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Poster #23: Using Polarity Management Techniques to Uncover the Paradoxical Consumer Needs

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Abstract

- Often product opportunities are defined as solutions to a consumer problem. If we build the right solution the consumer's problem will be solved. And to build the right solution all we have to do is understand the needs (articulated and unarticulated) of the consumer. Yet often these needs are paradoxical; such as consumers wanting a product that delivers both innovation and nostalgia. These needs are complex and often competing in nature so they are difficult to address effectively.

- Polarity Management® principles and methods were applied with a creative consumer qualitative group and made visible and concrete several paradoxes or polarities which were named using the consumers' own language. Using a polarity mapping method, the consumers could understand the upside and the downside of each of these needs (poles) **and** identify the motivations and behaviors that correspond to each pole or pull.

- This process allows for product developers and marketers to resolve the inherent tensions and conflicts in consumer needs and desires surrounding product and brand options. Rather than force tradeoffs to seek a single solution that is force fit to the initial 'consumer fix", the researcher gets a deeper understanding of the pull of different need states as the consumer "leans" toward certain product choices over others.

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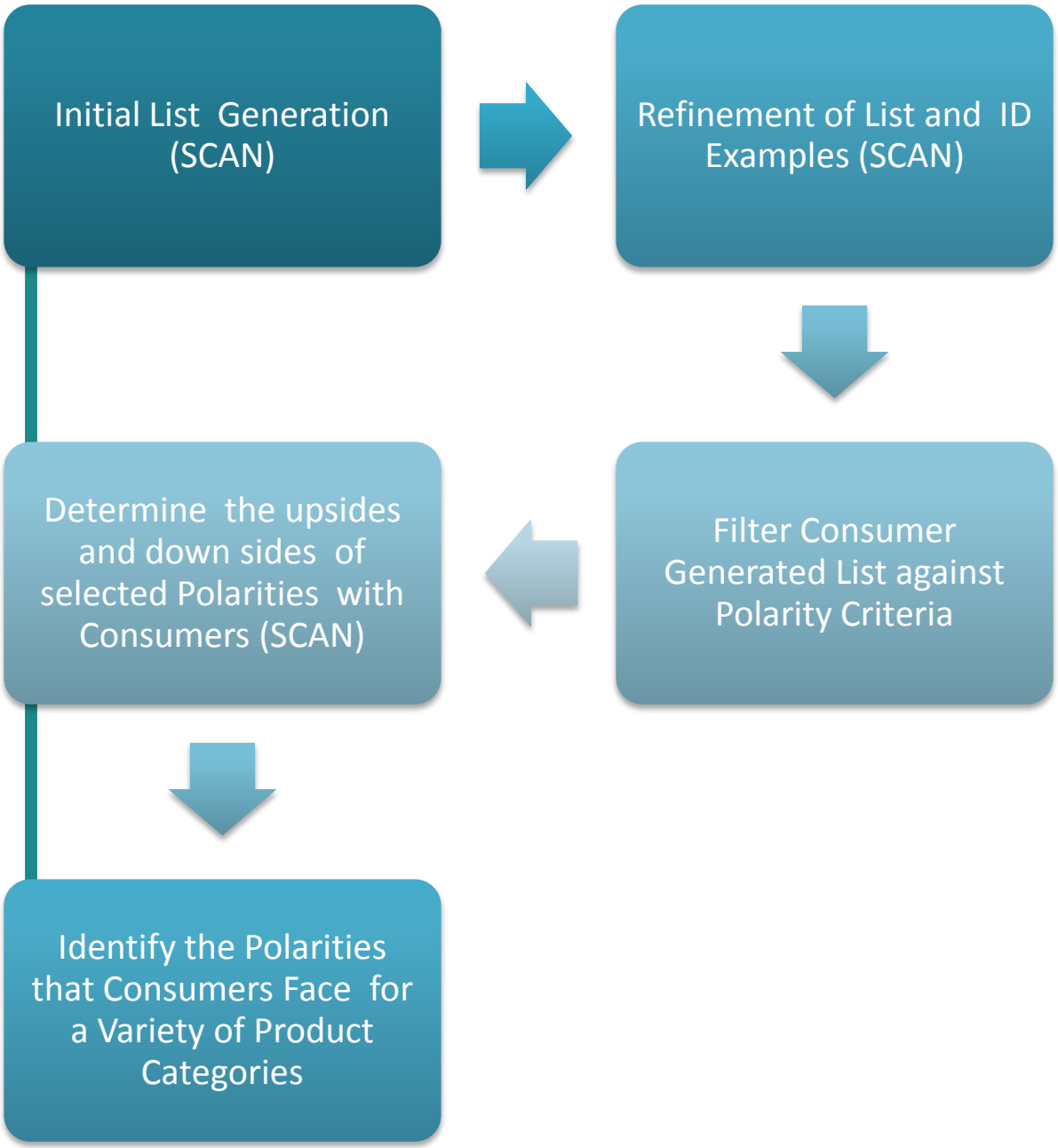
Polarity Definition

