

# The joining of two opposing ideas to get a reaction, a useful marketing tool

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



Cognitive dissonance is the feeling of discomfort that comes from two conflicting beliefs (Aronson, Blanton, & Cooper, 1995). For example, someone who is aware of the negative environmental impact of their vehicle and deeply cares about the environment, but still chooses to drive a larger, fancier vehicle for style versus the environment. Cognitive dissonance plays a large role in regards to attitude and behavior change. No one wants to feel discomfort from their actions which leads to a change in attitude or behavior. We want to achieve uniformity in our beliefs and attitudes when two cognitions are varying (Festinger, 1957). So, in my example above with the environmental activist driving a large, non-fuel efficient car, the guy driving the car would need to either change his attitude or his behavior in order to reduce the dissonance. He might attempt to downplay the negative impact of his car on the environment or he might try to convince himself that if he got rid of the car that his girlfriend would leave him. When he uses such explanations, he is able to reduce the dissonance and continue on with his behavior (Festinger, 1957).

People will attempt to change their attitudes or beliefs in order to relieve the dissonance (Anupam & Purva, 2008). They will do this by either internal justification or external justification (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959). In a study by Festinger and Carlsmith (1959), they asked students to perform a dull task; the objective of the study was to have the students produce a negative response towards the task. After the students had completed that task, they asked each student to sway another participant into thinking that the task was exciting. A third of the group was paid \$1 and the next third of the group was paid \$20 while the last group wasn't asked to sway any participants. In

the end, the group that got paid \$1 rated the task more positively than those who received the \$20 payment. Festinger and Carlsmith (1959) explained this as those who received the \$1 payment had to find internal justification to get rid of their dissonance while the students in the \$20 payment group used external reward to defend their behavior (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959). Another example of this is when we force ourselves to eat salmon salad for lunch everyday even though we don't particularly like the taste, we might internally justify it by telling ourselves that it is good for our health (Aronson & Carlsmith, 1963). On the other hand, if we eat cupcakes everyday and know that it isn't good for our health and we start to gain weight, we might start to tell ourselves that those cupcakes aren't very good anyways (Aronson & Carlsmith, 1963).

In marketing and sales, cognitive dissonance theory is completely helpful if you know how to use it correctly. In the example of purchasing a new car, there are thousands of options on the market at all different price points. In one example, a woman may purchase a new Lexus thinking that it is the safe, family-friendly car she needs in order to look the part for her new job as a lawyer. However, she is also aware that this car costs enough to feed starving children around the world and could help pay off her student loans. She is faced with cognitive dissonance. She searches online to realize that the car isn't actually as safe as the salesperson allowed her to believe and she found a highly rated, safe car that fits her budget better. She may choose to return the car in order to get rid of her dissonance. If a car salesperson wants to prevent buyer's remorse, they could provide

testimonials and reviews for each model sold at their dealership (Cummings & Venkatesan, n. d.). Also, providing customers with a sense of closure after buying the car will help increase their satisfaction with their purchase and help prevent buyer's remorse (Gu, Botti, & Faro, 2013). One example of this in action would be when the customer is driving off the lot in their new car, comment on how awesome they look in the car, remark the practicality/cool factor/luxury etc. of their car instead of telling them to make sure they like it and if they don't they can just bring it back within a certain amount of time. Another thing that can truly help prevent buyer's remorse is just being honest (Anupam & Purva, 2008). Give the simple facts to the customer on what the car can actually do, what your dealership provides, and what other customers think of their purchase of the same product. Having honesty from the beginning will create a sense of loyalty.