Storytelling in Advertising: Does the Beginning matter?

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Abstract

In the present study we investigated whether the beginning of dramatic stories could change the liking of neutral stimuli in an evaluative conditioning paradigm. We conducted an experiment to examine two hypotheses, namely whether the story endings affect the neutral stimuli towards their valence and whether the story beginnings affect the neutral stimuli towards the opposite valence. The experiment (N = 132) used a 2 x 2 between and within participants (mixed) design. Unknown brands of mineral water were associated with stories that could begin either positively or negatively and could also end either positively or negatively. The brands were always presented after the ending of the stories. The results indicated that the beginnings in contrast to the endings do not have an effect on neutral stimuli. Both the theoretical and the practical implications of the findings are discussed.

Keywords: evaluative conditioning, storytelling, story beginnings, story endings

Storytelling in Advertising

The gradual increase in the use of "cookies" at internet websites that offer customized services to users, the multitude of advertising campaigns that target to shape consumer preferences or the feedback that consumers have the chance to provide for several products or services could illustrate some extent of the overall importance that preferences seem to have in several aspects of modern life. Realizing how individuals acquire positive (like) and negative (dislike) preferences towards numerous aspects of daily life such as products, people, ideas or lifestyles is of great significance, because it leads to a more profound understanding of human behavior within social contexts. In fact, experts from several disciplines (Martin & Levey, 1978; Stuart, Shimp, & Engle, 1987), have long highlighted the importance of preferences in an attempt to further delegate social behavior. A study that investigated food preferences supports the notion that most likes and dislikes seem to result from learning rather than being inherited (Rozin & Millman, 1987).

An effective way of studying the acquisition of preferences, is through evaluative conditioning (EC) namely, a change in a neutral stimulus that is usually called conditioned stimulus or CS which emerges from pairing it with an already positive or negative stimulus, that is usually called unconditioned stimulus or US (De Houwer, Thomas, & Baeyens, 2001; Gast, Gawronski, & De Houwer, 2012; Hofmann, De Houwer, Perugini, Baeyens & Crombez, 2010). A prototypical example of an EC effect could be the "kill-the-messenger" effect, which refers to the situation where a person (CS) who carries a message (US), due to mere association with the negatively valenced message, seems to acquire a negative valence as well (Manis, Cornell, & Moore, 1974). The term evaluative conditioning was introduced by Levey and Martin, (1978) while the studies of Razran (1954) and Staats and Staats (1957) have illustrated earlier demonstrations of the phenomenon (for a review see De Houwer et al., 2001). Across EC studies, researchers have used, both as CS and US, stimuli that could either have the same or different modality such as visual stimuli, gustatory stimuli or visual-auditory stimuli, visual-offspring stimuli (for a review see De Houwer et al., 2001; Walther, Nagengast, & Trasselli, 2005).

Most of the aforementioned studies employed as USi, stimuli of stable valence that were either negative or positive. An important exception to these paradigms is the

US-revaluation paradigm, in which, at a first stage, the US was associated with the CS and at a subsequent stage the US was again associated with the CS but at the latter stage, the US possessed the opposite valence compared to the valence that it possessed during the first stage (Walther, Gawronski, Blank, & Langer, 2009). Also, in their recent study, Strick and Volbeda (2018) used stories with a dramatic structure as USi of either stable or changing valence, since stories in general, rarely seem to have a stable valence. All stories started negatively, introducing characters with a social or a personal problem and ended either in a negative way where the problem remained unresolved or in a positive way where the problem was eventually solved, hence the changing valence (Strick & Volbeda, 2018).

