

In 1876, the German psychologist and physicist Gustav Fechner described how our brains respond more strongly to familiar cues; he called this the exposure effect. The more we're exposed to something or someone, the more we trust it. And the more we like it. Scientists have since used the exposure effect to describe why we might like a song more after hearing it a few times, why we feel more comfortable around friends than strangers, and why we're inclined to feel as though we personally know celebrities we see frequently in the media. Consistent and repeated exposure to celebrities such as Will Smith and Oprah Winfrey makes us more likely to trust and like them, because over time their images have literally created a neurochemical pattern within our brains.

These patterns can slowly accumulate over the course of years, as with *It's a Wonderful Life*. But does that mean that only adults experience trust? Do we experience the exposure effect early in life?

McNuggets, Milk, and the Golden Arches

Through repetition of messaging and consistency of experience, McDonald's builds trust in young diners. In a study designed to show the effects of marketing on young children, researchers at the Stanford University School of Medicine and Lucile Packard Children's Hospital presented children ages three to five with two different sets of chicken nuggets. They wrapped one set of nuggets in McDonald's packaging, and the other in plain, unmarked packaging. Which group of nuggets tasted better, they asked. The twist: the packaging was different, but the nuggets themselves were exactly the same.

Overwhelmingly, the young patrons rated the McDonald's-branded food as better than the unbranded food—even though the nuggets were identical. Thomas Robinson, the director of the Center for Healthy Weight at Lucile Packard Children's Hospital, reported, "Kids don't just ask for food from McDonald's, they

actually believe that the chicken nugget they think is from McDonald's tastes better than an identical, unbranded nugget." Kids preferred the flavor of not only branded nuggets, but also the taste of menu items not normally associated with McDonald's, such as carrots, milk, and apple juice, when these foods were presented in McDonald's-branded packaging. By age three, their taste buds were already "tricked" into imagining superior taste.

To fascinate diners with Trust, Mickey D's doesn't just invest in becoming the most familiar option. It also conditions people to know what to expect from each encounter by maintaining predictability.

Villains, Heroes, and Other Personal Brands

We measure how much we trust something by comparing our expectations against any deviations. The more similar something is to our expectations, the more we count on it in the future. Human reputations confirm this. We trust good guys to be good. (Notice how few fairy tales illustrate Prince Charming embezzling from the royal coffers.)

Note: This consistency doesn't *necessarily* mean "good." Trust builds a strong expectation of future behavior based on past behavior. Now, that behavior could be bad. That college buddy who always runs half an hour late, but you still meet him out for drinks anyway? You've figured out his patterns, and can accurately judge his behavior. His tardiness might annoy you, but it doesn't surprise you. We also "trust" Darth Vader, Cruella de Vil, and Caligula to be bad. We revel in the evil of Heath Ledger's Joker, and in the innocence of Tom Hanks's Forrest Gump. If a character deviates sharply from his or her established persona, we're confused, even disappointed.

In marketing, predictable messages might become boring over time, yet erratic action unravels the pattern. Reputations influence decision making. People make Trust judgments based on