- *"…sets of pairs that may seem contradictory or competing although they can't function well independently over time. Because the two parts of the pairs are interdependent, you cannot choose one as a 'solution' and neglect the other"* – Barry Johnson
- Polarities:
  - Are ongoing; have no endpoint
  - Are not solvable
  - Are interdependent alternatives which need each other to optimize situation over time
  - Are indestructible; meaning that no matter how much you want one over the other; at some point, you will need both

Polarity Examples

Thinking and Feeling	Candor and Diplomacy
Stability and Change	Tough Love and Gentle Love
Individual and Team	Structure and Flexibility
Work and Home	Growth and Retention
Activity and Rest	Depth and Breadth

Process



The SCAN panel is the Spectrum Community Narrative Panel . The Spectrum Community Narrative Panel (SCAN) is comprised of creative, articulate consumers who meet for multiple sessions to build community within the group. This process leads to honest communication, enhanced creativity, and increased description of the target product category and/or concept.

SCAN provides rich, in-depth language, and deep insights translated into actionable research guidance for the stages of product development.

First SCAN Session

- Brief introduction to concept of polarities – using examples from everyday:
  - Stability and Change
  - Rest and Activity
- Main Question:

What are the chronic challenges/dilemmas you face when making purchasing decisions?

Purchasing Decisions are Complex

" Shopping has become an art"

"Dilemma purchasing something new and fear of it becoming obsolete…When do I buy this thing. Will it breakdown, should I be out of date and not have one? Being first is it sometimes. When do I buy, I want it, but not perfected yet. Flatscreen TV?..now or wait?"

"Oil of Olay..Our mothers used it. Go crazy with beauty products. It's so crazy and overwhelming, annoying"

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Initial List of Consumer Identified Polarities

cost	and	quality	innovation	and	nostalgic
cost	and	personal values	fear of being left behind	and	fear of being obsolete
nice to have	and	need to have	status	and	independent thinking
need to have	and	help the economy	keep product until it dies	and	replace frequently
impulse buying	and	informed purchase	unique	and	mass market
safety	and	risk	too many choices	and	not enough choices
for me	and	for others in my life	having to replace	and	wanting to replace
everyday	and	special occasion	bells/whistles	and	basic features
control	and	easy choices	simple	and	complex
repurpose old	and	purchase new	choosing because of brand	and	brand doesn't matter
support local business	and	support large companies	willing to throw away	and	get $$ worth
brand loyalty	and	cost value	be served	and	self service
fulfill needs	and	create needs	sticking to budget	and	purchasing free for all
downsizing	and	expanding	convenience	and	requires time
trading up	and	trading down	comprehensive services	and	specialized services
emotionally tied	and	purely practical			

Second SCAN Session

- Review List
  - *Are all polarities – ongoing, interdependent?*
  - *Neutralize the language - names of poles should be neutral as possible and still be meaningful to the group*