In the story-paradigm, Strick and Volbeda (2018) used stories with a dramatic structure to investigate whether they could function as USi in a conditioning paradigm. In general, stories are without doubt an inextricable part of human culture. They are timeless, universal and appealing. Over the centuries they have contributed fundamentally to civilization through the communication of valuable information, having delivered several roles such as teaching or entertaining. Drama comes from the Greek word dran which literally means 'to act' and according to Aristotle drama refers to the imitation of action (Fairchild, 1916). In *Poetics*, Aristotle provided a distinction of the six key elements of drama namely, plot (*mythos*), character (*ethos*), thoughts or ideas (*dianoia*), verbal expression (*lexis*), song (*melopoeia*) and spectacle (*opsis*) (Potolsky, 2006; see also Freytag, 1863 for an alternative perspective). Dramatic stories provide a real life simulation, hence achieve to elicit audience's participation and emotional response. Indeed, observation of affective responses could evoke similar affective states to observers (Bandura, 1986). Despite contextual and narrative differences, dramatic stories in general seem to comprise of several fundamental elements such as main characters, a problem or a conflict, that is introduced in the plot, actions towards the plot and a conclusion or a resolution (Tindall, 2012). Whether a story would end up either positively or negatively is basically determined based upon whether the problem or conflict would be resolved or not.

Regardless of the fundamental elements of a story, its ending seems quite important for the impression that it would eventually impose on its audience. The fact that the ending segment is significant for the evaluation of a whole has been

demonstrated in several studies, for example "the duration neglect" that was demonstrated by Fredrickson and Kahneman (1993) that is, the evaluation of a situation would depend on its finale and its most intense (peak) moments while its duration does not seem to matter. Also, they stated that in some situations, where a positive beginning is followed by a negative ending, the evaluation is entirely based on the finale of the situation. The prominence of a story ending in subsequent evaluations was highlighted in the study of Strick and Volbeda (2018) as well, where it was found that the story endings affect the ratings of the conditioned stimuli towards their valence.

Despite their different theoretical and methodological implications, the US-revaluation paradigm (Walther et al., 2009) and the story-paradigm (Strick & Volbeda, 2018), have in common the fact that the used USi, did not maintain a stable valence throughout the entire duration of each study, as they would have in a typical EC experimental design. There is reason to believe that USi with changing valence might cause a stronger conditioning effect to the CSi compared to the USi with stable valence. A recent study, aimed to explore the feeling of being moved, demonstrated that when fundamental properties of human condition, namely "core values" such as love (positive valence), are presented at adverse contexts such as times of war (negative valence), invoke a stronger emotional response than when they are presented in auspicious contexts (Strick & Van Soolingen, 2018). Also, the US-revaluation study provided evidence that a change in the valence of the US caused counterpart changes to the valence of the CS (Walther et al., 2009). Another concept that could lend empirical support to the notion that changing valence evoke stronger affective responses is the contrast effect, which refers to the situation where a particular stimulus is perceived or evaluated towards the opposite direction compared to the perception or evaluation of a preceding stimulus (Scherer & Lambert, 2009).

The present study aims to investigate apart from story endings whether story beginnings could affect CSi liking in an EC story-paradigm. To explore this possibility, our goal is to employ an experimental design, similar to the one elaborated by Strick and Volbeda (2018), that is to use as USi, stories with a dramatic structure, with the exception that in the present study both the story endings and the story beginnings will vary. In essence, not only story endings will be either positive or negative but also story beginnings will be either positive or negative. Brands of

mineral water, which will not be familiar to the participants, will be used as CSi, as in the Strick and Volbeda (2018) design.

So far, we have illustrated how critical the endings are when it comes to evaluate a situation or a story. Also, we have demonstrated a few indications that could support the notion that stimuli with changing valence may result in stronger affective responses compared to stimuli which their valence remain stable over time. Consequently, we would expect that associating CSi with stories that end positively, to increase CSi liking compared to associating CSi with stories that end negatively, an expectation that partly replicates the aim of Strick & Volbeda (2018) study. Moreover, based on the notion that stimuli with changing valence would evoke stronger conditioning effects, we would expect that associating CSi with stories that for example begin negatively and end positively to increase CSi liking compared to associating CSi with stories that begin positively and end positively.

