

Module - 6

CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Sangeeta Sahney
Assistant Professor,
Vinod Gupta School of Management
Indian Institute of Technology
Kharagpur, India
Email. sahney@vgsom.iitkgp.ernet.in

LESSON – 19
**CONSUMER LEARNING THEORIES AND
THEIR IMPLICATION FOR MARKETERS, PART I**

Instructional Objectives:

After completion of this lesson, the student shall know about:

6.2.4 Learning Theories and their Implication for Marketers (Part I)

**6.2.4 LEARNING THEORIES AND THEIR IMPLICATION FOR
MARKETERS (Part I):**

There are two approaches to the study of learning, viz., the behavioral approach to learning, and the cognitive approach to learning. According to the behavioral theorists, learning takes place in response to events/happenings in a person's external environment. On the other hand, the cognitive theorists believe that learning takes place as a result of a person's conscious and deliberate information processing and storage activity. The behaviorist approach with implications for marketers is explained in this lesson. The next lessons deal with the cognitive approach and the social cognitive approach.

6.2.4.1 BEHAVIORAL LEARNING THEORY:

The approach defines learning in terms of an association between stimulus and response, where the stimulus is an external object/person/situation that a person senses and perceives, and response is the behavior of the person that occurs in reaction to the object/person/situation.

The theories are based on the assumption that:

- people learn to associate the stimulus and response.
- they begin to relate the stimulus and response and they generalize the relationship, across situations; whenever the stimulus occurs, there is a similar response.
- observable and predictable responses to specific external stimuli are reflective and symbolic of learning having taken place.
- thus, these behavioral theories are also referred to as stimulus-response theories .

Behavioral theorists do not concentrate on the dynamics of the learning process. Their major concern is on viewing learning as a response to events/happenings in a person's external environment. The main proponents of this approach were Pavlov, who proposed the theory of classical conditioning, and Skinner, who proposed the theory of operant/instrumental conditioning. While they both spoke of the relationship between the stimulus and response, they differed on the cause and effect relationship; while Pavlov believed in the Stimulus leading to Response relationship ($S \rightarrow R$), Skinner spoke of Response leading to Stimulus relationship ($R \rightarrow S$). The theories by the two psychologists are elaborated upon subsequently.

6.2.4.1.1 Theory of Classical Conditioning:

Proposed by Ivan Pavlov, a Russian psychologist, in the 1920's, this pioneering work was based on the famous experiments that were conducted on dogs. Pavlov believed:

- all living beings are passive in nature; they can be taught how to behave through repetition or conditioning; and,
- learning occurs as a repeated connection/association between stimulus and response (Stimulus → Response) or (S - R).
- learning takes place through conditioning; as such classical conditioning also came to be known as respondent conditioning.
- learning becomes conditioned when a stimulus that is paired with another stimulus that leads to a known response serves to produce the same response when used alone.

Pavlov elaborated upon the process of conditioning through a series of experiments that he conducted on dogs. Pavlov started his experiments on the dog by measuring the amount of salivation secreted by the dog as and when changes were made. Initially, he gave meat (unconditioned stimulus, US) to the dog and as natural, there was a great deal of salivation (unconditioned response, UR). When he merely rang the bell (neutral stimulus) and gave no meat, there was no salivation. In the next phase, he combined the two, meat as well as the ringing of the bell (unconditioned stimulus plus conditioned stimulus, US+CS). The dog salivated (unconditioned response, UR). He repeated the pairing many a times over a period of time. In the last phase, Pavlov rang the bell without giving the meat (conditioned stimulus, CS); and the dog salivated to the sound of the bell alone (conditioned response, CR). The dog became conditioned to salivate at the sound of the ringing bell. The dogs associated the bell sound of the bell (CS) with the meat (US) and, after a number of pairings between the CS and the US, gave the same response (salivation) to the bell alone as he had been doing to the maet alone.

I Before conditioning

Meat (US) → Salivation (UR)

Ball (Neutral stimulus) → No response

II During conditioning

Meat (US) + Bell (CS) → Salivation (UR)

III After conditioning

Bell (CS) → Salivation (UR)

In conceptual terms, according to Pavlov, conditioning would take place if:

- an unconditioned stimulus (US) results in an unconditioned response (UR).

