

Surprise Toys to Build Customer Loyalty Using Classical Conditioning

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the effects of conditioning (the systematic pairing of 'surprise toy' paired with a market offering) on the target consumer attitudes and satisfaction. The study examines whether using surprise which are highly congruent with the consumers leads to a stronger conditioning effect. It further scrutinizes how a reaction towards surprise varies with age. The results demonstrate that individuals exposed to the systematic pairing of a surprise with a market offering did develop a more favorable attitude and higher satisfaction towards the offering than individuals in the control condition. Moreover, the pairing of a surprise with a market offering was more effective in forming a positive attitude when the congruence was high. Further, the younger the age group, the more positive was the response towards the surprise. It has been argued that marketers must move beyond mere satisfaction to customer delight. Interestingly, the finding of this research proves that positive surprise in the form of toys can be a privileged way to trigger customer satisfaction and loyalty.

KEYWORDS

Children, Classical Conditioning, Consumer Behavior, Loyalty, Surprise, Toys

1. INTRODUCTION

Consumers today can order goods within the comforts of their dwelling, from markets, across the seven seas. To stand out in the competitive world, a marketer today, must understand why and how consumers make their decisions (Shiffman and Knauk, 2006). They also must comprehend what motivates their consumers to buy, what attracts their attention, how do they learn and memorize various products (Shimp, 1991; Wani and Malik, 2013). Further does, their personality, culture, and attitude influence their buying decisions? Such a profound understanding of customers requires a thorough study of Consumer Behaviour. (Batkoska and Koseska, 2012; Alhamdi, 2019).

Within the arena of Consumer Behavior, learning is one branch that is of great connotation and interest to marketers (Marilyn. 2018). Consumer learning is defined as the process by which individuals acquire the purchase and consumption knowledge and experience that they apply to future consumption-related behavior. (Shiffman *et al.*, 2013). Its understanding enables marketers to ensure that their products are chosen over their competitors (Schutzwohl, 1998).

Psychologists have advocated several basic theories to explain the process of consumer learning. (Asikainen and Martinez, 2010). One of the most popular of these theories is Classical

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Conditioning. The theory views both animals and humans as relatively passive entities that can be taught certain behaviors through repetition or conditioning (Schiffman *et al.*, 2013). The theory of Classical Conditioning, an heritage of Ivan Pavlov, occurs when a stimulus that naturally elicits a response, Unconditioned Stimulus (US), is paired with another stimulus that initially does not elicit any response, Conditioned Stimulus (CS), on its own (Solomon *et al.*, 2006). Over time, the second stimulus produces an identical response because of its repeated association with the first stimulus (Hunt, 1989).

As stated above, in Conditioning Theory there is an unconditioned stimulus (UCS) and a conditioned stimulus (CS). *The CS is usually the product or brand that marketers teach consumers to recognize and prefer over others* (Klein, 1991). The UCS is the positive stimulus; usually, something that makes consumers feel good, *and can be presented along with the CS*. (Asikainen and Martinez 2010).

The above-mentioned theoretical arguments strongly suggest that classical conditioning is used by marketers to teach consumers about their products.

Studies show that customer satisfaction has a direct impact on purchase intention, the higher the satisfaction more is the probability to repurchase (Bode, G. 2008). Further research also found that customer satisfaction and customer attitude are also positively co-related (Szymanski and Henard, 2001). Oliver's (1980) study on Customer Satisfaction antecedents and hypothesized consequences of satisfaction; found attitude to be an outcome of satisfaction. As research proves a direct and positive relation between purchase, satisfaction & attitude it would be valuable for marketers to understand:

RQ1: How Classical Conditioning impacts consumer's attitude and satisfaction towards products?

One very commonly used unconditional stimulus by marketers is "Positive Surprise"(Ariffin and Omar, 2016). A Surprise is defined as a brief mental and physiological state experienced both by animals and humans as the result of an unanticipated event (Fisk, 2002). Surprise can be neutral/moderate, pleasant/unpleasant, positive/ negative. (Gregan *et al.*,1997). A positive surprise is a surprise, combined with a subsequent positive emotion like joy and excitement. Such surprises are said to lead to customer delight which is considered as the highest level of customer satisfaction resulting in customer loyalty (Kovacs,2015).