During their experiments, Strick and Volbeda (2018) examined whether the timing of the presentation of a CS moderates the effect of EC. In order to examine this, they created three timing conditions, namely before the beginning of the story, before the ending of the story and after the ending of the story, during which the CS could be presented to the participants. The most effective timing condition of the three, concerning the impact of EC, was when the mineral brands (CSi) were presented to the participants after the ending of the story. Based on these findings, we will present the CSi after the positive or the negative ending of the stories (USi) since this particular timing condition generated the strongest effect compared to the other two timing conditions, in all three experiments of Strick and Volbeda's (2018) study. Presenting the CS after the US describes a "backward conditioning" paradigm which reflects more vividly an advertising setting, since it is often the case in advertising, a positive or negative stimulus, that is the US, to be presented prior to the advertised brand, that is the CS (Stuart et al., 1987).

In summary, in the present study, we aim to investigate two hypotheses. First, we expect that the association of CSi with stories that end positively will result in more positive CSi ratings compared to the association of CSi with stories that end negatively. Second, we expect that the association of CSi with stories that begin negatively will result in more positive CSi ratings compared to the association of CSi

with stories that begin positively**. In the experiment we measured EC using an attitude measure**. The sample size was determined before collecting the data.

Method

Participants and Design. In order to determine the sample size, we generated a pattern of expected results, by estimating expected means and standard deviations in order to calculate the effect size ($d = .26$). Power analysis revealed that in order for an effect of this size to be detected (80% chance) with alpha level at .05, a sample of 119 participants would be required (Erdfelder, Faul, & Buchner, 1996). One-hundred-and-thirty-two participants were recruited via Amazon M-Turk, $M_{age} = 40.56$, $SD_{age} = 9.86$, (65 females). A 2 (beginning: negative vs. positive; between participants) x 2 (ending: negative vs. positive; within participants) mixed design was employed.

Materials – Stories. We created 40 stories, based on the story materials of Strick and Volbeda (2018), 10 of which were composed of negative beginnings and positive endings, 10 of negative beginnings and negative endings, 10 of positive beginnings and positive endings and finally 10 were composed of positive beginnings and negative endings. An example of a story that initiated positively and ended negatively is "Nick has been in a relationship with Megan for one year, which was the best year of his life. - At a party of the study association, he finds her kissing with an older student." An example of a story that initiated positively and ended positively is "Chris was coming back from a romantic honeymoon in Hawaii and was looking forward to his first working day. - When Chris arrived at the office, his colleagues welcomed him with a cake that was decorated with the line 'we missed you'.". All participants were presented with the same 20 story endings, 10 positive and 10 negative. However, for half of the participants, all stories started positively, while for the other half of the participants, all stories started negatively. The stories that started negatively, introduced main character(s) with a social, economic or personal problem, while the stories that started positively introduced main character(s) with social, economic or personal success. The endings, either negative or positive, provided a counterpart closure to the previously presented plot.

In a pretest, the beginnings and endings of the stories were evaluated separately by participants on M-Turk ($N = 29$) on a scale from -3 (very negative) to +3 (very positive). The set of endings that was designed to be positive was rated

positively ($M = 2.02$, $SD = 0.91$) while the set of endings that was designed as negative was rated negatively ($M = -1.82$, $SD = 0.44$). The negative beginnings of the stories that ended negatively were evaluated as negative ($M = -1.87$, $SD = 0.59$) while the negative beginnings of the stories that ended positively were evaluated negatively as well ($M = -1.77$, $SD = 0.53$). The positive beginnings of the stories that ended negatively were evaluated as positive ($M = 1.39$, $SD = 0.76$) while the positive beginnings of the stories that ended positively were evaluated positively as well ($M = 1.52$, $SD = 0.72$). One-sample t-tests demonstrated that all means were significantly different from zero ($p < .001$).

Procedure and Conditioning Phase. We used as conditioned stimuli (CSi) two pictures of unknown brands of mineral water that were used in the study of Strick and Volbeda (2018). Participants were informed that they would be presented with short stories and alongside those, some brands of mineral water would be shown. They were asked to concentrate on the upcoming presentation as attentively as possible, as they would later receive questions about it.