Subsequently,

- an unconditioned stimulus (US) paired with a conditioned stimulus (CS), will result in the same response, which would now be called a conditioned response (CR).

Finally, upon repeated pairings,

- the conditioning stimuli alone (without the unconditioned stimuli) would elicit the same conditioned response (CR).

Thus, classical conditioning occurs when a person learns to relate an unrelated stimulus (CS) with a particular behavioral response (UR/CR) that was previously elicited by a related stimulus (US). If a person is exposed to a series of repetitive pairings between the first and second stimulus, gradually what happens is that the second stimulus alone, begins to be associated with the first, and elicits the same response, as the first one did alone or in combination with the other.

In terms of consumer behavior, let us take an example of a product, and a brand:

I Before conditioning

Grandmother (US) → Love and affection, Happiness and delight (UR)

Nivea Cream (Neutral stimulus) → No response

II During conditioning

Grandmother (US) + Nivea Cream (CS) → Love and affection, Happiness and Delight (UR)

III After conditioning

Nivea Cream (CS) → Love and affection, Happiness and Delight (UR)

Now, let us take an example of a store, and its patronage.

I Before conditioning

Himalaya soap (US) → Purchase and loyalty (UR)

Frank Ross Pharmacy (Neutral stimulus) → No response

II During conditioning

Himalaya soap (US) + Frank Ross Pharmacy (CS) → Purchase and brand loyalty (UR)

III After conditioning

Frank Ross Pharmacy (CS) → Purchase and store loyalty (UR)

An Assessment of the Theory: Pavlov's theory was a pioneering piece of work, and has contributed immensely to the theory of learning. Pavlov proposed that living entities are passive beings who react with predictable responses to a stimuli after a number of repetitions and trials. However, it has been argued that the theory is inadequate, in the sense that learning is not just a reflexive process; there is always a element of cognition. This cognition, leads to a “learning of associations” among the stimulus and response that allows a living entity to anticipate the environment and react accordingly. This has been termed as cognitive associative learning. The dog had learnt to expect an association between the meat and the bell (US and CS), which influenced him to salivate at the sound of the bell, even in the absence of meat. Further, the neo-Pavlovian theorists believe that consumers are information seekers; and apart from understanding the association between US and CS, they also rely on information that is provided by the US about the CS.

Implications for marketers:

The Pavlovian Theory has implications for marketers. Consumers respond to learning via classical conditioning when:

- the level of perceived risk is low (and cognitive effort is not required)
- products are low on differentiation
- purchases are routine; convenience goods and impulse items.

The basic concepts that derive from classical conditioning are explained below with relevant examples:

a) Repetition: The repeated pairings of the CS and the US, led to a strong association between the two, and this resulted in a similar response, even when the US was missing; thus, repetition increased the likelihood of a living entity's responding to a conditioned stimulus. The more often a CS is paired with a US, the stronger the association becomes and the more likely that it would be remembered. Because of this principle of repetition, the dog had begun to associate the meat and the bell.

Signs, symbols, logos, colours and jingles help facilitate consumer learning through the process of association.

In terms of marketing, this is the reason why marketers repeat their messages either in print or in audio visual media across channels several times a day. Repetition slows down the pace of forgetting. For example, HUL advertises for its various brands separately all the day long on various TV channels; while the brand is Lux or Liril or Dove (individual brand), the advertisement concludes with the HUL logo, the parent brand.

However, this also has a demerit, in the sense that too much of repetition leads to boredom, resulting in fall of attention and subsequent retention. This is referred to as the satiation effect. Thus marketers go in for variation of their message content and/or message context. In order to prevent an advertisement wearout, the marketer conveys his message through a variety of formats and themes across print and audio visual media. There can be two types of variations that a marketer may choose from, viz., cosmetic variation and substantive variation;

- Cosmetic variation: Here, a change is brought about in the context or the background or the celebrity/spokesperson or in the font and the print type. The message content across the advertisement remains the same. Example: Lux: "Filmi sitaron ka saundarya sabun"; the message content remained the same, but the celebrities ranged across Hema Malini, Rekha, Sridevi etc;

