

The Role of Classical Theory of Conditioning in Advertising

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to study the role played by *The Classical Theory of Conditioning* in Advertising. *The Classical Theory of Conditioning* or *Respondent Positioning* was a result of the experiment conducted on dogs by *Ivan Pavlov* (a noble prize winner in 1904). Although, this theory was developed to study the digestive process of animals over a long period of time, it later became the basis of 'learning' (change in behaviour) process.

Keywords: Stimulus, Conditioned stimulus and Unconditioned stimulus.

INTRODUCTION

When 'Airtel' launched its advertisement in the year 2004 of 'A. R. Rahman' playing music on the tunes of 'Live Every Moment', it was a 62 seconds long ad. This ad then reduced to a shorter duration and subsequently kept on decreasing, till it was only 5 seconds of music play. No matter what was the duration of the ad, but we were able to identify the source, i.e., 'Airtel', just by listening to its music. Similarly, in the year 2003, 'Vodafone' launched its ad 'You and I in This Beautiful World' of a young boy with a dog, highlighting the reach of their network. It was also a long ad of 62 seconds, which afterwards went on decreasing. And a time came when the ad projected only the dog followed by the punch-line. Yet, we were able to relate the dog in the ad with 'Vodafone'. So, how do we identify products just with minimal clues? And on what principal does these advertisements works?

The Classical Theory of Conditioning or *Respondent Positioning* was a result of the experiment conducted on dogs by *Ivan Pavlov* (a noble prize winner in 1904). Although, this theory was developed to study the digestive process of animals over a long period of time, it later became the basis of 'learning' (change in behaviour) process.

Pavlov experimented by serving a dog with 'food' (referred to as *unconditioned stimulus*) and at the same time a 'bell' (referred to as *conditioned stimulus*) was ringed. As soon as the food was served, the dog began to salivate. This process continued for few days.

After some days, the dog began to salivate only by listening to the sound of bell, even before the food was served. *Pavlov* concluded that the sound of the bell conditioned the dog, so much so, that just on hearing the sound of bell, the dog salivated with the hope of receiving the food.

Stimulus is anything which influences our response. In *Pavlov's* theory, we found that the 'unconditioned stimulus', i.e., food, caused the dog to salivate. But with the introduction and constant repetition of the 'conditioned stimulus', i.e., the sound of bell, the dog began to salivate even before the food was served. Similarly, music, colourful patterns, figures, designs, logos, etc., are being used as conditioned stimulus in present day advertisements to help us identify, recognize and relate with the advertised products (like the *A.R. Rahman's* music for *Airtel* and the particular dog for *Vodafone*)

CONCLUSION

This theory is still being used in social sciences and more particularly in advertising. It is being used as a marketing tool. With the passage of time, advertisers aim to create an association between the advertised product (unconditioned stimulus) and some other stimulus such as logos, figures, colourful patterns or music (conditioned stimulus) so that the consumers may recognize the product with minimum effort. According to *Natasha Barnhart* (2013), conditioning helps consumer learn (consciously or unconsciously) the relationship between the different stimuli (plural form of stimulus) and alter their behaviour accordingly. McDonalds' logo "M" is another example. Over a period of time, McDonalds' customers have been conditioned to relate the logo with McDonald and eventually with their hunger for food.

The added advantage of conditioning is of course that the advertisers can take the risk of reducing the time-duration of their advertisements. One reason as to why advertisers decrease the time-duration of television ads is to minimize their cost over a period of time. The application of this theory is effective if the time gap is less between the 'conditioned' and 'unconditioned' stimulus. Further this theory is very much effective in low-involvement category of products (products which are not very costly and as such there is less risk attached to its purchase), as the consumers are attracted emotionally and not objectively.

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