Overall, there were 40 conditioning trials that were presented in random order, with four different conditions that represented the 2x2 design. The CSi were always presented after the ending segment of each story, utilizing backward conditioning. The instructions, stimuli and questions were provided screen-centered. Each trial started with the presentation of a story beginning, followed by a blanc screen, followed by a story ending, followed by a blanc screen, followed by the presentation of the CS, followed by a blank screen (for a detailed depiction of the trials in the four different conditions see *Figure 1*.). The inter-interval was 2000 ms.

Attitude Measure. Participants were asked to evaluate the CSi by answering three questions for each of them, namely "How attractive do you find this brand?", "Does this brand appeal to you?", and "How much do you like this brand?" on Likert scales ranging from 1(*not at all*) to 7(*very much*). The attitude measure was calculated by averaging out the results of the three questions, regarding CSi evaluation. Cronbach's alpha per different ending ranged from .956 (positive endings) to .972 (negative endings).

Exit questions. Participants completed demographic questions and at the end they had the opportunity to share their thoughts on whether they knew what the study was about and to leave any comments concerning the study.

Trial type	Sequence of stimulus presentation					
NegPos	NegBegin	Blank	PosEnd	Blank	CS	Blank
	8000 ms	1000 ms	8000 ms	1000 ms	3000 ms	1000 ms
NegNeg	NegBegin	Blank	NegEnd	Blank	CS	Blank
	8000 ms	1000 ms	8000 ms	1000 ms	3000 ms	1000 ms
PosPos	PosBegin	Blank	PosEnd	Blank	CS	Blank
	8000 ms	1000 ms	8000 ms	1000 ms	3000 ms	1000 ms
PosNeg	PosBegin	Blank	NegEnd	Blank	CS	Blank
	8000 ms	1000 ms	8000 ms	1000 ms	3000 ms	1000 ms

Figure 1. Overview of each trial type. NegPos = Negative Beginning/Positive Ending; NegNeg = Negative Beginning/Negative Ending; PosPos = Positive Beginning/Positive Ending; PosNeg = Positive Beginning/Negative Ending; NegBegin = Negative Beginning; PosBegin = Positive Beginning; NegEnd = Negative Ending; PosEnd = Positive Ending.

Results

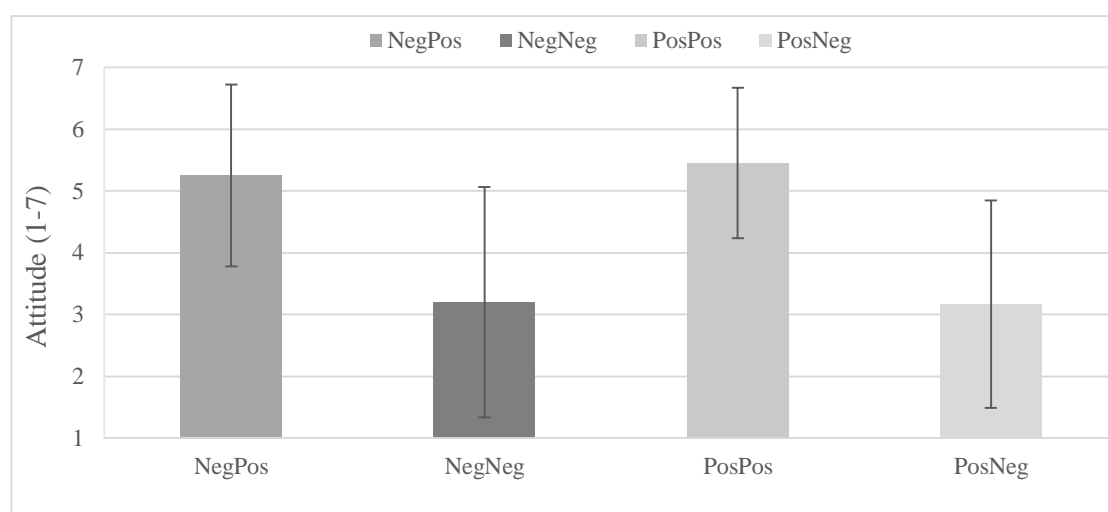The results of the attitude measure are displayed in *Figure 2*.