- **Substantive variation**: In substantive variation, the change is brought about in the content of the advertisement. The rest remains the same; there is no change in the context, or the celebrity/spokesperson or the print type and format. Example: Amul products: In their print advertisement, the mascot (spokesperson) remains the same; but every week the content of the advertisement changes, according to the contemporary events/happenings.

b) Stimulus generalization: This is defined as a phenomenon that occurs when a stimulus is so similar to another stimulus, that the former evokes the same response as the latter; in other words, what happens is that a new stimulus is so similar to an already existing conditioned stimulus that it elicits the same conditioned response. It is the tendency to respond similarly to slightly different or similar stimuli. In other words, learning is generalised. According to Pavlov, a living entity also learns via stimulus generalization. In fact, while conducting his experiment, Pavlov discovered that the dog had learnt to salivate not only to the sound of the bell, but also the jingling of bells and keys.

In terms of marketing:

1. This is the reason behind the success of imitative “me too” products/brands. There is a stimulus generalization on the part of the consumers who fail to differentiate between the “me too” from the original products/brands. This may be because of similarity in the name or logo or packaging or in the advertisement. When stimulus generalization takes place, the consumers confuse the “me-too” with the original products/brands they have are familiar with, and go in for the purchase of imitative products/brands. Example: Puma vs. Pama; Adidas vs. Abcids; Sony vs. Sonia; KFC vs. KLC; Panasonic vs. Panosaonic.
2. Apart from the “me-too” marketers, there may also be competitors (market challengers and followers) who may want to encourage stimulus generalization to take advantage of the market leader’s position; they go in for similar packaging or advertisements or may even use the same models and celebrities for their advertisements. Example: Duracell and Eveready played very similar advertisements, much to the confusion of consumers.

3. Also in case where a brand is very successful, and the marketer is diversifying into other related product lines, he adopts this principle to encourage generalization for all the new product lines by using similar packaging for all the different products in a product line. Example, product line extensions, brand extension, family branding, licensing.

- Product line extensions: The use of an established brand name for a new item in the same or related product category, eg. Surf, Surf Excel, Surf Excel Blue, Surf Excelmatic. This practice is commonly adopted as it is easier for a marketer to relate a new product or the new variants of an existing product with a known brand name than having a totally new name. One needs to exercise caution as any failure with any of the products, can tarnish the entire brand name.

- Brand extension: This implies the use of an existing brand for a new product.

- Family branding: It is also called umbrella branding. It is the practice of using the same brand name for the whole line of the company's products so as to generalize favorable brand associations from one product to another. A large number of products capitalize on the reputed name of the company, eg. Amul, Samsung.

- Licensing: The permission to use a well-known brand name to products/services of another manufacturer/service provider is called licensing; the advantage of licensing is that it leads to instant recognition as a quality brand and successful brand, eg McDonalds.

c) Stimulus discrimination: The opposite of stimulus generalization is stimulus discrimination. Stimulus discrimination is the ability to differentiate a particular stimulus from among similar stimuli. Marketers always want their product/service offerings to stand out from the rest. Thus, they position their brand and try and differentiate it from others, very often through a Unique Selling Proposition (or a USP) or the unique attributes of the brand.

In case there is'nt a USP, the marketer tries to differentiate his product from the competitors by focusing on a feature or an attribute that is important, valuable and meaningful to the consumer; Sometimes he also tries to exhibit how he is better from the competitor. The marketer could make use of differences in packaging or in advertising to enable the consumer to differentiate. Thus, in case of stimulus differentiation, the

marketer makes sure that the consumer is able to differentiate the new stimulus from the previously existing one, so he does not exhibit or repeat the same behavioral response again. There develops within the consumers a tendency to attach themselves with a particular brand. They are aided in their effort through advertisements in print and on TV.

