

**EFFECTS OF PERSONAL NOSTALGIA INTENSITY  
ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR**

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## **EFFECTS OF PERSONAL NOSTALGIA INTENSITY ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR**

### **ABSTRACT**

Personal nostalgia has been found to exist as an advertising appeal which is distinctly different from historical nostalgia, although the effects on consumers as a result of the intensity of personal nostalgia specifically have not been explored. This paper looks at high, medium and low levels of personal nostalgic reactions in those exposed to a personal nostalgic advert to signal some of the benefits and weaknesses of the intensity of this type of response in adverts. Cognitive, Attitudinal, and Purchase Intension reactions are all shown to be significantly effected dependent on the level of Personal Nostalgia triggered.

**KEYWORDS:** Personal Nostalgia, Cognition, Attitudes, Intentions.

## **BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT**

### **Nostalgia**

The importance of nostalgia's use in advertising/marketing is clearly evident, with the appeal being shown to effect a range of important reactions including self-concept, brand loyalty, brand meaning, the human senses, attitude formation, cognition/memory process, consumption preferences, literary criticism, collective memory, and emotions (Muehling and Sprott 2004). Nostalgia is generally described 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)" (pp. 330 Holbrook and Schindler 1991). It is also believed that nostalgia concerns all persons, regardless of age, gender, social class, ethnicity, or other social groupings (Greenberg, Koole, and Pyszczynski 2004). Literature and evidence has also begun to show an important distinction between two specific 'types' of nostalgic reaction, specifically termed personal and historical nostalgia (Stern 1992). The responses of consumers are expected to differ dependent on the type of nostalgia being experienced. As scales which are able to distinguish between personal and historical nostalgia specifically have become recently available, such as the Personal the Nostalgic Scale (Marchegiani and Phau 2007), it is now also possible to begin to understand the different reactions that exist dependent on the intensity felt by consumers of each specific nostalgic reaction. This paper explores specifically personal nostalgia, with the hypotheses to examine some of the most important reactions of consumers. As such, cognition, attitudes and purchase intentions of respondents under low (LPN), medium (MPN), and high (HPN) personal nostalgia reactions are explored. Further information as to the directions and specific results under these consumer behaviour responses are explained further under each subheading.

### **Cognition**

Nostalgia in its unspecified form has been shown to effect on cognitive responses in a number of studies (Baker and Kenedy 1994; Belk 1991; Davis 1979; Holak and Havlena 1998; Holbrook and Schindler 1991; Muehling and Sprott 2004). Nostalgia is generally

shown as a positive reaction (Holbrook and Schindler 1991) and is filtered of negative thoughts (Davis 1979; Belk 1990; Stern 1992). While studies has explored cognitive reactions in 'combined' nostalgia verses non-nostalgia appeals, no empirical knowledge is available on effects dependent on the intensity of specifically personal nostalgic reactions. In relation to personal nostalgia exclusively, the hypotheses reflects a general direction of an increase in the general number of personal related thoughts as well as their valence, and decreases in negative thoughts, and numbers of non-personal nostalgic related thoughts as the intensity of personal nostalgia rises. Space restrictions does not allow an in-depth justification of each hypothesis, although in the interest of providing the underpinning theories, it should be noted that this hypothesis relates to previous evidence and theory related to changes when dealing with variation on 'autobiographical' or self-referencing thoughts, issues on memory accessibility and salience of thoughts, and the effects of emotions on cognitive reactions (Krugman 1967; Greenwald 1968; Sujan, Bettman, and Baumgartner 1993; Muehling and Sprott 2004; Craik and Lockhart 1972; Bettman 1979; Wright 1980; Davis 1979; Belk 1990; Stern 1992; Williams and Faber 1999). As such, based on the previous work and our understanding of personal nostalgia we hypothesise:

H1: As the level of personal nostalgia increases as shown by the personal nostalgic scale, we will see a significant:

- a) Increase in the number of thoughts overall
- b) Increase in the total number of positive thoughts
- c) Decrease in the total number of negative thoughts
- d) Increase in the number of personal nostalgia related thoughts
- e) Decrease in the number of ad execution related thoughts
- f) Decrease in the number of brand / message related thoughts
- g) Increase in the valenced indices of personal nostalgic thoughts
- h) Increase in the ratio of personal nostalgic related thought to total thoughts