The surprise is a short-lived emotion, which varies with an individual's age and experience (Teigen and Keren, 2003). What might constitute a surprise for one individual of a certain age and gender may not be for another. Thus, marketers must understand their target consumer before associating its product with a surprise (Tsang, 2013). Although psychologists have studied surprise, there is still little knowledge about the relationship between consumer characteristics and their reaction towards surprise. Accordingly, the second question is framed-

RQ2: How does the impact of surprise vary with consumer characteristics?

While targeting children, toys are often seen as the most commonly used instrument of surprise (Olivia and Saracho, 1995). Amongst all types of play materials, toys are the most essential and are also cherished by children the most. (Trawick *et al.*, 2015). Thus 'Surprise Toys' are unconditioned stimulus (that always elicits a positive response) for children.

RQ3: How effective are 'surprise toys' when used as unconditioned stimulus in Classical Conditioning?

Even though 'surprising your customers' appears to be in vogue, our understanding of this emotional variable in a marketing context is rather limited (Reisenzein, 2000). Although there have been calls for a theoretical framework to be developed for a surprise (Soriano *et. al*, 2015.) and that this

emotion is investigated in a marketing context (Silvia, 2009). Only a few researchers have attempted to examine the effect(s) of surprise on children's attitude and loyalty.

With the preponderance of evidence to indicate that surprise toys are an unconditioned stimulus and the identified need to study its impact on children's attitude the following objectives were formed:

1. To analyze the influence of surprise toys on the target consumer's attitude and towards the market offering.
2. To study how congruity, between the target consumers and surprise toys, influences attitude towards the market offering.
3. To understand the influence of 'surprise toys' on the overall consumer satisfaction level and the satisfaction of different age groups among children.

Further sections deal with theoretical background, experiments, and results, and discussions.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Interpreting consumer behavior is a vital task for marketers in their attempt to offer consumers greater satisfaction (MacInnis and Folkes, 2010). Every individual consumer is unique as each is influenced by their personality, attitudes, perceptions, learning, and motivations (Hawkins and Mothersbaugh, 2009). For a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior, the variable known as learning is of great significance. Learning, defined as the changes in a person's behavior caused by experience and information, is considered as the basis of the consumer's motivation to buy or not buy a certain product or service. Thus, learning is essential for the process of buying and consuming.

Learning has influenced a plethora of marketing strategy specifically in the area of consumer behavior (Foxall and Schrezenmaier, 2003). Of the various approaches of learning, behaviorism theories have had considerable influence on the marketing tactics used by brands. One of the most recognized and commonly used behaviorist approaches, and one that has been applied meticulously by marketers, is Classical Conditioning. (Delamater and Oakshott, 2007). According to the classical conditioning model of learning, which is based on Pavlov's (1927) work, occurs when a stimulus that causes a response is paired with another stimulus that initially does not elicit a reaction on its own. Over time, this second stimulus elicits a similar response because it is associated with the first stimulus' (Bouton, 2001).

One of the most popular techniques of conditioning used by marketers is that of pairing surprise toys or premium with a children's meal or special product. Marketers often pair positive surprises (unconditioned stimulus) to market offerings (conditioned stimulus) to condition their consumers into buying the products (Fisk and Pidgeon, 1998). This is especially a very common phenomenon in products targeted towards children, as children are more influenced by surprises than adults (Derbaix and Vanhamme, 2003). However, an understanding of the effects of this pairing on children's attitude towards the product is lacking. This led to the creation of the first hypothesis:

H1: Children exposed to the systematic pairing of surprise toys with a product will develop a more favorable attitude towards the market offering than children in the control condition (No systematic toy and market offering pairing).

The principle of consumer and unconditional stimulus congruence supports the concept of strategically matching the two to strengthen the associative link (Vanhamme, 2000). Therefore, it is expected that attitudes will be more favorable towards a market offering when there is congruence between the surprise and target consumer – that is when pairing via classical conditioning procedures. This reasoning leads to the second hypothesis.