Overall Contribution of Classical Conditioning to Marketing: The Pavlovian theory, through the above mentioned three principles provides insights into the understanding of consumer behavior. However, consumption patterns and consumption behavior of an individual is much wider, broader and less predictable. Much falls beyond the purview of repetition, stimulus generalization, and stimulus discrimination. The Neo-Pavlovian theory views consumers as much active entities rather than passive ones; it describes consumers as information seekers; we could relate this to extensive problem solving or purchases made after careful evaluation of alternatives. However, what still misses out is the impact of pleasant experiences and rewards on subsequent purchase, something that falls within the theory of operant/instrumental conditioning that is discussed subsequently.

6.2.4.1.2 Operant or Instrumental Conditioning:

While much of the contribution to the field of operant conditioning was made by researchers like Thorndike and Watson, it was Burrhus Frederic Skinner who is credited for his theory of operant conditioning. An American psychologist of the 1950s, he emphasized on the role that ‘consequences’ have to play on the process of learning. He spoke of a response-stimulus connection, (Response → Stimulus) or (R-S), rather than the S-R connection as proposed by Pavlov. The learning took place through instrumental or operant conditioning.

Skinner concluded that a living entity, be it animals or human beings, act instrumentally; they would act out certain behavior that would make them feel rewarded and get them what they want; on the other hand, they would avoid those acts of behavior that would be punishing and not get them what they want. The operant theory is based on the assumption that:

- behavior is a function of its consequences.

Skinner based his theory on the experiments he conducted while working with animals and birds, like rats and pigeons. He developed a cage, what was came to be known as the “Skinner’s Box.” The cage had a mechanism which facilitated the learning process; the cage had levers and keys; it also had a bar or a pedal on one of its walls, and that when pressed, caused the mechanism to release food into the cage. The rats moved across the cage; and suddenly, accidentally they would press the bar, and the food was released. The rat began to understand a connection between his movement and the food; and gradually, learnt to press the bar or pedal the right key that gave him the food. Skinner repeated these experiments with pigeons; as and when they pecked the right key, food was released. The food acted as a reward, where the rats and pigeons were "rewarded" for choosing an appropriate behavior, and their behavior was positively reinforced. Over time, Skinner decided to withdraw the food; while the rats and pigeons made the right movements, food was no longer released and the creatures were disappointed. After several attempts with unrewarding consequences, they stopped pressing the right bars and pedals. This was referred to as extinction.

Skinner concluded that any behavior that is followed by pleasant events (reinforcing stimulus), is likely to be repeated; a positively reinforced behavior increases the likelihood of repetition of such behavior. On the other hand, any behavior that is followed by unpleasant events (and a non-reinforcing stimulus), is less likely to be repeated; it results in a decreased probability of that behavior occurring in the future.

Thus, operant or instrumental conditioning occurs when person learns to act out behaviors that are positively reinforced, and avoids those acts of behavior that lead to punishment or yield negative reinforcement. Of the several responses made to a situation (stimulus), those which are followed by satisfaction and reward will be more likely to occur again; and, those which are followed by dissatisfaction and punishment, will be less likely to occur again.

In terms of consumer behavior, let us take an example of a product, like shoes.
-A person want to buy a shoe. He would go to a shop and try out various brand, kinds and sizes of shoes. He would continue with the trial and error process, till he can manage to get a shoe that is most comfortable and rewarding. The next time he wants to buy a shoe,

he would repeat the behavior (purchase), and he would go to the store and ask for that particular brand, type and size. This is because the satisfaction (Response) with the purchase of the brand, type and size positively reinforced his behavior towards his next purchase of shoes (Stimulus). In this way, he would learn to repeat behavior and inculcate a habit that is rewarding.

Types of Reinforcement according to Skinner: According to Skinner, reinforcement influenced the likelihood of repetition/non-repetition of a response, and it could be two types, viz., positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement. Both positive and negative reinforcement can be used to encourage a desired behavior. Positive reinforcement consists of a outcome that strengthens the likelihood of a response being repeated. For example, if an activity was followed by a reward, the likelihood of its repetition would increase. On the other hand, a negative reinforcement is an outcome that is also aimed to encourage a specific behavior. In other words, through a negative reinforcement, a person may be taught to act out an alternative behavior that would be more rewarding.

