

# The features and approaches to cognitive dissonance

[Health & Medicine](#), [Mental Health](#)



Cognitive dissonance is the unpleasant state of tension that takes place when there are two inconsistent thoughts or perceptions (Zimbardo, Johnson, & Hamilton, 2014). This would usually result in a conflict of attitudes and behaviour (Hockenbury & Hockenbury, 2012) and it is something we have all encountered at one point of time or another, especially in the realm of consumerism. It could have taken place after making that purchase of a new 70 inch widescreen TV, finally booking that trip to Europe, or even questioning the usability of that new paperweight that we just bought, that on hindsight might be more aesthetically pleasing than it is functional. Buyer's remorse is one of the concepts that comes to mind when discussing cognitive dissonance in the context of consumer behaviour. In particular, post-purchase dissonance is mostly associated with it, and it typically arises when the customer has to make a tough decision.

According to Hasan (2012), there are three main ways how dissonance can arise. Firstly, through any logical inconsistency. Secondly, when a person experiences an inconsistency either between his attitude and his behaviour or between two of his behaviours. And finally, when a strongly held expectation is disconfirmed, which in the case of the newly-wed couple was when they found another dining table which better fitted their décor and budget compared to the one they had already purchased. The expectation that they had found the best deal for themselves was disconfirmed shortly after they had already made their purchase.

Interestingly, Hassan (2012) found that the more personally involved the consumer was in the decision-making for that purchase, the less likely he

would experience the uncomfortable state of dissonance. That would suggest that there was not much involvement (Kardes, Cronley, & Cline, 2013) on the behalf of the newly-wed couple as they had not put in enough resources (i. e. money, time, or even cognitive resources) into deciding what table they should purchase, which as a result led to their post-purchase dissonance upon discovering a table that would have better fit their needs. However, it is also worth noting that Graff, Sophonthummapharn and Parida (2012) found that younger persons experience the least dissonance when it came to regretting their purchase of a mobile phone despite them being the least emotionally-involved in the decision-making process. Graff et. al (2012) attributed it to the fact that young persons found such a purchase to be an easy decision to make, and therefore only made use of simple decision rules or heuristics to aid their decision making (Kardes et. al, 2013).

While their post-purchase dissonance will likely never disappear, it can eventually be reduced as O'Neil and Palmer (2014) found that prolonged exposure to the positive aspects of purchased goods such as its quality and brand assurance, often lead to reduced levels of dissonance over time. It is then plausible that over time the couple might eventually realise that they had in fact not made any mistakes in purchasing the table. Instead, they might come to realise that the premium they paid for the chosen table was worth it for a product of better quality (O'Neil & Palmer, 2014). Increasing the perceived attractiveness of the chosen item, or a strategy known as 'sweet lemons', is also an approach Kardes et. al (2013) found to be successful in reducing post-purchase dissonance. Another method of

changing one's cognition involves being critical of the qualities of the rejected good, which in this case, is the second table the couple saw. Also known as the 'sour grapes' strategy, this involves reducing the perceived attractiveness of the rejected good, which is essentially the opposite of the 'sweet lemons' approach. The third strategy mentioned by Kardes et. al (2013) to resolve the uncomfortable tension experienced from dissonance involves increasing the perceived similarity among the alternatives, which means attempting to view all the products in that range as similar. In the three approaches mentioned, the consumer's cognition is being altered in the hopes of reducing the dissonance, either by creating new beliefs, or simply modifying existing ones.