H2: Conditioned attitude towards the market offering (the difference between the treatment condition and control condition) will be greater when there is perceived congruence between the surprise and the consumer.

The link between surprise and delight is rooted in Plutchik's (1980) empirical work in psychology. The work described delight as the result of the combination of two emotions, surprise, and Joy (Gwynne, 2002). Previous research has shown that surprise is one of the main determinants of customer delight (Vanhamme, 2000). The most important strategy in creating memorable experiences and customer delight is to provide surprise to the customer (Bartsch and Estes, 1997). This reasoning led to the creation of the third hypothesis.

H3: Children exposed to the systematic pairing of surprise toys with a market offering will have a higher satisfaction level than the children in the control condition. (No systematic toy and market offering pairing).

Surprises amplify feelings (Desai, 2001). Since the younger children are happier, more positive would be the impact of surprise on satisfaction for them (Dinisman and Ariei, 2015). Therefore, it is expected that feeling of delight due to a positive surprise as an unconditional stimulus would descend with age. Accordingly, the fourth hypothesis was formed-

H4: Children in the younger age group exposed to the systematic pairing of surprise toys with a market offering will have a higher satisfaction level than the children in the older age group.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research tries to explore the effect of pairing, a surprise toy with a product, on the consumer's attitude and satisfaction. The research further analyses the impact of, surprise toys and gender congruence, on conditioning. This is quantitative research-based out on real-world scenarios. The researchers have made four hypotheses and further each hypothesis was tested using descriptive statistics and ANOVA. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) is a collection of statistical models and their associated estimation procedures (such as the "variation" among and between groups) used to analyze the differences among means. This test is used to determine whether there are any statistically significant differences between the means of three or more independent (unrelated) groups. Since this study was testing the significant difference between two groups based on the aspect of classical conditioning, therefore, ANOVA was the aptest method. SPSS v22 was used to test the hypothesis.

The respondents were children from the various private school of New Delhi between 6 to 12 years of age. For each of the experiments, a different set of students were selected; thus, a total of 360 respondents took part in the experiments. Table 1 elucidates upon the profile of the respondents. The data was collected in the span of two months i.e. from December 2019 to February 2020.

The detail of each experiment is being elaborated in the further sections.

3.1 Experiment I

The purpose of an experiment was to test whether the children exposed to the systematic pairing of a toy and chocolate in the form of Kinder Joy develop a more positive attitude towards the product than individuals in the control group (no systematic pairing).

3.1.1 Participants and Design

120 students from eminent private schools of New Delhi were the participants in the experiment. The participants were in the age group of 6 to 12 years and both the genders were represented equally.

Table 1. Respondents Profile

Experiment	Number of Respondents	Age group	Gender	Geographical Location
Experiment I	120	6-12	60 each	New Delhi
Experiment II	120	6-12	60 each	New Delhi
Experiment III	120	7-12	60 each	New Delhi

3.1.2 Pilot Test

Before the experiment, a pilot test was conducted to choose a suitable product that involves a surprise. A total of 108 children between the ages 6 to 12 were asked to select a product based on the following characteristic of the Surprise- Attractiveness, Quality, Innovativeness.

The attractiveness scale contained three items: attractive/unattractive, bright/dull, and beautiful/ugly, (Cronbach's Alpha =.818). Similarly, the quality scale also included three items value for money /not value for money, classy/ not classy, high quality/low quality (Cronbach Alpha=.756). Innovativeness also contained three items variety/no variety, novelty/no novelty, new design/.old design, (Cronbach Alpha=.811). The Semantic Differential scale was employed.

Kinder Joy is a bar of chocolate sold by Ferrero in India. The chocolate is packed like an egg which is neatly divided into two halves. The first half of the egg serves as a small bowl to scoop the semi-solid milky & cocoa chocolate with two-wafer balls. The other half is filled with creative toys along with an instruction manual. The eggs are like two different packs glued together and can be easily separated.

Participants identified Kinder Joy, as the most attractive, quality-oriented, and innovative product with a surprise. Consequently, Kinder Joy was selected as the unconditional stimulus for the study.

