

Classical Conditioning is Everywhere

For classical conditioning to work, what is absolutely essential is constant pairing—your brand should be constantly paired with a desirable setting or with another desirable stimulus. The setting can include any number of things in the ad: color, look and feel of the ad, scenery, music in the jingle or commercial, or even the event being depicted (e.g., two people fighting versus showing affection). Other stimuli in the ad can include other objects or products (e.g., pair your brand of water, say, with a luxury car), sound bites (e.g., lyrics from an Elvis song or the voice of Glee star Dianna Agron), and, of course, specific persons (e.g., pair your brand of toupee with a tycoon or, alternatively, a hard-working athlete).

The magic of such pairings is constantly at work in ads everywhere. Thus, CK perfume is “youthful” because of the teenage models used in the brand’s advertising, and Giorgio is “mature” and “richer” because of its Beverly Hills heritage. Coca-Cola uses real-life vignettes (with the tag line “Open Happiness”) to convey its “real-thing” image, while Pepsi uses Kylie Minogue and Pink to promote its “New Generation” image.²

How do consumers learn which brand of shoes (and clothing) is for whom? Stacy Adams shows its shoes and clothing with fashionable, urban, trendy, young men; the brand and the wearer add to each other’s allure. (*Allure?* See the admiring woman behind.) Here Classical Conditioning is at work, superbly, alluringly!



(Courtesy: Stacy Adams)

INSTRUMENTAL LEARNING

Or, How a Pigeon Learns to Peck

The second learning mechanism takes us to other animals. Psychologist B.F. Skinner experimented with pigeons. He built two doors in a pigeon feed box, one fake and one real. If a pigeon pecked on the fake one, nothing happened; if it pecked on the real one, food grains fell out. After a few trials, the pigeons learned to peck on the right door. This is **instrumental learning** (also called *instrumental conditioning* or *operant conditioning*)—a process where one learns behavior because it is rewarding. That is, we learn a response because it is instrumental to obtaining a reward. This is the familiar way we get children to learn good behaviors—“Eat your vegetables, and you’ll get dessert,” we tell them.

Can marketers use this method to help consumers learn? Absolutely. By rewarding the consumer if he or she buys the marketer’s brand. Buy my product, and you get a chance to win a prize. Shop at my store, and you get a “double your coupon” deal. Use my credit card, and you get some cash back. Fly my airline, and you earn loyalty points good for a free trip—perhaps for this reason, your friend Christèle learned to always fly with JetBlue.

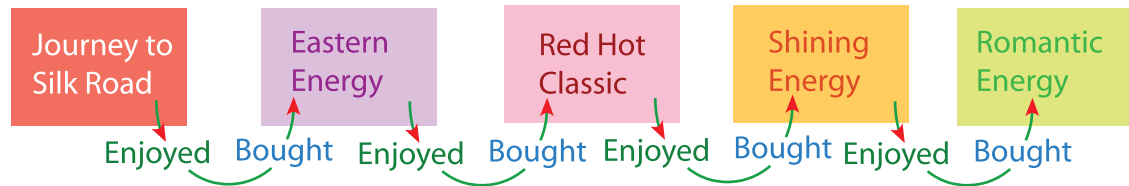
This reward comes in two forms: extrinsic and intrinsic. An **extrinsic reward** is external to the product; e.g., coupons, sweepstakes, rebates, and loyalty programs such as frequent flyer or frequent hotel stay rewards. Cigna, an insurance company, offers incentives to get its members to engage in pro-health behaviors. In contrast, an **intrinsic** reward is the reward built into the product itself—consumers learn to buy and use a product because they find the product itself rewarding. For example, we learn to use Bed Head shampoo

because it renders our hair just the way we want it, and we learn to drink Fruitopia because we savor its taste. We learn to visit the video game arcade Gameworks because we have a good time there, and we learn to buy Twelve Girls Band's new CD Romantic Energy because we found their previous releases—Eastern Energy, Journey to Silk Road, and Shining Energy—enchanting. (Check it out at www.twelvegirlsband.com.)



This distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic rewards is important to marketers. If the product is not, in itself, rewarding to the consumer (or not any more rewarding than competitors' products), then, to get the consumer to buy their product, marketers have to resort to extrinsic rewards, such as coupons, rebates, and frequent buyer rewards. However, consumer patronage won through such giveaways is rarely lasting. Rather than luring consumers through constant rebates and promotions, as marketers we should instead make our product itself intrinsically rewarding to the consumer. That way, the consumer buys our product not merely because of a coupon or sale (an extrinsic reward), but because he or she likes our product itself more. That is, as marketers, we have to get the consumer to learn to respond primarily to our product, not to extrinsic rewards. Frequency award programs, and indeed all extrinsic rewards, should serve, at best, as proverbial icing on the cake, but the real lure should be the cake itself.

Please, *instrumentally condition me...*



i am a consumer. instrumentally condition me. and i will learn to buy your products.
 intrinsic or extrinsic—which reward is twelvegirlsband offering me?
 dare to figure that...or else i will take my money to another marketer who does!



MODELING

Monkey See, Monkey Do

Let's continue with animals. This time, a monkey—actually, a bunch of them. Watch them sometime. One monkey will start scratching his head, or making faces, or swinging from a tree branch, and then all the other monkeys will do the same. This is the third mechanism of learning, called **modeling**—a process whereby learning occurs by observing others.³



This “monkey see, monkey do” phenomenon is very much present in humans as well. Children learn much of their social behavior by observing and imitating their elders. We also learn from teachers, celebrities, coworkers, and other role models we admire. Many teenagers adopted the grunge looks of teen music artist Avril Lavigne or rapper Nelly. You now realize that in the third consumer scenario described above, this is how our neighbor's son, David, must have learned to dress the way he does.

In our day-to-day lives, we observe people we like or aspire to be like, and we learn what they consider good to wear, eat, and do. Thus, clothing with specific designer names becomes popular because influential people wear it. Hairstyles become popular on college campuses based on peer observations. And we choose careers because someone inspires us as a role model. Marketers harness this learning mechanism, for example, when they send product samples to influential and well-respected people, hoping that their followers will adopt the product when they see their leaders and role models using it.