

# The Hero's Journey in Your Shopping Cart: Unmasking Identities in Marketing

Hey Aria! Ready for an adventure into the world of marketing where you're the hero, and brands are your trusty guides (or maybe not-so-trusty)? We're going to explore how companies use an ancient storytelling trick – the Hero's Journey – to shape their own identity and try to connect with yours!

## Your Mission, Should You Choose to Accept It (Learning Goals):

- Become a super-sleuth, identifying the Hero's Journey in cool (and maybe cringey) ads.
- Analyze how brands craft their "personality" and how they try to make you feel like the star of your own story.
- Unleash your creativity by designing your own marketing story for a product!
- Think critically about how these stories influence what we think about ourselves and what we buy.

## Section 1: What IS This Hero's Journey Anyway? (The Call to Adventure & Meeting the Mentor)

You've probably seen the Hero's Journey a million times in movies, books, and games. Think of Luke Skywalker, Harry Potter, or Katniss Everdeen. It's a classic story pattern where a hero:

1. Starts in an Ordinary World.
2. Gets a Call to Adventure (a problem or challenge).
3. Might Refuse the Call at first.
4. Meets a Mentor (someone wise to guide them).
5. Crosses the Threshold into a special new world.
6. Faces Tests, Allies, and Enemies.
7. Approaches the Inmost Cave (the biggest challenge).
8. Experiences an Ordeal (a major crisis, hits rock bottom).
9. Seizes the Sword/Reward (gains something important after the ordeal).
10. Takes The Road Back to their ordinary world.
11. Goes through a Resurrection (final test, often using what they learned).
12. Returns with the Elixir (solution, treasure, new understanding to share).

**Your First Quest:** Can you think of a character from a book or movie who follows these steps? Briefly jot down how they fit a few of these stages.

## Section 2: The Hero's Journey in Marketing: You're the Star! (Crossing the Threshold)

Okay, so how does this apply to... a new brand of soda or a smartphone?

In marketing, **YOU (the customer) are the Hero!**

- **Your Ordinary World:** You have a need, a problem, a desire (e.g., "I'm thirsty," "My old phone is slow," "I want to feel more confident"). This is your 'Call to Adventure.'

- **The Brand/Product as Mentor/Helper:** The brand often positions itself as the wise guide or the magical tool that will help you on your journey. The product is the 'elixir' or 'sword' that helps you overcome your challenge.
- **The 'Special World':** This is the world the brand promises if you use their product – a world where you're happier, more successful, cooler, or your problem is solved.
- **Identities at Play:**
  - **Brand Identity:** The personality the brand wants to project (e.g., innovative, trustworthy, rebellious, caring). They use the hero's journey story to build this.
  - **Audience's Desired Identity:** The story appeals to how the audience *wants* to see themselves (e.g., smart, adventurous, a good parent, environmentally conscious). The product becomes a way to achieve or express that identity.

### Example - Nike:

- **Hero:** The aspiring athlete (you).
- **Call to Adventure:** Wanting to run a marathon, get fit, overcome self-doubt.
- **Mentor/Helper:** Nike (their shoes, apparel, inspiring messages).
- **Promised Land/Elixir:** Achieving your goal, feeling empowered ("Just Do It").
- **Brand Identity:** Determined, empowering, high-performance.
- **Audience's Desired Identity:** An achiever, strong, resilient.

## Section 3: Ad Detective Time! (Tests, Allies, and Enemies)

Let's put on our detective hats! Find 2-3 advertisements (video, print, or online). For each ad:

1. **Who is the "Hero" (the target customer)?** What's their problem or desire (their "Call to Adventure")?
2. **How is the product/service presented as the "Mentor," "Magic Helper," or "Elixir"?**
3. **What transformation or "Special World" is promised to the Hero if they use the product?** (e.g., happiness, success, belonging, problem solved)
4. **What identity is the BRAND trying to project for itself through this story?** (e.g., innovative, traditional, fun, serious, caring, exclusive)
5. **What identity is the ad appealing to in the AUDIENCE?** What does it suggest about the kind of person who uses this product? How would using this product make the "Hero" feel about themselves?

Jot down your notes. We can discuss your findings!

## Section 4: Your Turn to Be the Marketer! (The Ordeal & Reward)

Now it's time for you to get creative. Invent a new product or service, OR pick an existing one you think could use a new marketing story.

**Your Mission:** Create a concept for a marketing campaign using the Hero's Journey. You can write it out, create a mini-storyboard (stick figures are awesome!), or even act it out.

### Make sure to define:

1. **Your Product/Service:** What is it? What does it do?

2. **Your Target Audience (The Hero):** Who are they? What's their "Ordinary World" and their "Call to Adventure" (their problem, need, or desire)?
3. **Your Brand Identity:** What personality do you want your brand to have? (e.g., rebellious, comforting, luxurious, eco-friendly)
4. **The Hero's Journey Outline:**
  - How will your brand/product be the **Mentor** or **Magic Helper**?
  - What is the "**Inmost Cave/Ordeal**" your hero faces that your product helps them overcome?
  - What is the "**Reward/Elixir**" they gain by using your product? (More than just the product itself – think about the feeling or status).
  - What is the "**New World**" or transformed self they experience?
5. **Connecting to Audience Identity:** How does your story make your target audience feel good about themselves or help them express an identity they desire?

Have fun with this! The more creative, the better!

## Section 5: Thinking Deeper - The Power of Story (The Road Back & Resurrection)

Let's reflect on what we've learned:

- How do you think using the Hero's Journey in marketing affects how people see themselves and the products they choose?
- Can these marketing stories sometimes be misleading or create unrealistic expectations about what a product can do for someone's identity?
- Now that you know this "secret code," how might it change the way you look at ads in the future?
- What is the responsibility of marketers when they are trying to associate a product with someone's identity?

## Section 6: You've Returned with the Elixir! (Conclusion)

Awesome work, Aria! You've journeyed through the world of marketing and storytelling, uncovering how brands use the Hero's Journey to define their own identities and appeal to ours. You've seen that a toothbrush isn't just a toothbrush – it can be a magical wand for a brighter smile and newfound confidence, all thanks to the power of story!

The "elixir" you've gained is new knowledge and critical thinking skills. You can now see these patterns and understand the deeper messages in marketing. This makes you a super-empowered consumer and a brilliant creative thinker!