained the dominant journey framework for more than a century until marketers recognised the need to account for the effect of digital technologies on consumers’ interactions with brands.

Hugh Macfarlane wasn’t the first marketing specialist to identify problems with the purchase funnel, but he is often credited with originating the term ‘buyer journey’ in his 2003 book The Leaky Funnel. According to Macfarlane, people don’t just wake up one day and want to buy goods and services; they go on a journey that takes them from pre-awareness to purchase.

Since then, many consultancies have created proprietary versions of consumer journey models. We’ve seen circles, loops, pyramids, maps, spirals and more as marketers try to measure decision-making processes.

Examples of popular consumer journey models

FORRESTER

Forrester’s research in 2007 questioned the simplicity of traditional methodologies. The company claimed consumer journeys are too complex to represent through linear funnels and instead formulated the maze-like structure below, which put social at the centre of the process:
McKinsey’s sway among senior executives means its consumer journey models have remained influential over the years. In 2009, the firm unveiled its circular framework, which covered four stages: consideration, active evaluation, closure/purchase, and post-purchase experience.

Last year, McKinsey updated its previous model, encouraging firms to compress or remove the consideration and evaluation phases.

Google’s Customer Journey tool identifies moments that influence buyers on their path to an online purchase. The search engine uses Google Analytics to gauge the effectiveness of different marketing channels such as email, social and organic search:

LIMITATIONS OF EXISTING CONSUMER JOURNEY FRAMEWORKS

Despite the popularity of the above models, most have left marketers hungry for more. The excellent Google work does not cover everything that happens offline or leave a ‘footprint’, e.g. attitude shifts. Many feel the influential McKinsey work understates the importance of brand building ahead of the purchase. A truly representative consumer journey framework should take a holistic approach that impartially considers all the relevant factors.
WHAT DO WE DO DIFFERENTLY?

At Pointlogic, we don’t believe the consumer journey begins when people start active consideration. Furthermore, while we appreciate the huge impact of digital technologies, we still recognise the power of traditional channels such as TV, radio, print and your friends or family.

Consumer behaviours aren’t mechanical step-by-step processes that follow neat, preordained patterns. Marketers need journey research that can account for the messy and inconsistent paths people take when buying products in real-world scenarios. Has the purchase been planned weeks in advance or was it simply an impulse decision made while waiting in the checkout aisle? Have customers always been interested in the category or not? Who were they buying for and why? Which emotions did they feel most strongly at different journey stages?

These are just a few of the many specific questions that we know brands and agencies often ask - and Commspoint Journey can deliver the answers. Pointlogic is a global leader in media software and analytics and our software is one of the first of its kind to delve strategically into real responses from upwards of 5,000 people regarding actual purchases they’ve made.

Journey frameworks help you identify key influences across your categories and support decision-making at the creative and activation levels. If you want a fast, flexible and comprehensive journey research tool, Commspoint Journey can be a crucial weapon in your arsenal.

OUR JOURNEY FRAMEWORK

We selected five stages for our design: Being, Starting, Exploring, Buying and Enjoying. These cover everything from pre-awareness of brands and needs through to post-purchase activities such as taking pictures of your new car and recommending the product to others.

Five stages is a balanced number for a multi-category overview. They were carefully chosen to ensure you can analyse every step in depth if necessary. However, we understand that some stages are more important than others for certain categories, which is why Commspoint Journey offers the flexibility to highlight and prioritise the most relevant stages. You can also skip, split or extend parts of each process to create fully customised insights that reflect your requirements. Every consumer journey is unique, and the system can mirror the often sporadic practical and psychological influences that drive individuals’ purchases.

Our software is designed to offer specific, fresh research that you can utilise to identify communications objectives and find evidence to support your strategies. Commspoint Journey can provide the data and insights to underpin the relationships you want to build with consumers. Ultimately, we’re not looking to dominate the conversation; we simply provide the tools to strengthen your voice in a crowded landscape.
WHAT CAN JOURNEY TELL US?

Commspoint Journey can provide unique insights across different countries and categories, which enables marketers to influence outcomes and optimise communications strategies. Here are a few examples of the trends we’ve encountered while using Journey:

HOME ENERGY CONTRACTS (UK)

Our data reveals that under-35s who’ve switched their home energy supplier are three times more likely to recommend the service they’ve bought to friends and families than those aged 55 and over. However, both demographics are equally likely to visit the supplier’s website following the purchase. This indicates that one group doesn’t necessarily ‘get digital’ more than the other, but instead shows there are clear differences in how age groups interact and utilise their networks.

SOFT DRINKS (THAILAND)

The leading category shared experience for both UK and Thai soft drink consumers is feeling confident when making a purchase. But this is where the similarities between the two countries start to diverge. Journey shows us that UK buyers don’t spend much time thinking about the category and mostly opt for familiar brands. In contrast, Thai people are more likely to research their purchase beforehand and choose innovative products. Awareness of underlying attitudes across international markets enables you to tailor your campaign to meet different requirements. Do you have to feed their curiosity, or simply stimulate a purchase need?

VIDEO GAMES (UK)

According to Journey, men and women typically buy video games for different reasons. Women are 3.5 times more likely than men to be purchasing the latest release as a gift for someone else, which often has an impact on the channels they use to guide their decision-making. For example, female shoppers are more reliant on personal recommendations, while males - who overwhelmingly buy video games for themselves - look to online reviews for information.

INSURANCE POLICIES (US)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the data tells us that shopping for insurance is more associated with negative emotions in the early stages of the journey. ‘Worried’, ‘Need some help’ and ‘Nervous’ all make it into the top four emotions that consumers report. However, by the end of the journey, the top three feelings are ‘Satisfied’, ‘Confident’ and ‘Relieved’. Planners can use this information to focus their campaigns on promoting the positive outcomes of reaching the final destination rather than the crowded landscape of the comparison phase.

These are just a handful of observations spanning four categories, three continents and a small selection of demographics. With more than 30 categories and 10,000-15,000 individual journeys to explore, our tool has plenty more insights left to discover.
Consumer journeys are a hot topic among marketers who want to gain a competitive edge for their communications strategies. While purchase funnels have existed for over a century, modern journey research has become more complex due to digital technologies disrupting traditional relationships between brands and consumers.

Some consumer journey frameworks have tried to tap into the chaotic nature of shoppers’ decision-making processes as they move along the path to purchase. However, even the most popular models have shortcomings that prevent them from delivering detailed insights across multiple product categories.

Commspoint Journey offers a holistic solution to these problems via sophisticated software that is powered by comprehensive research compiled from thousands of respondents and purchases. Your brand or agency can customise your journeys to gain specific information to drive creative discussions and activation strategies.

If you would like to know more about our consumer journey philosophy or discuss our suite of solutions, please contact us today.