Figure 2. Attitudes towards CSi associated with each set of stories (1-7). Error bars represent standard deviations.

The ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of the endings on brand ratings, $F(1, 130) = 95.03$, $p < .001$, with CSi rated more positively ($M = 5.35$, $SD = 1.35$) when they were presented after stories that ended positively than when they were presented after stories that ended negatively ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 1.77$). This confirms the first hypothesis, that is, associating CSi with stories that end positively will result in more positive CSi ratings compared to associating CSi with stories that end negatively. In contrast, the analysis did not reveal a significant main effect of the beginnings on brand ratings, $F(1, 130) = 0.264$, $p = .610$, thus rejecting the second hypothesis, that is, associating CSi with stories that begin negatively will result in more positive CSi ratings compared to associating CSi with stories that begin positively. Finally, the analysis did not reveal an interaction effect between the beginnings and the endings, $F(1, 130) = 0.262$, $p = .610$. Summarizing, the results confirmed that when CSi were associated with stories that end positively, are rated more positively compared to when they were associated with stories that end negatively. On the other hand, neither the hypothesized nor the opposite conditioning effect was found for the beginnings.

Discussion

We conducted an experiment to investigate whether the beginning and the ending segments of dramatic stories, which their valence was either changing or remained stable could function as unconditioned stimuli in an evaluative conditioning paradigm. The results demonstrated that the association of unknown brands of mineral water (conditioned stimuli) with stories that end positively, led to more positive ratings of those brands compared to the association of brands with stories that end negatively. In contrast, the results neither demonstrated the negative beginnings to lead to more positive ratings of water brands compared to positive beginnings nor demonstrated the positive beginnings to lead to more negative ratings of water brands compared to negative beginnings. In fact, we did not observe a statistically significant effect of the beginnings on brands' ratings at all. In other words, the beginnings did not seem to affect the brands' ratings neither towards the predicted direction nor towards the opposite direction.

The results of our study replicated the findings of Strick and Volbeda (2018) and provide further proof concerning the effect that the endings of dramatic stories

have on brands' ratings in the story-paradigm. Furthermore, the findings of this study add further empirical evidence for the effect of backward conditioning in EC studies, that is the changing in the valence of a neutral stimulus, after it has been associated with a preceding unconditioned stimulus.

The confirmation of the first hypothesis, namely that the endings affect brands' ratings according to their valence and the lack of evidence to support the second hypothesis concerning the effect of beginnings on brands' ratings provide further strengthening to the notion that the endings seem to play a pivotal role when it comes to evaluate a certain situation, event or story. The importance of the endings was previously highlighted in a series of studies concerning the peak-and-end effect, namely the influence that the endings and other intense moments have on people's retrospective assessments (Fredrickson, 2000; Kahneman, 1999). In those studies, participants evaluated their experience towards several different situations such as a colonoscopy (Redelmeier & Kahneman, 1996), an exposure to short films that differ in both duration and affect (Fredrickson & Kahneman, 1993) and an exposure to an unpleasant experience of dipping their hands in cold water (Kahneman, Fredrickson, Schreiber, & Redelmeier, 1993) primarily based on how the experience ended. Fredrickson (2000) proposed two different explanations that could shed further light to the importance of endings. She argued that the endings along with the peak moments could convey more "personal meanings" compared to the rest of the reviewed situation, namely information that could help people's self-perception with regard to their environment. Furthermore, she argued that among all else the endings illustrate the completion of a situation or in our case a story that provide people with a certain degree of confidence that along with the personal meanings conveyed could further facilitate a subsequent evaluation of the situation from a safer stance (Fredrickson, 2000).