3.1.3 Procedures and Measures

This experiment was a two-group design utilizing a treatment group vs. a control group. The experiment followed well-established classical conditioning procedures (Shimp, 1991). The participants were randomly assigned to two groups: 60 each.

To the treatment group the whole Kinder Joy was given (chocolate+ toy). To the control group, the half containing the chocolate was only given. All the other conditions were identical for both groups.

The dependent variable in the experiment was the participant's attitude towards the product.

Consistent with prior research, a seven-point semantic differential scale was utilized with the following items: tasty/ not tasty, enjoyable / not enjoyable, fun/not fun, will buy again / will not buy again, good/bad (Cronbach's alpha = .819) (Till *et. al*, 2008). All items were averaged to represent the overall attitude towards the event.

3.2 Results of Experiment I

The means and standard deviations by conditions for 60 subjects are represented in Table 2. The mean of attitude towards Kinder Joy was 3.48 for the treatment group, compared to 3.02 for the

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations for experiment Group Wise

Condition	N	Mean	Standard deviation	T	p-value
Treatment	60	3.48	1.39	4.29*	0
Control	60	3.02	0.85		

*p<.05

control group. This difference was statistically significant ($t=4.29, p<.05$). Results of this experiment revealed that individuals exposed to the systematic pairing of the toy with the product did develop a more favorable attitude towards the Kinder Joy than children in the control group. No systematic pairing. This supported H1.

3.3 Experiment II

The purpose of experiment II was to test whether the conditioned attitude towards market offering increased when there was a perceived congruence between the unconditioned stimulus and consumer (gender in this case).

3.3.1 Participants and Design

There was a total of 120 children 60 girls and 60 boys acted as participants between the age group 6 to 12. This experiment used a 2X2 between subjects' factorial design (systematic pairing vs no systematic pairing; congruence vs no congruence) that is four groups – two congruence treatment groups and two no congruence treatment groups).

3.3.2 Pilot Test

Before the experiment, a pilot test of 60 participants was performed to choose a product that had high congruence with the participant's gender. The measure for perceived congruence included: fit/not fit, and appropriate/inappropriate, and proper/improper. (Cronbach Alpha = .922). Results showed that both the genders readily identified again with Kinder Joy. The girls identified with the pink pack of Kinder Joy whereas the boys with the blue pack.

3.3.3 Stimuli and Procedures

In Experiment II the treatment group I which had only girls as participants were presented with a Kinder Joy Pink is exclusively for girls (toy + chocolate). The control group I, again had only girls as participants. This group was also presented with the Kinder Joy (toy+ chocolate) however pink was replaced with Kinder Joy Blue exclusively for boys. A similar experiment was conducted with Control and Treatment Group II containing only boys.

3.3.4 Manipulation Check

The analysis for the high/low congruence manipulation revealed that participants rated Kinder Joy as highly congruent with gender ($M=6.06$) ($M=2.27, t=15.21, p<.001$). Thus, results lead to the conclusion that the manipulation of high/low congruence was successful.

3.4 Results of Experiment II

Table 3 shows a significant interaction between congruence and conditioning on attitude towards the product ($F=9.23, p=.05$). Further analysis revealed that in the high congruence girl's treatment group mean was 5.87 and the girl's control group mean was 4.33. This difference was significant ($t=2.34, p=.05$).

Similarly, in the boy's treatment group mean was 3.87 and the control group's mean was 2.89. This difference was significant ($t=3.04, p=.05$). Thus, the results of this experiment revealed that individuals had a more favorable attitude towards a product when it was congruent with the consumers (gender in this case).

Thus, this implies that the pairing of conditioned and unconditioned stimulus is more effective in the formation of a positive attitude towards a product when there is congruence with the consumer (gender). Thus, supporting H2.

Table 3. ANOVA Results for Experiment II

Factor	DF	SS	F	p-value
Conditioning	1	6.34	6.24*	0.024
Congruence	1	1.28	1.38	0.524
Conditioning X Congruence	1	8.89	9.23*	0.012
Error	69	65.36		

*p<.05

3.5 Experiment III

The purpose of experiment III was to test whether the children exposed to the systematic pairing of a toy and chocolate in the form of Cadbury Likable had a higher satisfaction level towards the product than individuals in the control group (no systematic pairing).