In terms of marketing, if a person enjoys the food he eats in a restaurant, the likelihood of his visiting the restaurant and eating from there would increase. This would be an example of positive reinforcement. Another example: An advertisement showing soft skin as a reinforcement to buy Dove soap.

Insurance companies make consumers aware of undesirable consequences in case something happens to the head of the family or the bread earner or the house/possessions. People are taught to avoid such negative consequences by buying life insurance policies, medical insurance policies, fire/theft/burglary insurance etc. This would be an example of negative reinforcement. Another example: An advertisement showing wrinkled skin as reinforcement to buy a Garnier Anti-wrinkle cream.

Reinforcement Schedule according to Skinner: Skinner also spoke of the reinforcement schedule in terms of the frequency with which it should be applied. He said that rewards should not follow a desired behavior all the time; neither should it follow every desired behavior; this is because in case of regular reinforcement, the reinforcement becomes expected, and loses its novelty, making it ineffective. Skinner, thus proposed that reinforcement should be intermittent and be placed at irregular intervals.

In terms of marketing, it may be observed that sales promotion incentives are short term in nature; often a consumer is caught unawares and rushes to the store when he knows that a promotional activity is on. Similar is the impact of loyalty programmes in retail stores, or frequent flyer programs or frequent guest/customer programs for hotels etc.

An Assessment of the Theory: The theory of operant or instrumental conditioning highlighted the impact that reinforcement has on learning. Skinner concluded that a living entity, be it animals or human beings, act instrumentally; they learn to act out certain behavior that would make them feel rewarded and would avoid those acts of behavior that would be unrewarding. However, critics have argued that apart from reinforcement, there are other elements that lead to learning, like for example, people also learn by observing others, copying others and modeling.

6.2.4.1.2.1 Kinds of Reinforcement:

Reinforcement may be defined as something that increases the strength of a response and tends to encourage repetitions of the behavior that preceded the reinforcement. There are four kinds of reinforcement, viz., positive reinforcement, punishment, extinction and negative reinforcement. As may be seen in the figure, a pleasant event may be applied or it may be withdrawn. Similarly, a negative event may be applied or it may be withdrawn. The application or withdrawal of pleasant and unpleasant events elicits learning in individuals and has varying impacts on the behavior of a person (See Table 1).

Table1: Kinds of Reinforcement

	Pleasant Event	Unpleasant Event
Event is Applied	Positive Reinforcement Behavior becomes more likely to occur again	Punishment Behavior becomes less likely to occur again
Event is Withdrawn	Extinction Behavior becomes less likely to occur again	Negative Reinforcement Behavior becomes more likely to occur again

- **Positive Reinforcement:** Here, a pleasant event is applied after the act of behavior; in other words, the act of behavior is followed by pleasant consequences; The individual is rewarded for his behavior, thereby encouraging repetition of the response. Thus, the behavior that precedes the pleasant event is more likely to occur again. The behavior is positively reinforced.

- **Punishment:** An unpleasant event is applied after the act of behavior; in other words, the act of behavior is followed by unpleasant consequences; The individual is punished for his behavior, thereby discouraging repetition of the response. Thus, the behavior that precedes the pleasant event is weakened and becomes less likely to occur again.

- **Extinction:** In the case of extinction, a pleasant event is withdrawn after the act of behavior; in other words, the act of behavior is not followed by pleasant consequences; The individual is neither rewarded nor punished for his behavior, thereby discouraging repetition of the response. Thus, the behavior that precedes the pleasant event is less likely to occur again.

- **Negative Reinforcement:** An unpleasant event is withdrawn after the act of behavior; in other words, the act of behavior is not followed by unpleasant consequences; The individual is not punished for his behavior, thereby encouraging repetition of the response. Thus, the behavior that precedes the pleasant event is more likely to occur again.

Implications for marketers:

The Operant Conditioning Theory has implications for marketers. Consumers respond to learning via instrumental conditioning when:

- trial can be attempted before purchase
- purchases are linked to desirable affective experiences
- there is higher involvement and greater cognitive activity.

Marketers can make use of instrumental conditioning when a consumer is rewarded for a brand decision in their favour, or punished for a brand decision in the competitors favour. The rewards here not only refer to product satisfaction and value for money but also services and facilities provided, rebates, discounts, loyalty points, etc.