An alternative interpretation of the endings' effect could be achieved through the concept of *katharsis*, that was introduced by Aristotle in the *Poetics*. Since Aristotle never actually provided a concrete definition, katharsis has been considered as a highly controversial concept with emotional, moral and educational aspects. For the purposes of the present study, we are going to adopt a working definition. The concept of katharsis is stimulated as a response to the presented emotions of pity and fear that emerged during the dramatic narration and refers to the inner experience of

purification - "a pleasurable relief" - of the consequences provoked due to those aversive emotions (Fairchild, 1916; p. 47). It would be reasonable to assume, then, that katharsis seems to be evoked by intense moments. In general, moments of intensity during a narration of a story are most likely to occur when the story has already unfolded to some extent. Also, changes in the intensity of a story typically have a larger effect, especially later in the story (Ariely, 1998) where the audiences demonstrate a higher degree of identification with the characters. Katharsis as a response to the intense moments of a story that is most likely to unveil at the ending segment could partially account for the impact of the endings. However, further research is needed to address this issue.

The aforementioned arguments provide some justification for why the endings and not the beginnings seem to matter after all. However, there are situations in which a beginning seems to have a stronger effect than the ending, such as the example of paraplegics and lottery winners where people do not evaluate a past experience or situation but foresee one. In these situations, people base their positive (lottery win) or negative (paralysis) expectations on the extremity of the initial affective state. However, the extreme affect eventually will fade due to contextual habituation, hence the prominence of the initial effect compared to the mitigated post effect (Brickman, Coates, & Janoff-Bulman, 1978). Nevertheless, it seems that this is not the case here since participants were asked to rate the brands of mineral water after they have witnessed the stories. Future research could investigate this issue further by asking participants to rate the conditioned stimuli before the story begins or after the story beginning.

The hypothesis that negative beginnings should increase brands' liking compared to positive beginnings was based upon the notion that changing valence might cause stronger emotional responses than stable valence. However, in light of our findings, future research could examine whether the beginnings could evoke the opposite effect, that is to cause an effect towards their valence. The concept of "*temporal monotonicity*" seems to be in line with this claim. Temporal monotonicity refers to the situation where an extension of an unpleasant or a pleasant situation contributes to the already experienced negative or positive emotional state (Fredrickson & Kahneman, 1993). This concept could lend empirical support to a

potentially opposite effect of beginnings, compared to our hypothesis, on conditioned stimuli ratings.

The fact that a significant effect of the beginnings neither towards the hypothesized direction nor towards any other direction was observed, inevitably lead us to reflect upon the experimental design. In the present study, participants were asked to evaluate the brands only after the story had ended. Also, the fact that each participant was exposed to stories that could ended both positively and negatively but could initiated only positively or only negatively, may have made endings much more salient than the beginnings. It has been argued that the more salient an element is, the easier it is, to recall it (Alba & Chattopadhyay, 1986). In order to cope with that eventuality, future research could employ two timing conditions where participants could evaluate the conditioned stimuli not only after the endings (same timing condition as in the present study) but also after the beginnings. In this case the - after beginnings - evaluation may function as an anchor. The anchoring effect appears as one of the most robust effects in social psychological literature and refers to the "disproportionate influence on decision makers to make judgements that are biased toward an initially presented value" (Furnham & Boo, 2011; p. 35). In principle, the anchoring effect illustrate that an initial high value will result in a corresponding ending high value. However, Ku, Galinski and Murnighan (2006) performed a series of experiments in the context of auctions and demonstrated that lower initial numerical values can result in higher ending values. In general, the anchoring effect was reversed due to higher auction participation resulted from the lower initial prices. Lower prices stimulated more people to join the market auction, decreased potential impediments, increased the perceived value of products due to high participation and generated more sunk costs, thus resulted in higher final prices compared to the initial prices (Ku et al., 2006). Based on these findings we believe that generating an experimental design where participants would evaluate conditioned stimuli (e.g. brands of mineral water) in three different timing conditions namely before the story beginning, after the story beginning and after the story ending, it might illustrate whether story beginnings could affect conditioned stimuli ratings after all.