3.5.1 Participants and Design

120 students from various private schools of Delhi were selected as participants for the experiment. The participants were in the age group of 7 to 12 years. There were 20 participants from each age group. In each age group, ten participants were a part of the treatment group and ten control groups.

3.5.2 Pilot Test

Before the experiment, a pilot test of 100 participants was performed to choose a product that always was associated with a surprise. The surprise was to be rated on the following characteristics- Unique/ Not Unique, Bright/ Dull, Innovative/ Repetitive, Interesting/Not Interesting, Like /Dislike (Cronbach Alpha = .902). Results showed that both the genders readily identified with Cadbury Likable.

3.5.3 Stimuli

Based on the popularity of Cadbury Likable among children the same was chosen to be the stimuli for this experiment too.

3.5.4 Procedures and Measures

This experiment was a two-group design utilizing a treatment group vs. a control group. The experiment followed well-established classical conditioning procedures. Care was taken that each age group is equally represented in both the groups. Thus, each group had 60 participants, 10 from each age group.

Children in the treatment group were given Cadbury Likable. To the control group, the same chocolate was presented, however, this time the toy was removed from the Likable, and only the chocolate part was presented. All the other conditions were identical for both groups. The dependent variable in the experiment was participant satisfaction towards the product.

A seven-point Semantic Differential Scale was once again utilized with the following items: good quality /bad quality, value for money/ not value for money, will repurchase/ will not repurchase, enjoyed the product/ did not enjoy, happy/ not happy (Cronbach's alpha = .732) (Till *et al.*, 2008). All items were averaged to represent overall satisfaction towards the stimulus.

3.6 Results of Experiment III

The means and standard deviations by conditions for 60 subjects are represented in Table 4. The mean satisfaction towards Likable was 3.88 for the treatment group, compared to 3.06 for the control group. This difference was statistically significant ($t=3.28$, $p<.05$).

Results of this experiment revealed that individuals exposed to the systematic pairing of the toy with the product did develop a more favorable attitude towards Likable than children in the control group. No systematic pairing. This supported H3.

For the analysis of the fourth hypothesis, no separate experiment was conducted. The values of satisfaction received in the third experiment were recalculated age-wise. As the Children in the treatment group were more satisfied, for the calculation of results data of only the above group was utilized. In the experiment children of 6 different age groups from 7 to 12 had participated, all were divided into two age groups younger age group- 7 to 9 years of age and older age group -10 to 12 years. Each age group had an equal representation of 10 each with a total of 30. The dependant variable was the satisfaction level. The means and standard deviations by conditions for 30 subjects are represented in Table 5. The mean satisfaction towards Likable was 3.56 for the younger age group, compared to 3.12 for the older. This difference was statistically significant ($t=3.01$, $p<.05$).

Results of this experiment revealed that the positive impact of surprise on satisfaction is stronger in the younger age group. Thus, the last hypothesis H4 was accepted.

4. DISCUSSION

Marketers often pair positive surprises (unconditioned stimulus) to market offerings (conditioned stimulus) to condition their consumers into buying the products (Fisk and Pidgeon, 1998). This is especially a very common phenomenon in products targeted towards children (Derbaix and Vanhamme, 2003). This study was an attempt to investigate the impact of such “positive surprise” in the form of toys on the attitude and satisfaction of children. The study also analyzed the impact of surprise on consumer congruity and age.

Three experiments were conducted to study the same. The findings of the experiment revealed that pairing a positive surprise in the form of a toy to a market offering has a positive impact on the attitude of the children towards the product. These findings are consistent with the work of Chen (2012) which showed the same effect by using celebrity endorsements as to the unconditioned stimulus

Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations Group Wise

Condition	N	Mean	Standard deviation	T	p-value
Treatment	60	3.88	1.52	3.28*	0.000
Control	60	3.06	0.38		

* $p<.05$

Table 5. Means and Standard Deviations by Age Groups

Condition	Age group	N	Mean	Standard deviation	T	p-value
Younger Age Group	7-9	30	3.56	1.52	3.01*	0
Older Age Group	10-12	30	3.12	0.38		

* $p<.05$

for sporting events. The results of Experiment II revealed that using a surprise that highly matched the consumer gender resulted in stronger conditioning and a stronger positive attitude than when the surprise was not congruent with the consumer gender.