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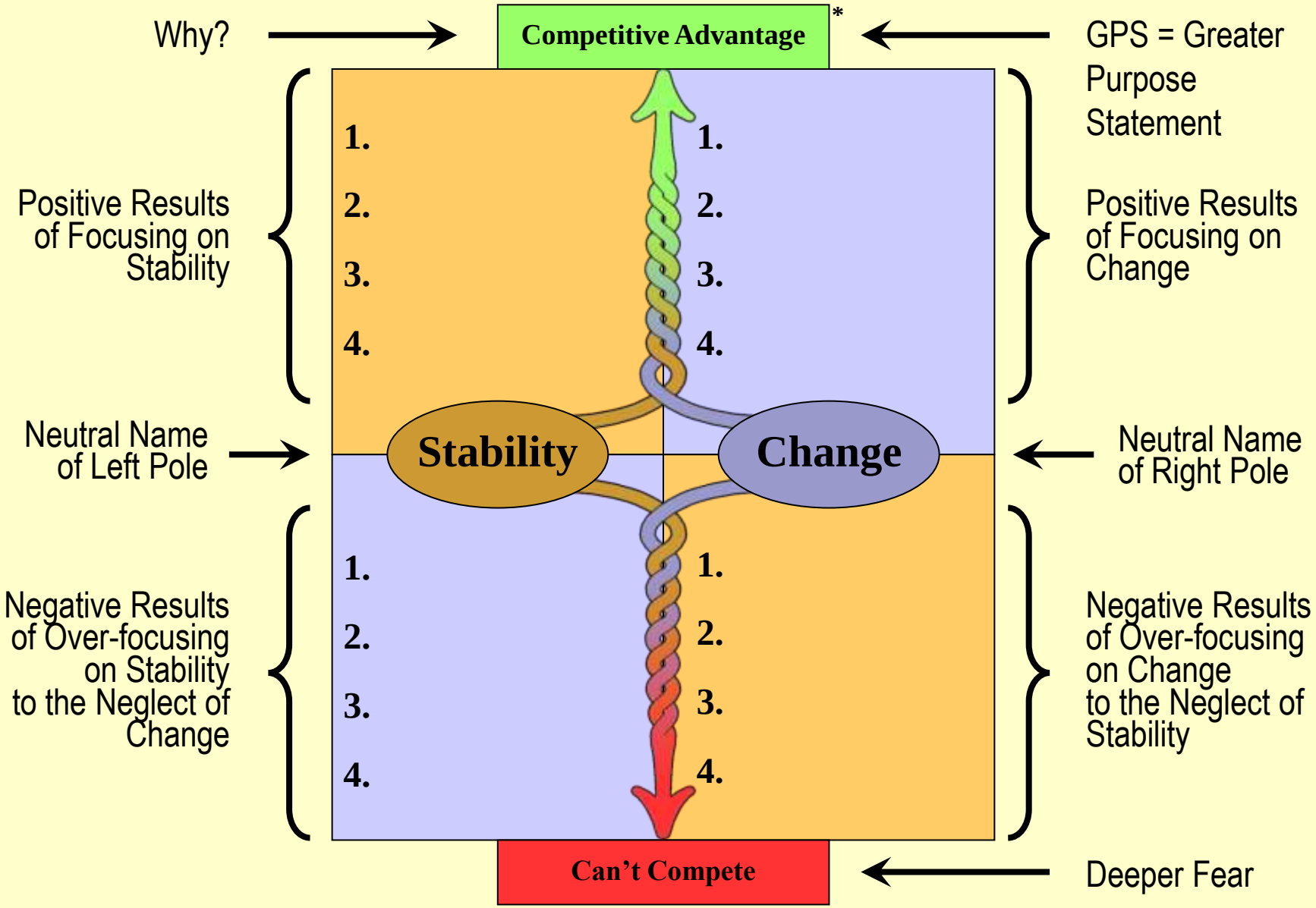
Final List of Consumer Identified Polarities

considering cost	and	considering quality	innovative (innovation)	and	nostalgic
cost	and	personal values	behind the curve	and	ahead of the curve
want (nice) to have	and	need to have	status	and	independent thinking
spontaneous purchase	and	informed purchase	unique	and	mass production (market)
safe (safety)	and	risk	too many choices	and	not enough choices
care for me	and	care for others	having to replace	and	wanting to replace
everyday	and	special occasion	simple	and	complex
repurpose old	and	purchase new	choosing because of brand	and	brand doesn't matter
brand loyalty	and	cost value	sticking to budget	and	purchasing outside of budget
fulfill needs	and	create needs	convenience	and	requires time
downsizing	and	expanding	comprehensive services	and	specialized services
purely (fun) emotional	and	purely practical			

Third SCAN Session

- Complete a Polarity Map® for consumer selected polarities
- Identify the relevant polarities for selected consumer product categories

Guide to Polarity Map® Content



* Polarity Management Association and John Scherer, Center for Work and the Human Spirit