Concerning the implications of the study's results towards an applied advertising context we argue that based on our design, the findings could be applied primarily to narrative advertisements, namely advertisements that use sequences of

events that are related in both time and topic (Bruner, 1990). For the purposes of the present study we only tested brands that were not familiar to the participants. Future research may investigate potential differences between familiar and unfamiliar products to the audiences. Indeed, previous studies indicated that EC could be efficacious for new brands but it would not be for well-known brands (Gibson, 2008; Shimp, Stuart, & Engle, 1991). In addition, existing evidence also favor that EC functions more effectively for novel products in contrast to well-known products because the latter are depicted more detailed in memory and this cognitive complexity evokes a weaker conditioning effect, compared to novel products (Cacioppo, Marshall-Goodell, Tassinary, & Petty, 1992; Gibson, 2008).

Our findings indicated that the presentation of a product that follows the positive ending of a story which is typically comprised of main character(s), a plot and a conclusion increases the liking of that product, compared to the presentation of a product that follows the negative ending of a story, while the beginning of the story do not seem to account for any changes in the liking of the product. In other words, regardless of whether the beginning would be positive or negative, the more positive the story ending, the more liked the presented product will be. In order to increase liking towards advertised products, then, those products should directly follow story endings that should aim to elicit as stronger positive affective responses as possible.

Finally, future research could operationalize dramatic stories as unconditioned stimuli with more complex valences such as employing various affective states like enthusiasm, joy, fear, pity or sadness rather than just positive and negative valence, as it may unveil a more detailed depiction of the role that more complex affective states might have on the acquisition of preferences. For example, previous research on investigating suspense in advertisements found that hope and fear were stimulated more often in commercials that elicited suspense in contrast with commercials that did not (Madrigal & Bee, 2005). In a similar vein, since actual television commercials are comprised of sequences of moving pictures accompanied by sounds and written text, a cross-modal EC design with multiple stimuli of different modalities such as visual USi and auditory CSi or vice versa might enhance perceived complexity which could result in a closer simulation to these settings.

In conclusion, we associated mineral water brands with dramatic stories and we found that the story endings affect the liking of those brands while the story beginnings do not seem to evoke a conditioning effect. Future research may further investigate whether story beginnings could affect the liking of conditioned stimuli.

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Appendix

Story Materials

Negative beginnings of stories that end positively.

1. Chris feared to get fired on his first working day after his burn-out, which had left him unable to work for months.
2. Everything went wrong when I took Charlie to the zoo. It was raining, we missed the train, and the zoo was closed.
3. Jess has a severe congenital muscle disease and is in a wheelchair.
4. Kevin's basketball knee injury has lasted for more than a year and he has undergone multiple surgeries.
5. Jack's company went bankrupt ten years ago. He had to sell his house and car.
6. In his youth, Dylan had been severely abused by his father, after which he tried to find solace in drugs.
7. The terrace house of the Joneses family needed to be refurbished, but the family did not have any friends to ask for help.
8. Dave and Noah used to be close friends, but they lost sight of each other when Dave got a job on the other side of the world.
9. Kate's cat disappeared. She was afraid that her cat had an accident and she decided to distribute some 'missing' posters.
10. Jacob is a poor busker in London and barely has any financial means to make ends meet.

Negative beginnings of stories that end negatively.

1. Nick loves his girlfriend very much but she is very distant and does not seem to care about him at all.
2. Rachel's twin sister Mary was taken away by human traffickers. Rachel has been looking for her ever since.
3. Sophia is a mother of two. She has lung cancer and visited the doctor for her monthly checkup.
4. Alex was studying hard for the last exam of the academic year but one day before the exam he got very sick.
5. Lauren has spent the last 6 months organizing a music festival, instead of spending time with her baby daughter.

