

**AN INVESTIGATION OF THE INFLUENCE OF NOSTALGIA  
ON TOURIST DESTINATION**

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# AN INVESTIGATION OF THE INFLUENCE OF NOSTALGIA ON TOURIST DESTINATION

## ABSTRACT

The paper examines how nostalgia influences travel attitudes and intentions of tourist destination among travellers with Italian heritage. Perceived travel risks upon travel attitudes are also examined. Analysis of the data collected through a mail survey, showed that only personal nostalgia was found to exert a positive influence upon travel attitudes which in turn was positively related to travel intention. Perceived travel risk factors did not moderate the relationship between personal nostalgia and travel attitudes. A negative relationship is also found between perceived travel risk and travel intentions. Managerial implications of these findings are discussed.

## BACKGROUND OF NOSTALGIA

An increasing number of companies within the consumer goods, leisure, and entertainment markets are using nostalgia as a source of competitive advantage (Holak, Matveev and Havlena 2007; Holbrook and Schindler 1994; Kessous and Roux 2008; Merchant and Ford 2008). Moreover, activities in the past that served as subjects for nostalgic emotions are said to often become leisure activities later on which are viewed as special (Mannell and Iso-Ahola 1987; Moschis and Ünal 2008). Feelings can contribute to persuasion (Deighton, Romer and Mcqueen 1989) and although consumers cannot literally return to the past, they can recreate it through nostalgic consumption events (Stern 1992a).

In spite of the increasing attention placed upon nostalgia, the domain still lacks a solid theoretical structure (Sierra and McQuitty 2007). The majority of the research has been centred on brand attachment (Fournier and Yao 1997), brand preference (Holbrook and Schindler 1989), and individual collection of brand objects (Belk 1988, 1990). Scarce mention can be found pertaining to the possible impact of nostalgia upon consumers' intentions to engage in leisure travel. An exception is Sellick (2004) who identified nostalgia as the biggest travel motivator of mature Australians. However, the author failed to clarify which type of nostalgia was manifested and no additional studies dedicated to further exploring such finding have

been identified yet. Consequently, the present research seeks to explore the relevance of nostalgic emotions as travel motives, whilst differentiating among two types of nostalgia, i.e. personal and historical.

## RELEVANT LITERATURE AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Holbrook and Schindler (1991, 330) define nostalgia as “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)”. Given that nostalgia is a private emotion, variations are likely to exist among individuals regarding the type of stimuli that evokes it and the intensity with which it manifests (Baker and Kennedy 1994; Havlena and Holak 1991). This highlights the importance of focusing on segmentation bases that are associated with nostalgia (Goulding 2001; Holbrook and Schindler 1996).

Despite the different types of nostalgia described in the literature (see Baker and Kennedy 1994; Boym 2001; Holbrook and Schindler 1991), personal and historical nostalgia seem to comprise the essence of them all by distinguishing if the individual personally or vicariously experienced the situation that is causing the yearning. Personal nostalgia is directly and strongly linked to an individual’s own and idealised past; whereas historical nostalgia includes external sources that cover the whole past and that are outside an individual’s personal experience as triggers of the emotion (Havlena and Holak 1996; Holak and Havlena 1992; Holbrook 1993; Holbrook and Schindler 1991).

Tested on a travelling motivation context among mature Australians, Sellick (2004) found nostalgia to be the most prevalent travel motive of the population sample. However, the author failed to identify the specific type of nostalgia that was being felt by respondents. Given that personal and historical nostalgia are known to be prompted by different stimuli and to elicit different reactions (Havlena and Holak 1991; Stern 1992b), need arises to distinguish between the two when conducting consumer research. Moreover, based on the proven relationship between motivations, attitudes, and behavioural intentions, greater attention needs to be placed into further

developing this area of knowledge (Falomir-Pichastor et al. 2008; Fishbein and Ajzen 1975; Iso-Ahola 1982).

The term attitude has been described as a mental state of readiness to respond and as a form of psychological outcome (Shim, Gehrt and Siek 2005). It has also been recognised to be determined by a person's motives (Solomon 2006, 234) and is seen as an important predictor of purchase behaviour (Feng, Cai and Zhu 2006; Ha 1998; Kim, Weaver and McCleary 1996; Lutz 1991; Pitts and Woodside 1984). Within the pleasure travel dominion, Shim, Gehrt and Siek (2005) found the affective component of overall travel attitude to yield the highest correlation coefficient. This highlights the importance of emotions as enhancers of experiences (Tomkins 1980) and as influencers of behavioural outcomes.