The marketers need to understand the impact of the trial and error on the learning process. According to the theory, people learn by trial and error; they would find certain acts of behavior more rewarding than the others, and the tendency on the part of the individual would be to repeat such behaviors. People would also find certain acts of behavior threatening, and they would avoid repeating those acts of behavior.

Consumers also learn by trial and error. Some purchases are more rewarding than others, i.e. they result in favorable outcomes; this favorable outcome leads to an instrumental conditioning, and the consumer learns to repeat the purchase behavior (in favor of the brand/marketer). The brand that is most rewarding and satisfies him the most, is the one that he would like to buy in future. Learning is viewed as a trial and error

process in which the positive/desired outcomes lead to repeat behavior like Repeat Purchase. Satisfaction/dissatisfaction with a product/brand act as a reinforcement strategy and affect the habit paradigm. Further, heavily used reinforcements lose effect, and this is referred to as the satiation effect.

Let us now discuss the implication of the reinforcement strategies for a marketer:

- **Positive Reinforcement:** A consumer will continue to patronize a brand and be loyal towards it as long as his purchase decision is satisfying and rewarding. The purchase of the product/brand elicits a reward in terms of satisfaction; thus the likelihood of the repeat behavior (purchase) is high, and brand loyalty would develop. A habit would be formed as a result of the reward received for the behavior. For example, a lady would continue buying Dove soap as long as she finds that the soap that has a moisturizer leaves her skin soft after a bath. The marketer needs to fulfil all promises and keep the consumer satisfied.

- **Punishment:** As a strategy this has lesser implications for a marketer. However, policy makers, governmental organizations and reform bodies, may depict this to create fear amongst the people and make them law abiding citizens; Eg. fines for traffic rule violation, smoking and cancer, drinking and driving etc. This would discourage a person from taking an action that would have an unpleasant or a negative consequence.

- **Extinction:** A marketer who is popular with providing discounts, rebates and offs on his products may face such a situation. If a company is frequent with providing discount and rebate schemes, suddenly withdraws such schemes, the consumers would be discouraged from purchasing the brand again. In a way, the consumers would have become used to such discounts (rewards). Now if the schemes are withdrawn, then the likelihood of a repeat purchase of the brand would reduce. For example, Koutons Retail has positioned itself as “High Fashion Value for Money” brand; the brand is always on sale, like “50% off” or “Flat 50% off+49% off” or “Flat 80% off” or Denims at Rs. 299. Now bargain hunters and price sensitive customers who look out for good deals would purchase from Koutons. If Koutons withdraws its discount schemes, the likelihood of consumers buying from there would reduce.

- **Negative Reinforcement:** As a strategy this implies, that a marketer should encourage consumers to make purchases of their brands (act out behavior) to avoid the negative consequences. This could be related to negative motivation, in the sense that the marketer convinces the consumer to buy out his brand to avoid an unpleasant experience. For example, HUL played an advertisement for Pepsodent Toothpaste for children. Targeted at children, a fear appeal was used; it said, if you do not brush your teeth “kitanu kha jayenge”; For parents it said that Pepsodent fights germs and tooth decay 24 hours a day; Now children/parents began to use/buy Pepsodent in order to avoid a negative consequence (tooth decay). Thus a marketer can encourage a behavior on the part of the consumer by conveying a withdrawal of an impending undesirable consequence, through the purchase of his brand. Consumers would learn that through negative reinforcement that a change in behavior (change from existing brand to a new one) could avoid negative consequences and subsequently provide rewards.

Marketers should also understand that heavily used reinforcements lose effect. This is referred to as the satiation effect.

Overall Contribution of Operant/Instrumental Conditioning to Marketing: The Operant Conditioning theory, contributes to the understanding of consumer behavior. However, there is much more that exists beyond the purview of rewards and reinforcements. People do not always look at rewards or the opportunity costs. They often make rational purchase decisions irrespective of rewards. They also act out of emotional pressures. They are also driven out of social forces; they would want to copy and imitate the behavior of their parents, friends, colleagues, reference group, and buy certain brands or shop from certain stores. This adds weight to the points that critics make that not all learning is reward based. Much is learnt by acquiring knowledge, and by observation and modeling. The role played by cognition and social cognition is dealt with subsequently.

