

Advertising Appeals to “The Times of your Life”: Developing a Scale to Measure Personal Nostalgia

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Abstract

This paper describes three independent studies designed to fill an inherent gap in the literature by developing, validating and confirming a scale specifically tailored to measure personal nostalgic reactions autonomously, as a response to advertising stimulus. While nostalgic appeals have been empirically explored in a ‘unified’ context, the literature has identified two distinction forms of nostalgia; namely personal and historical. These forms have not been studied independently, although theory suggests that their influence on emotions, cognition, attitudes and purchase intentions, amongst other, will differ. Considering the importance of these consumer reactions to advertising, and nostalgia’s proven results as a highly effective advertising tool, the scale will have both practical and theoretical significance.

Keywords: Personal Nostalgia, Scale Development, Advertising Appeals, Nostalgia

Background and Problem Development

A common definition for nostalgia in the marketing literature is "a preference (general liking, positive attitude, or favourable affect) toward objects (people, places, or things) that were more common (popular, fashionable, or widely circulated) when one was younger (in early adulthood, in adolescence, in childhood, or even before birth)" (Holbrook and Schindler 1991; p. 330). It has been discussed as both a cognitive and emotional reaction (Holak and Havlena 1998). Nostalgia can be traced back to the mid-seventeenth century (Hofer 1688) and has been shown to concern all people, regardless of their age, gender, social class, ethnicity, or other social groupings (Sedikides, Wildschut, and Baden 2004). Its use as an advertising appeal is proven to be a highly effective and persuasive marketing and advertising tactic for marketing practitioners (Naughton and Vlasic 1998). It has also been implicated in a variety of behavioural research contexts important to marketers, including self-concept, cognitive reactions, brand loyalty, brand meaning, the human senses, attitude and consumption preferences, literary criticism, collective memory, and emotions (Muehling and Sprott 2004). It is clear that any advertising appeal that can have a significant effect on such a range of important reactions is one worth understanding.

Although nostalgia and its effects as an advertising appeal have been studied previously, there has been discussion of two distinct forms of nostalgia being evident. This has led to classification of nostalgia by academics (e.g. Havlena and Holak 1991; Stern 1992) as either **Personal Nostalgia**, relating to reactions generated from either a personally remembered past (‘the way *I* was’), or, **Historical Nostalgia**, reactions generated from a time in history that the respondent did not experience directly, even a time before they were born (‘the way *it* was’). The underpinning theories on memory systems and episodic memory (Tulving 1972, 1984), in addition to theories on autobiographical memories (Brewer 1986; Neisser 1988), which has also been called personal (Brewer and Pani 1983) further show evidence of the distinction between the two forms. As personal nostalgia deals with ones own real or idealised past, these theories are of course relevant. However, historical nostalgia, by definition does not

share this connection. Instead collective memory (Halbwachs 1950) becomes an important feature, as historical nostalgia often deals with ‘fantasised’ or aspirational characters, as opposed to more ‘real life’ aspects of personal nostalgia (Stern 1992). This shows a clear distinction in the cognitive reactions to the two appeals. This is of importance to advertising and marketing practitioners especially, as it has been shown that salient thoughts are often self-referencing and thus may influence mental-processing activity when attitudes are formed and retrieved (e.g. Greenwald 1968). Not only cognitive responses, but emotions too are affected, which is significant as emotionally arousing events are often more likely to be recalled later than more neutral events (Canli *et al* 2000; Holak and Havlena 1998). Thus we would expect personal nostalgia (which is dealing with connection with one’s self) to then lead to more salient and heightened emotions and a difference in cognition than historical nostalgia would, and this is likely to have follow-on effect to attitudes and purchase intentions (MacKenzie, Lutz & Belch 1986). Considering the proven effectiveness of nostalgia on such a range of responses, coupled with the likelihood of differing effects due to the ‘type’ being used, it is clear that researchers and practitioners need to know the varying specific effects that their chosen advertising appeal may have on viewers. To achieve this, a logical first step is in the development of a scale to measure personal nostalgia specifically, a task that is currently unachievable with existing scale instruments.