The relationship between attitudes and behaviour has been extensively studied within the consumer behaviour field (Pitts and Woodside 1986). The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) poses intention as the most proximal determinant of action and as being determined by attitude (Lemmens et al. 2009; Shim, Gehrt and Siek 2005).

However, despite individuals' motivation to travel and positive attitudes, action will not irremediably follow since other factors, known as risks or barriers, can prevent it (Crompton 1979; Goeldner and Ritchie 2006; Laroche et al. 2004; Lee and Tideswell 2005). Within the tourism context, risk was defined as "what is perceived and experienced by the tourists during the process of purchasing and consuming travel services" (Reisinger and Mavondo 2006, 14). Importantly, risk is known to influence individual perceptions and decision processes (Dowling and Staelin 1994; Ropeik 2001). As such, perceived risk greatly affects an individual's intention to travel (Cleaver, Green and Muller 2000; Lehto, Douglas and Park 2007; Reisinger and Mavondo 2005).

Based on the preceding discussion, a series of hypotheses can be elaborated pertaining to the relationships between personal nostalgia, historical nostalgia, travel attitudes, travel intentions, and perceived travel risks. They are as follows:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a positive relationship between personal nostalgia and travel attitudes.

- H<sub>2</sub>:** There is a positive relationship between historical nostalgia and travel attitudes.
- H<sub>3</sub>:** There is a positive relationship between travel attitudes and travel intention.
- H<sub>4</sub>:** The positive impact of personal nostalgia on travel attitudes will be weaker (stronger) at higher (lower) levels of perceived travel risk.
- H<sub>5</sub>:** The positive impact of historical nostalgia on travel attitudes will be weaker (stronger) at higher (lower) levels of perceived travel risk.
- H<sub>6</sub>:** There is a negative relationship between perceived travel risk and travel intention.

## METHODS

The sample population was limited to individuals with Italian surnames that are likely to have such heritage in order to draw richer conclusions. A total of 1,000 self-administered questionnaires were sent to a mailing list generated by randomly picking addresses with Italian family names from the white pages website. The survey form opens with a screening question asking respondents for their heritage. The next few sections comprised of a list of established scales namely perceived travel risks (Laroche et al. 2004; Mieres, Díaz and Gutiérrez 2006), travel attitude and travel intention (Bagozzi, Dholakia and Basuroy 2003), personal and historical nostalgia (Marchegiani and Phau 2007a, 2007b). All scales were rated on a seven point Likert scale. Demographic and psychographic information were also collected.

## RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

A total of 218 usable responses were collected. Half of the sample population was aged over 50 and a similar 48.6% was below 50, with the majority being females (57.8%). The quality of the measure instruments was tested with an exploratory factor analysis with Varimax rotation. Results showed all the scales to be uni-dimensional with the exception of perceived travel risk which fell into three distinct factors, namely: 'physical, performance and social esteem risks'; 'time and psychological risks'; and 'financial and personal satisfaction risks'. More importantly, personal and historical nostalgia was loaded neatly into its intended factor. The estimation of Cronbach's alpha coefficient reliability yield highly satisfactory results ranging from 0.808 to 0.943 all deemed acceptable by Nunally (1978).

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis revealed that personal nostalgia positively influences travel attitudes ( $R^2 = .097$ ,  $\beta = .248$ , Sig.  $.001$ ) supporting  $H_1$ . A second regression between historical nostalgia and travel attitudes is found to be insignificant (Sig.  $.129$ ) rejecting  $H_2$ . A significant positive relationship was found between travel attitudes and travel intentions ( $R^2 = .179$ ,  $\beta = .275$ , Sig.  $.000$ ) supporting  $H_3$ .

Hierarchical moderated regressions showed that none of the travel risk factors moderated the relationship between personal nostalgia and travel attitudes, rejecting  $H_4$  (Appendix A). Due to the lack of evidence proving a relationship between historical nostalgia and travel attitudes, the moderating effect of travel risks was not tested, therefore  $H_5$  was rejected.