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER READING:

1. Assael, H. (1992), Consumer Behavior & Marketing Action, 4th. Ed., PWS Kent, Boston, MA.
2. Loudon, D.L. and Bitta A.J. Della, Consumer Behavior, Fourth Edition, 2002, Tata McGraw-Hill, New Delhi.
3. Kotler P., and Keller K.L. , Marketing Management, Thirteenth edition, 2009, Pearson.
4. Peter, P.J. and Olson, J.C., Consumer Behavior and Marketing Strategy, Seventh Edition, 2005, McGraw-Hill Higher Education.
5. Schiffman, L.G. and Kanuk, L.L., Consumer Behavior, Eight Edition, 2004, Prentice Hall, India.
7. Wells W.D. and Prensky, D., Consumer Behavior, 1996, John Wiley & sons, Inc.

FAQS (FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS):

Ques 1 Write short notes on the following:

- a) Behavioral learning theory
- b) Stimulus generalization

Ans 1 a) Behavioral learning theory:

The behavioral approach to learning defines learning in terms of an association between stimulus and response, where the stimulus is an external object/person/situation that a person senses and perceives, and response is the behavior of the person that occurs in reaction to the object/person/situation. The theories are based on the assumption that:

- people learn to associate the stimulus and response.
- they begin to relate the stimulus and response and they generalize the relationship, across situations; whenever the stimulus occurs, there is a similar response.
- observable and predictable responses to specific external stimuli are reflective and symbolic of learning having taken place.
- thus, these behavioral theories are also referred to as stimulus-response theories .

Behavioral theorists do not concentrate on the dynamics of the learning process. Their major concern is on viewing learning as a response to events/happenings in a person's external environment. The main proponents of this approach were Pavlov, who proposed the theory of classical conditioning, and Skinner, who proposed the theory of operant/instrumental conditioning. While they both spoke of the relationship between the stimulus and response, they differed on the cause and effect relationship; while Pavlov believed in the Stimulus leading to Response relationship ($S \rightarrow R$), Skinner spoke of Response leading to Stimulus relationship ($R \rightarrow S$).

Ans 1 b) Stimulus generalization:

Stimulus generalization is defined as a phenomenon that occurs when a stimulus is so similar to another stimulus, that the former evokes the same response as the latter; in other words, what happens is that a new stimulus is so similar to an already existing conditioned stimulus that it elicits the same conditioned response. According to Pavlov, a living entity also learns via stimulus generalization. In fact, while conducting his experiment, Pavlov discovered that the dog had learnt to salivate not only to the sound of the bell, but also the jingling of bells and keys.

In terms of marketing:

1. This is the reason behind the success of imitative “me too” products/brands. There is a stimulus generalization on the part of the consumers who fail to differentiate between the “me too” from the original products/brands.
2. Apart from the “me-too” marketers, there may also be competitors (market challengers and followers) who may want to encourage stimulus generalization to take advantage of the market leader’s position; they go in for similar packaging or advertisements or may even use the same models and celebrities for their advertisements.
3. Also in case where a brand is very successful, and the marketer is diversifying into other related product lines, he adopts this principle to encourage generalization for all the new product lines by using similar packaging for all the different products in a product line.

Ques 2 Critically assess the Theory of Operant Conditioning.

Ans 2 While much of the contribution to the field of operant conditioning was made by researchers like Thorndike and Watson, it was Burrhus Frederic Skinner who is credited for his theory of operant conditioning. An American psychologist of the 1950s, he emphasized on the role that ‘consequences’ have to play on the process of learning. He spoke of a response-stimulus connection, (Response → Stimulus) or (R-S), rather than the S-R connection as proposed by Pavlov. The learning took place through instrumental or operant conditioning.

Skinner concluded that a living entity, be it animals or human beings, act instrumentally; they would act out certain behavior that would make them feel rewarded and get them what they want; on the other hand, they would avoid those acts of behavior that would be punishing and not get them what they want.