Methods and Results

Three studies were designed to validate and confirm the personal nostalgic scale. All were experimental in nature and were conducted in a classroom style setting. As respondent’s age is often a determinant of whether or not a reaction to a stimulus results in historical or personal nostalgia a delimitation of those aged between 17 and 26 was enforced for each study. This would also provide a consistent ‘life station’ which could otherwise effect nostalgic reactions (Davis 1979). This ensured a more homogenous sample at this stage scale development.

Study One

Purpose

It has been suggested that the theory (as discussed above) surrounding the concepts of personal and historical nostalgia being explored should first be consulted to aid clarity (DeVellis 2003). As per Li, Edwards and Lee (2002), three methods were used to generate a set of potential scale items: literature reviews (Churchill 1979), thesaurus searches (Wells, Leavitt and McConville 1971), and experience surveys (Chen and Wells 1999; Churchill 1979). From these procedures an initial pool of 72 items was first developed

Method and analysis

Two broadcast style adverts eliciting either personal or historical nostalgic appeals were produced. Kodak was used as the brand portrayed in the advert, a brand that has been used successfully in previous studies on nostalgia (Muehling and Sprott 2004). A previous thought collection and coding study was used to pre-test the adverts to ensure the desired response was being elicited (as per Gurhan-Canli and Maheswaran 1998; Muehling and Sprott 2004; Wright 1973; Mackenzie, Lutz and Belch 1986; Pascal, Sprott and Muehling 2002). A survey instrument with the initial 72 items and demographics was developed / collected. Valid respondents totalling 117 were received for the personal condition and 118 for the historical. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) has often been cited as a first step in scale development

(DeVellis 1991, Spector 1992, Sweeney, Hausknecht and Soutar 2000) and was thus undertaken at this stage.

Results

The EFA revealed three factors, two of which were clearly related to either personal or historical nostalgia. The EFA process included removing items indicated as unusable in the factors shown by the EFA, in addition to using Cronbach's alpha and removing items with squared multiple correlations of less than 0.30 and corrected item-to-total correlations of less than 0.50 (DeVellis 1991). Analysis of the item's mean scores were positive as they showed no extreme means either way (between 4.03 and 5.03 on a seven point scale) (DeVellis 2003). Weaker items were also removed in favour of almost identical stronger items to optimise scale length. Finally we were left with nine items relating to personal nostalgia ($\alpha = .946$) and 11 items relating to historical nostalgia ($\alpha = .912$) (KMO and Bartlett's test = .918, Approx. Chi-Square = 3035.505, Df = 190, Sig. = .000).

Study Two

Purpose

Netemeyer, Bearden and Sharma (2003) discuss Floyd and Widaman's (1995) work showing how Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) can be used as a means of scale reduction by showing what items may be trimmed from the scale, in addition to confirming the scale's final form. The aim of this study was to examine the unidimensionality of the scale items developed in Study One and, if necessary, further purify items. As discussed, this paper was only concerned with developing a scale for personal nostalgia at this point. Unidimensionality was tested through a CFA using the AMOS (6.0) programme.

