Follow Your Curiosity, You Won”T Regret It: How Disconfirmed Expectations Will Not Always Result in Dissatisfaction

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The present paper shows that higher curiosity levels are related with higher expectations regarding the product and more negative disconfirmation between expectations and performance of the product. However, satisfying curiosity leads to pleasure so that this negative disconfirmation does not lead to dissatisfaction or regret after product trial.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1019891/volumes/v43/NA-43

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EXTEND ABSTRACT

Satisfaction with a product or service is of utter importance for marketing-practices (Han & Hyun, 2015; Ranaweera & Prabhu, 2003). The most widely used framework to predict a customer’s satisfaction, is the ‘expectancy disconfirmation paradigm’ (Oliver, 1980), which argues that consumer satisfaction depends on pre-purchase expectations one has about the performance of the product or service. The extent to which these expectations are met determines the perceived disconfirmation experience. If the outcome matches or exceeds one’s expectations, one is expected to be satisfied. However, when the product underperforms and thus negative disconfirmation occurs, a decrease in satisfaction is to be expected. This paper poses the question if dissatisfaction after negative disconfirmation occurs when curiosity about the product is evoked prior to product experience. The current paper argues that negative disconfirmation does not result into dissatisfaction when curiosity about the product is evoked prior to product experience. In particular, we suggest that satisfying curiosity is rewarding and evokes pleasure, which can override the negative feelings one might experience when being confronted with negative disconfirmation.

Marketers often spark consumer’s curiosity over a product to capture and hold consumer’s attention and to evoke interest in a product. As such, multiple studies on curiosity evoking ads demonstrate their effectiveness (Smith & Swinyard, 1988; Gibson & Zillman, 1993; Menon & Soman, 2002).

Although academic research thus proves the effectiveness of using curiosity to make customers interested in your product (Menon & Soman, 2002; Van Dijk & Zeelenberg, 2007, very little research has looked at what happens once one’s curiosity is satisfied, namely when people buy the product which they were made curious about. Loewenstein (1994) suggested that often people can be disappointed with an outcome when satisfying their curiosity since their expectations are often not met. This implies that people create high expectations when being made curious about something. When expectations are (too) high, they are often difficult to meet resulting in a higher probability to be disconfirmed (Tutorila, Andersson, Maritkainen & Salovaara, 1998). Following the expectancy disconfirmation theory, one would predict that the raised expectations caused by curiosity will readily lead to dissatisfaction with the product or service, since there is a negative disconfirmation between these inflated expectations and the actual performances. However, we suggest that this does not result in dissatisfaction. We argue that the pleasure accompanying satisfying curiosity, can override this feeling of disappointment associated with negative disconfirmation of expectations.

Previous research supports this hypothesis. Loewenstein (1994) states that satisfying curiosity is itself pleasurable. Research in education literature also finds that students derive more pleasure in learning activities when they feel that the subject matter has satisfied their curiosity (Csikszentmihalyi et al, 1993). Recently, Kang and colleagues (2009) supported this idea and found correlations between reported curiosity and activity in the caudate nucleus, a brain region that is involved in reward anticipation and is driven by feedback.

In the following paragraphs, we present three studies. The first study is set up to explore if curiosity indeed causes expectations to be higher which in turn leads to a negative disconfirmation between expectations and performance. A second study illustrates that satisfying curiosity evokes pleasure, while a curious state leads to displeasure when it is not satisfied. This shows that it is not being in a curious state that is pleasurable, but the pleasure stems from satisfying curiosity. Finally, a third study looks further at the interaction between disconfirmation and curiosity on satisfaction and regret with the aim to explore if disconfirmation only leads to dissatisfaction when there was no curiosity evoked prior to product-trial.

In the first study (n=120) respondents were randomly exposed to one out of two fictitious film announcements in a newspaper. The film-announcements were created to evoke different degrees of curiosity. We found that respondents who were made curious about the short-film had higher expectations and that respondents indicated that their expectations had not been met, while respondents who were not made curious had lower expectations but reported that their expectations were met.

In a second study (n=132) respondents participated in a 2 (curiosity, control)x2(open box, closed box) design. Participants were presented with a little non-transparent white box which had either a question mark on top of it (curiosity-condition) or a picture of the candy that was inside (control-condition). Participants were either told to open the box (satisfying their curiosity) or to leave the box closed. We found that there was a significant difference in pleasure between the curiosity and the control condition, when respondents were in the ‘not able to open box’ condition, that is respondents in the curiosity-condition experienced more displeasure than respondents in the control condition. This effect disappears in the ‘able to open box condition’, where there is no difference in pleasure between curiosity-condition and control-condition. This shows that there may be two mechanisms at play: people are happy when they get what they expect (control-condition) and people are happy because they are able to satisfy their curiosity (curiosity-condition) even though the product that evoked their curiosity was not as good as expected.

In a third study (n=120) respondents were asked to participate in a chocolate- tasting test. They were randomly assigned to one out of two taste conditions (either ‘tasteful’ chocolate condition (confirmation) or ‘distasteful’ chocolate condition (disconfirmation)) and curiosity was measured prior to tasting the chocolate. Our results show that people are still satisfied when experiencing curiosity prior to tasting, even though the chocolate tasted not good at all. Moreover, they regretted their choice to taste the chocolate less when the chocolate tasted not good (and their expectations were thus even more negatively disconfirmed) compared to when they were less curious.

The primary contribution of this work is the demonstration that unmet expectations do not always result in dissatisfaction or regret with one’s choice. Our findings suggest that evoking curiosity is beneficial for product satisfaction regardless of how a product performs.

REFERENCES