Similar results were found in Experiment III, which demonstrated a higher satisfaction with a product paired with a surprise. Further, it was analyzed that the level of satisfaction varied with age. The younger age group emit higher satisfaction levels with the same surprise than their older counterparts. These findings were also similar to the findings of Teigen and Keren, 2003. Previous studies have attempted to investigate the impact of positive surprise on consumer delight. (Schutzwohl, 1998; Alden, 2000; Reisenzein, 2000; Vanhamme 2000). However, none have explained how surprise can be employed by marketers to create a positive attitude and higher satisfaction among the target consumer. Several brands with children as their target market is launched across the globe. The major problem in marketing such brands is the difference between the consumer and customer. For these brands, though children are the final consumer, it is the parents who are usually the decision-makers and the buyers of the product.

Influencing a parent to buy a confectionary product is a difficult task. However, associating a surprise with children's products helps brands persuade their final consumers who in turn influence the buyers. This is achieved in a variety of ways. Firstly, it helps the brand cut through the advertising clutter, and attract their target consumer which is critical in the highly advertised environment of today. Secondly, the brand due to its association with the surprise remains in the evoked set of the consumer making it easier to recall. The children would insist on buying the product that they recall.

Thus, using surprise as an unconditional response prompts the children to become a major influencer and sometimes even the decision-maker. The findings of the study also revealed that a surprise that is congruent to the consumer's demographic profile like age and gender creates stronger conditioning than the non-congruent surprises. Thus, care must be taken by the marketers to choose a surprise congruent to their target consumer to ensure strong conditioning.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study was an attempt to investigate the impact of such "positive surprise" in the form of toys on the attitude and satisfaction of children. A positive surprise is a surprise, combined with a subsequent positive emotion like joy and excitement. Such surprises are said to lead to customer delight which is considered as the highest level of customer satisfaction resulting in customer loyalty (Kovecses, 2015). The research also analyzed the impact of surprise on consumer congruity and age.

It has been argued that "marketers must move beyond mere satisfaction, to customer delight" (Griffin *et al.*, 1996). Customer delight - which is defined as the highest level of customer satisfaction - is believed to translate into higher customer retention and loyalty (Ariffinet *al.*, 1996; Vanhamme 2000). Interestingly the finding of this research proves that positive surprise in the form of toys can be a privileged way to trigger customer satisfaction and loyalty.

The result of the study revealed a positive impact of surprise on consumer attitude and satisfaction. When paired with a surprise, a market offering elicits a more favorable response than a non-paired offering. *Thus a marketer intending to increase consumer satisfaction and the purchase could use a positive surprise as a tool to achieve this objective.* However, not all surprises will lead to an increase in satisfaction, the impact of surprise on satisfaction would also be determined by the congruity between consumer characteristics and surprises. Higher the congruity more favorable is the attitude towards the offering. *Thus, marketers to ensure a positive response from their customers will have to choose a surprise based on the target market characteristics and choices.*

Previous research has shown that surprise is one of the main determinants of customer delight (Vanhamme, 2000). *Overall the findings of the research will help marketers make more informed decisions regarding the sales promotion strategy thus creating more memorable experiences and*

higher customer delight for the consumers. This in turn will add to the overall happiness index of the society at large.

Pairing products with surprises is a common marketing tactic for promoting sales. The results of the research will assist marketers to take decisions regarding pairing their products with surprises. The analysis will also help marketers understand the importance of congruity between the consumer and the surprise, which in turn will help them make a better decision about the kind of surprise to be added with their market offering.

The above study however focuses on the impact of surprise on children as a consumer. Further studies can be carried out to study the impact of surprise on adult consumers. Research can also be carried out to understand the role of surprise in different categories of products like low involvement and high involvement products.

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