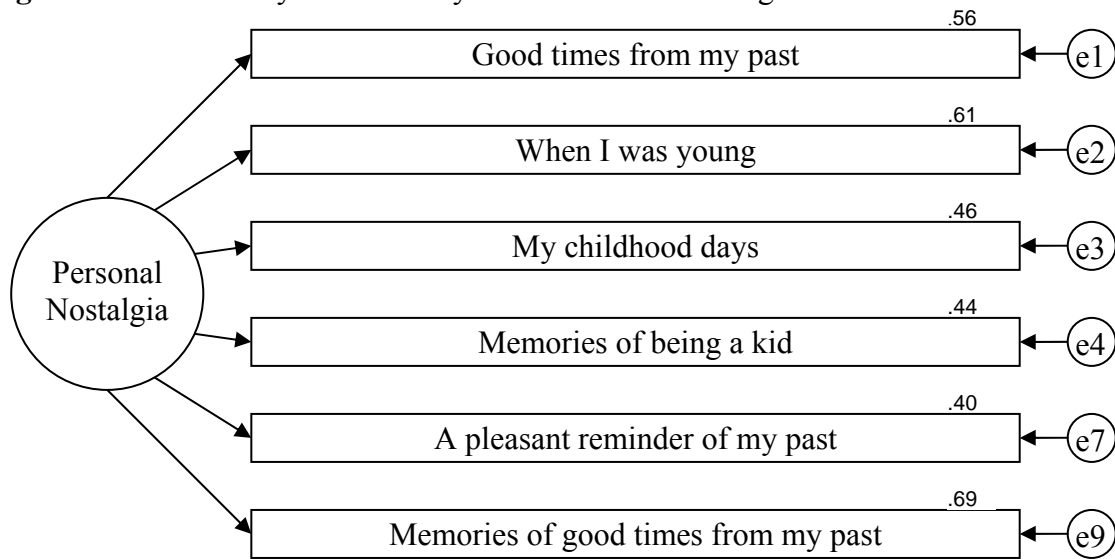
Method and analysis

The stimulus used was the Kodak broadcast advert although a new survey instrument was produced containing the nine personal nostalgia items found in the first study. Valid respondents totalled 211. The use of a CFA is common next step in the development of a scale (Pedhazur and Schmelkin 1991) in part due to its consideration as a superior technique than EFA for assessing unidimensionality (O'Leary-Kelly and Vokurka 1998).

Results

CFA further refined the scales resulting in 6 items for personal nostalgia with acceptable measures (Hu and Bentler 1999) (Chi-square = 10.992, Degrees of freedom = 9, Probability level = .276, GFI = .983, AGFI = .960, RMSEA = .032, $\alpha = .865$).

Figure 1: Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Personal Nostalgia Scale



Study Three

Purpose

This study aimed to test the construct (convergent and discriminant) and criterion (predictive) validity of the scale. Studies by Churchill (1979), Campbell and Fiske (1959) and Oh (2005) were followed as guides for this study.

Method and analysis

To show validity, a new survey instrument comprising of existing established scales to measure attitude towards the advert and brand was developed ($\alpha \geq .90$) (Pascal, Sprott and Muehling, 2002; Muehling and Sprott, 2004). These would be used when establishing criterion (predictive) validity through median split and T-tests. The underpinning for the suitability of this process is that, as discussed earlier, previous studies have shown that increased nostalgia positively affects attitudes (Muehling and Sprott, 2004). In addition, developed versions of previously established scales were included in the survey from, namely; 'evoked nostalgia' (Pascal, Sprott and Muehling, 2002), 'nostalgia' scale (Baker and Kennedy, 1994), 'nostalgic proneness' (Holbrook, 1993) and, the 'experience' scale (Taylor & Konrad, 1980). These would be adjusted for use in a Multitrait-multimethod matrix (MTMM), which has been shown in previous studies to be capable of showing convergent and discriminant validity (Campbell and Fiske, 1959; Churchill, 1979).

Results

The results of the T-tests confirmed predictive validity by showing a significantly more positive attitude towards the advert ($p < 0.05$, $df = 96$) and attitude towards the brand ($p < 0.05$, $df = 97$) in those experiencing a higher level of nostalgia, as tested by the developed items. The results for the MTMM are best explained in conjunction with Table 1. 'Rules' for an acceptable MTMM have been listed verbatim of Trochim (2006) but with the following discussion and analysis after each rule in original form. The following points show the analysis of the basic principles of a valid MTMM:

1. 'Coefficients in the reliability diagonal should consistently be the highest in the matrix':

This is explored as a trait should be more highly correlated with itself than any other scale. This is uniformly true in this MTMM.