6. Jamie's laptop had suddenly crashed while downloading data, just a few hours before an important deadline.

7. Luke's successful enterprise faced serious losses because of the economic crisis.

8. Olivia has been diagnosed with breast cancer in a terminal state and she booked one last trip to meet her best friend.

9. Nina has been mistreated by her husband and been unhappy for many years now.

10. Tom cannot pay his house anymore since he has not gotten the promotion he was promised.

Positive beginnings of stories that end positively.

1. Chris was coming back from a romantic honeymoon in Hawaii and was looking forward to his first working day.

2. Charlie and I had the most amazing day at to the zoo - we petted baby animals and the dolphin show was spectacular.

3. Jess is a popular and talented field hockey star at her college.

4. Kevin is a local rising basketball star and may now and then play as a substitute in the national team.

5. Jack is a successful and wealthy businessman and has saved many companies from going bankrupt.

6. Dylan fell in love with Trish, which was why he wanted to better his life and went to rehab for his drug addiction.

7. The Joneses family was new in the friendly and welcoming neighborhood, where they bought a very beautiful old house.

8. Dave and Noah are close friends and kept in touch even after Dave had gotten a job on the other side of the world.

9. Kate's cat disappeared, but she did not worry. She knew that her cat was probably staying safely in one of her neighbors' houses.

10. Jacob is a singer-songwriter who enjoys earning some pin money as a street musician in his free time.

Positive beginnings of stories that end negatively.

1. Nick has been in a relationship with Megan for one year, which was the best year of his life.

2. Rachel has had a beautiful life and was recently happy to find out that she has a twin sister somewhere in the world.

3. Sophia is a mother of two. She visits the doctor now and then, just like today, because it is important to stay healthy.

4. Alex enjoys studying the human body and is studying hard because he has the dream of becoming a doctor.

5. Lauren is organizing a music festival with her friends and is having a lot of fun doing this.

6. Jamie has a great night out with friends, as a break from collecting the many data for his thesis.

7. Luke wanted to shut down his company to start traveling around the world.

8. Olivia is excited about finally fulfilling her dream: to go on a trip to her favorite city Bangkok.

9. Nina has found herself and the purpose of life during a meditative vacation in Bali and now wishes to divorce her husband.

10. Tom has been working very hard for quite some time and was told that he would get a promotion soon.

Positive endings

1. When Chris arrived at the office, his colleagues welcomed him with a cake that was decorated with the line 'we missed you'.

2. At the end of the day, he thanked me with a big hug and told me he had an awesome day.

3. This year, she graduates cum laude and has been offered an excellent job at a prestigious consultancy firm.

4. Today, he was brought on as a substitute at the last game of the season and scored the winning goal.

5. Today, he is celebrating the five-year anniversary of his new profitable enterprise.

6. Dylan has now been clean for five years, he is living together with Trish and is a happy father of a daughter.

7. One morning, people from the entire neighborhood gathered to help make the house livable again.

8. Unexpectedly, they stood next to each other on a camping site in South-France and fell happily in each other's arms.

9. Today, Kate receives a phone call from a man telling her that her cat is safe and has been staying in his house for a few days.

10. A talent scout runs into him and is impressed. Not long after that, Jacob is at the top of America's pop charts.

Negative endings

1. At a party of the study association, he finds her kissing with an older student.

2. Today, Rachel passes away at the age of 85. She never found her sister.

3. From the doctor's diagnosis, it is apparent that she is terminally ill.

4. After the last exam of the year, he comes five study points short to be able to study medicine next year.

5. On the festival day, it is raining cats and dogs and the festival needs to be canceled due to safety measures.

6. When he comes home in the evening and turns on his laptop, his hard drive appears to be irreparably damaged and all his data are lost.

7. He has had to fire all of his personnel and today he has finally been declared bankrupt.

8. When she gets off the bus on the way to the airport, she breaks her ankle and cannot continue her trip.

9. She has inadequate financial means to apply for divorce and shall inevitably have to spend the rest of her life with this man.

10. When he came to the office today, Tom's close colleague appeared to have gotten the promotion instead of him.