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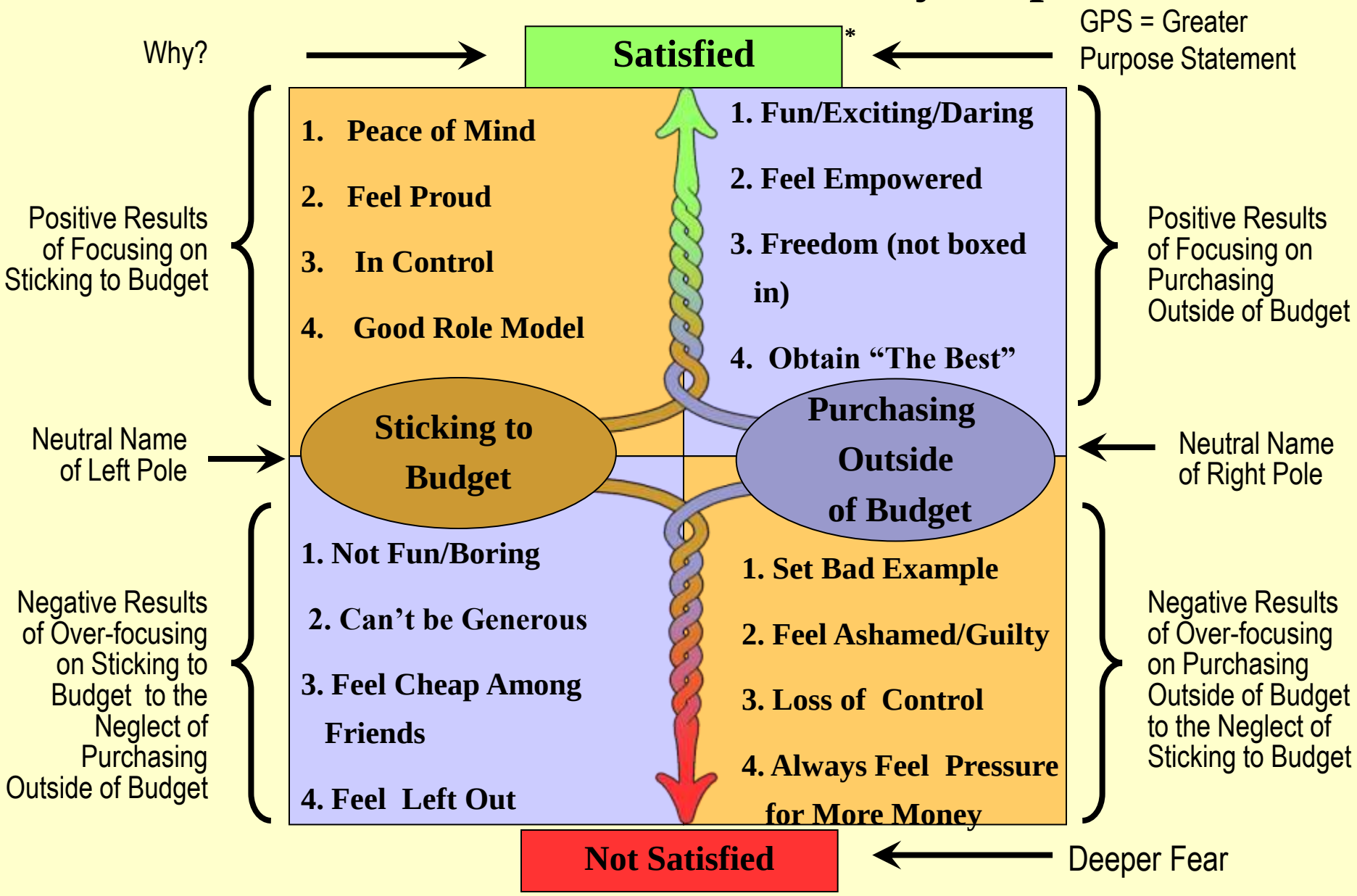
Consumers Completing the Polarity Map® Sections for *Sticking to a Budget and Purchasing Outside a Budget*





Consumer Generated Polarity Map®



Top 3 Polarities Consumers Consider When Purchasing …

Personal Care Products
Convenience and Requires Time
Choosing Because of Brand and Brand Doesn't Matter
Sticking to Budget and Purchasing Outside of Budget

Grocery/Food Products
Considering Cost and Considering Quality
Everyday and Special Occasion
Spontaneous Purchase and Informed Purchase

Top 3 Polarities Consumers Consider When Purchasing …

Clothing
Care for Self and Care for Others
Status and Independent Thinking
Behind the Curve and Ahead of the Curve

Technology /Electronics
Behind the Curve and Ahead of the Curve
Considering Cost and Considering Quality
Spontaneous Purchase and Informed Purchase

Top 3 Polarities Consumers Consider When Purchasing …

Home Care Products and Products for the Home
Convenience and Requires Time
Choosing Because of Brand and Brand Doesn't Matter
Repurpose Old and Purchase New

Big Ticket Items (Home, Car, etc.)
Status and Independent Thinking
Sticking to Budget and Purchasing Outside of Budget
Safety and Risk

Questions

- Are there gender and age differences, especially when identifying relevant polarities with consumer product categories?
- Which polarities are overarching naturally occurring polarities and which polarities are consumer created?

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