Hierarchical multiple regressions showed evidence that 'physical, performance, and social esteem risks' ( $R^2 = .156$ ,  $\beta = -.230$ , Sig.  $.001$ ), 'time and psychological risks' ( $R^2 = .131$ ,  $\beta = -.160$ , Sig.  $.023$ ) and 'financial and personal satisfaction risks' ( $R^2 = .153$ ,  $\beta = -.220$ , Sig.  $.002$ ) negatively affect travel intention. Therefore,  $H_6$  was supported.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

To the best of the researchers' knowledge, this is the first piece of research to look at personal and historical nostalgia within a leisure travel context. Findings provide further validity to the scales developed by Marchegiani and Phau (2007a, 2007b) and justify the need to differentiate among these two known types of nostalgia when evaluating them under consumer behavioural contexts. Interestingly, only personal nostalgia was seen to exert a significantly positive effect upon individuals' travel attitudes. This result supports the importance of emotions as possible behavioural influencers (Jang and Wu 2006; Tomkins 1980). Although there is a need to perform additional studies, the practical implications are truly significant since it is being suggested that tourism marketing executions that seek to capitalise on the nostalgic sentiments of target populations should only be focussing on cues that elicit personal nostalgia as a form of maximising their effectiveness. Italy is a popular tourist destination but it can further benefit from a better understanding of what type of nostalgia may attract travellers to this country, hereby appearing to be personal. This in turn can impact upon how the destination is branded and promoted to match the

target market's specific desires since evident differences exist with regards to individuals' psychological needs, values, and concerns, and their impact upon consumer behaviour (Cleaver, Green and Muller 2000).

In relation to perceived travel risk, its hypothesised moderating effect over nostalgic travel motives and travel attitudes was found to be not significant. This suggests the need for further research. As argued by Dowling and Staelin (1994) and Ropeik (2001), risk is known to influence individual perceptions and decision processes. However, the authors failed to distinguish what kind of influence is being suggested. Nonetheless, it was possible to support the negative effect of the perceived travel risk factors upon travel intentions. Therefore, understanding consumers' perceptions of the risks associated with a travel destination is important in order to develop appropriate marketing campaigns that highlight the reduced chances of experiencing such negative outcomes and stimulate travel intention. Government organisations should also take caution into this matter by closely examining risk significance in order to improve the situation.

As expected, the relationship between travel attitudes and travel intentions was found to be positive. Moreover, strong favourable attitudes were held by respondents regarding the notion of visiting Italy. For a country that ranked fifth in terms of tourist arrivals and fourth in tourism receipts in 2007 (World Tourism Organisation 2007), the positive travel attitudes and elevated travel intentions toward this country is of considerable importance.

Several relevant limitations of the present research and future directions can be mentioned. The relatively small size of the sample population may be an issue. Further, a longitudinal study is recommended since attitudes are known to be dynamic in nature (Feng, Cai and Zhu 2006). The survey asked for the intention to visit Italy in the next five years thus imposing a long-haul travel frame. This may have negatively affected the results (Lee and Tideswell 2005) and should be taken into consideration. The present research lacked the input of qualitative interviews which could yield meaningful contributions to the understanding of nostalgic emotions (personal and/or historical) as travel motivators.

### Appendix A: Results for Hierarchical Moderated Regression

Independent Variables	Sig.	R <sup>2</sup>	F	df	Δ R <sup>2</sup>	F Change	df	β
Personal Nostalgia	.003	.041	8.76 2	1	.041	8.762	205	.202
Personal Nostalgia + Risk Factor 1	.062	.057	6.19 2	1	.016	3.515	204	.196 -.128
Personal Nostalgia + (Personal Nostalgia + Risk Factor 1) + (Personal Nostalgia x Risk Factor 1)	<b>.994</b>	.057	4.10 8	1	.000	.000	203	.196 -.128 .001
Personal Nostalgia	.003	.041	8.89 0	1	.041	8.890	208	.202
Personal Nostalgia + Risk Factor 2	.103	.053	5.82 0	1	.012	2.678	207	.204 -.111
Personal Nostalgia + (Personal Nostalgia + Risk Factor 2) + (Personal Nostalgia x Risk Factor 2)	<b>.475</b>	.056	4.04 2	1	.002	.513	206	.116 -.193 .130
Personal Nostalgia	.003	.041	8.89 0	1	.041	8.890	208	.202
Personal Nostalgia + Risk Factor 3	.013	.069	7.70 8	1	.028	6.300	207	.192 -.169
Personal Nostalgia + (Personal Nostalgia + Risk Factor 3) + (Personal Nostalgia x Risk Factor 3)	<b>.414</b>	.072	5.35 4	1	.003	.671	206	.079 -.264 .154

\* Dependent Variable: Travel Attitude = Attitudes towards visiting Italy

\* Independent Variable: Personal Nostalgia

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