2. ‘Coefficients in the validity diagonals should be significantly different from zero and high enough to warrant further investigation’: This is in order to test for convergent validity. The validity diagonals are those that belong to the Monotrait-hetromethod block (in this matrix indicated by ‘^c’) and in this case all of the correlations in meet this criterion at the .01 level, seen using a bivariate correlation test.
3. ‘A validity coefficient should be higher than values lying in its column and row in the same heteromethod block’: This is the case in this matrix as the first validity coefficient (.49) is higher than .32 and .02, with the remaining validity coefficient (.49) with a likewise result.
4. ‘Validity coefficient should be higher than all coefficients in the heterotrait-monomethod triangles’: This explains that correlations between traits measured by different methods should be stronger than correlations between traits with the same method. It can be seen that the trait coefficients (.49 and .49) are higher than the correlations that appear between traits that share a method (.36 and .03). This signifies the likely absence of any methods factor, although the figure of .36 may be questioned. This is discussed in the immediately subsequent rule.
5. ‘The same pattern of trait interrelationship should be seen in all triangles’. The MTMM results would usually be expected to reveal correlations of the Heterotrait-hetromethod measures (^d) being uniformly lowest in the matrix. However, this has not occurred completely in this study. The correlation between the ‘experience scale’ and the ‘nostalgia scale’ is seen to be higher than the correlation between the ‘Personal Nostalgia’ scale and ‘nostalgic proneness’. While this suggests that the ‘experience scale’ is closely related to the ‘personal nostalgia’, the validity diagonal (^c) of the ‘experience scale’ still outweighs this figure, as does the figure’s reliability diagonal (^a). All this shows is that the experience scale has a stronger element of personal nostalgia than first thought, however, is still better related to both itself and the other attitude towards the past scale being employed. This is again supported by the Heterotrait-monomethod correlation of the ‘personal nostalgia’ scale being higher than one would normally expect, although still within the previously discussed rules. In fact, this in itself portraying an existing reliable pattern between the scales.

Table 1: Multitrait-Multimethod Matrix Scale for Personal Nostalgia

		Likert		Bi-polar	
		Personal nostalgia (Personal)	Attitude towards past (Experience)	Personal nostalgia (Nostalgia Scale)	Attitude towards past (Nostalgic Proneness)
Likert	Personal nostalgia (Personal)	0.855 ^a			
	Attitude towards past (Experience)	.361 ^b	0.660 ^a		
Bi-polar	Personal nostalgia (Nostalgia Scale)	.491 ^c	.305 ^d	0.702 ^a	
	Attitude towards past (Nostalgic Proneness)	.023 ^d	.491 ^c	.031 ^b	0.517 ^a

^aReliability diagonal (Cronbach’s α). ^bHeterotrait-monomethod block (correlations of the different constructs measured by the same methods). ^cMonotrait-hetromethod block (validity diagonals) (correlations of the same constructs measured by different methods). ^dHeterotrait-hetromethod block (correlations of the different constructs measured by different methods).

Conclusion

This paper has described an overview of the process undertaken in developing the 'personal nostalgia' scale. It comprised of studies to confirm the convergent, discriminant, content, and criterion (predictive) validity of the scale. The final items in their complete form appear at Figure 1. This scale fulfils an important gap in the knowledge of nostalgia as no previous scales were available that make the distinction between the two types of nostalgia. This has meant that they could not previously be measured or tested for and as such, they have not been empirically explored in comparison to one another. The 'personal nostalgia' scale is an important contribution not only to marketing and communication literature, but may be used by practitioners as a manipulation check to ensure that advertisements are eliciting the correct and intended form of nostalgia. This should assist in ensuring that the expected and desired effects on consumer behaviour attributes related to nostalgia are produced.

In regards to the future, studies related to exploring the differing effects of the two forms of nostalgia should be undertaken. Theory shows that consumer responses to these individual forms of a common advertising appeal should in fact differ. This is of course of importance to academics and practitioners alike due in part to the variety of reactions that nostalgia has been implicated in. Additionally, future studies should explore the generalisability of the developed scale between channel types, brands, consumer types and situation, and product categories, to further validate the scale.

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