Abstract

Although people might react positively to surprise rewards at first, it is unclear whether surprise will sustain their positive responses over time by decelerating the process of hedonic adaptation (Frederick and Loewenstein 1999). In four experiments involving real-time consumption of rewards, the authors investigated how surprise influences the pace at which the enjoyment of a reward declines over time. Experiment 1 (a field experiment), showed that happiness with a surprise reward decreases less than happiness with an anticipated reward over a one-week period, resulting in a positive main effect on the slope of consumption enjoyment and thus a greater gap in enjoyment after one week. Experiment 2 showed that surprise slows down the decline in real-time consumption enjoyment even when the reward item is unpleasant. Experiment 3 replicated the basic effect in a marketing context, and showed that the effect is mediated by gratitude towards the reward giver for the surprise reward. Finally, Experiment 4 showed that the positive effect of surprise replicates when people feel more grateful for the surprise reward, and that the effect attenuates when people feel less grateful for the surprise reward. Together, data supported the gratitude account and ruled out affect-intensification mechanisms.

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All interested are welcome.