Thus, operant or instrumental conditioning occurs when person learns to act out behaviors that are positively reinforced, and avoids those acts of behavior that lead to punishment or yield negative reinforcement. Of the several responses made to a situation (stimulus), those which are followed by satisfaction and reward will be more likely to occur again; and, those which are followed by dissatisfaction and punishment, will be less likely to occur again.

The theory of operant or instrumental conditioning highlighted the impact that reinforcement has on learning. Skinner concluded that a living entity, be it animals or human beings, act instrumentally; they learn to act out certain behavior that would make them feel rewarded and would avoid those acts of behavior that would be unrewarding. However, critics have argued that apart from reinforcement, there are other elements that lead to learning, like for example, people also learn by observing others, copying others and modeling.

As far as marketing is concerned, the operant conditioning theory contributes to the understanding of consumer behavior. However, there is much more that exists beyond the purview of rewards and reinforcements. People do not always look at rewards or the opportunity costs. They often make rational purchase decisions irrespective of rewards. They also act out of emotional pressures. They are also driven out of social forces; they would want to copy and imitate the behavior of their parents, friends, colleagues, reference group, and buy certain brands or shop from certain stores. This adds weight to the points that critics make that not all learning is reward based. Much is learnt by acquiring knowledge, and by observation and modeling. The role played by cognition and social cognition are dealt with subsequently.

SELF EVALUATION TESTS/QUIZZES:

Section A True/false:

1. The behavioral theorists believe that learning takes place as a result of a person's conscious and deliberate information processing and storage activity.
2. When the message content across the advertisement remains the same, but a change is brought about in the context or the background or the celebrity/spokesperson, it is called a cosmetic variation.
3. Product line extensions: The use of an established brand name for a new item in the same or related product category is called family branding.
4. As per the operant conditioning theory, people learn by trial and error;

Section B Fill up the blanks:

1. The _____ theorists believed that learning takes place in response to events/happenings in a person's external environment.
2. According to Pavlov, learning occurs as a repeated connection/association between _____ → _____
3. Stimulus _____ is the ability to differentiate a particular stimulus from among similar stimuli.
4. _____ influences the likelihood of repetition/non-repetition of a response.
5. _____ helps create association between an unconditioned stimulus and a conditioned stimulus, in terms of constant pairings between the two.
6. In order to prevent advertisement wearout, marketers should go for cosmetic variation or _____ variation.
7. Heavily used reinforcements lose effect, and lead to what is called the _____ effect.

Section C Multiple choice questions:

1. The individual is neither rewarded nor punished for his behavior, thereby discouraging repetition of the response. This is called:

- a) Punishment
- b) Positive reinforcement
- c) Extinction
- d) Negative reinforcement

2. People learn by:

- a) Modelling
- b) Observation
- c) Punishments
- d) All of the above

3. _____ on the part of the consumers could help marketers of imitative “me too” products/brands.

- a) Repetition
- b) Stimulus differentiation
- c) Reinforcement
- d) Stimulus generalization

4. Consumers respond to learning via classical conditioning in all cases mentioned below except when:

- a) the level of perceived risk is low
- b) cognitive effort is not required
- c) products are high on differentiation
- d) purchases are routine; convenience goods and impulse items.

5. Consumers learn by trial and error. This is the basis of learning through _____ conditioning.

- a) Operant
- b) Cognitive
- c) Classical
- d) None of the above.

Section D Short answers:

1. Mention the two main approaches to the study of learning?
2. Name any two principles that derive from classical conditioning.
3. Mention the four kinds of reinforcement strategies.

KEY

Section A True/false:

1. False
2. True
3. False
4. True

Section B Fill up the blanks:

1. Behavioral
2. Stimulus, Response
3. Discrimination
4. Reinforcement
5. Repetition
6. Substantive
7. Satiation

Section C Multiple choice questions:

1. c
2. d
3. d
4. c
5. a

Section D Short Answers:

1. Behavioral approach and cognitive approach
 2. Repetition, Stimulus generalization and discrimination.
 3. Punishment, Positive reinforcement, Negative reinforcement, Extinction.
-