## **Attitudes and Intentions**

Some commonly explored consumer reactions related to increases in nostalgic responses to advertisements are Attitudes Towards the Advert (Aad), Attitude Towards the Brand (Ab), and Intentions to Purchase the Brand (Ib) (Pascal, Sprott and Muehling 2002; Muehling and Sprott 2004). However, as discussed previously, specific results in relation to a variation in the intensity of personal nostalgia specifically have been unexplored. Based on previous theory and results, as discussed in H1, an increase in intensity of personal nostalgia, which by definition should include increases in personal relevance, autobiographical memories, positive feelings, and more salient thoughts, we hypothesise this will in turn result in:

H2: As the level of personal nostalgia increases as shown by the personal nostalgic scale, we will see a significant positive increase in:

- a) attitude towards the advert
- b) attitude towards the brand
- c) intention to purchase the brand

## **METHOD AND RESULTS**

### **Method**

Respondents were exposed to an original broadcast style advertisement containing personal nostalgic cues as derived from focus group studies and previous academic papers (Stern 1992). The advert was pre-tested to ensure the intended nostalgic reaction occurred with samples similar to those used in the main study. The brand depicted in the advertisement was Kodak, a brand successfully used in previous studies of nostalgia (e.g. Muehling and Sprott 2004). A total of 420 usable respondents were collected and an inter-quartile split based on their score on the personal nostalgic scale (Marchegiani and Phau 2007) was used to result in LPN and HPN groups of 105 respondents each, and with 210 respondents in the MPN group. In order to ensure a homogenous sample, respondents were delimited to ages 18-25 and were collected from a student sample. Student sample groups have been successfully used in past studies to explore nostalgic

reactions (Muehling and Sprott 2004; Baker and Kennedy 1994). A table summarising the results can be seen at Table 1. This table should also be referred to for clarification of significance between the groups of nostalgic intensity and for mean and standard deviation scores. Any significant differences in mean scores between the groups are measured using One-way ANOVA.

### **Cognition Results**

Cognitive reactions were collected by using a thought collection process occurring immediately after exposure to the advert. This consisted of listing each thought the respondent had during the advert on a separate line within a 3 minute timeframe, and then self-evaluating each thought as either positive, negative, or neutral (as per Wright 1980; Gurhan-Canli and Maheswaran 1998; Muehling and Sprott 2004). At a later stage two independent judges coded the thoughts into categories similar to that of Muehling and Sprott (2004) and Sujon, Bettman and Baumgartner (1993). The five categories were 'personal nostalgia', 'historical nostalgia', 'ad-execution', 'brand/message related', and 'miscellaneous'. Interjudge agreement of coding was 83% with disagreement resolved by discussion between the two judges. Analysis of this hypothesis follows the method of set out in Muehling and Sprott (2004) in examining simple counts, ratios and valenced indices, except with some variation under the new context of exploring personal nostalgic reactions specifically. Results are as follows:

#### **H1a) Increase in the number of thoughts overall**

The number of thoughts overall increased significantly when comparing the low Personal nostalgic group to the medium. The high personal nostalgic group however, did not share this significance. This shows an increase in personal nostalgia persuaded more thoughts overall.

#### **H1b) Increase in the total number of positive thoughts**

These results indicate that the intensity of personal nostalgia has a significant effect on the number of positive thoughts overall when comparing low level to med and high. However, it also indicates that to have a significant effect, meeting the mid level is all

that is necessary, as no significantly greater benefit is received from elicited high levels in this case (although it is not detrimental to do so). This result is taking into account thoughts regardless of the 'type'.

**H1c) Decrease in the total number of negative thoughts**

This result indicates that the level of personal nostalgia has a significant effect on the number of negative thoughts overall when comparing low level to med and high (as Personal nostalgia increases to med, there is significantly less negative thoughts overall). However, it also indicates that to have a significant effect, meeting the mid level is all that is necessary, as no significantly greater benefit is received from elicited high levels in this case (although it is not detrimental to do so). The ability to decrease negative thoughts is of course of importance.

**H1d) Increase in the number of personal nostalgia related thoughts**

ANOVA shows that the level of personal nostalgia being elicited has a significant effect on the number of personal nostalgic thoughts in comparison to those experiencing low levels of nostalgia. However, no significant increase was evident between the mid to high groups, indicating that in this can no significant benefit in terms of personal nostalgic thoughts is received by producing high levels of personal nostalgia (although it is not detrimental).

**H1e) Decrease in the number of ad execution related thoughts**

This indicates that as respondents spend increase cognitive power on personal nostalgic reactions, other types of thoughts (in this case, ad execution type) may significantly decrease. This is similar to previous academic suggestions (Sujan, Bettman and Baumgartner 1993; Williams and Faber 1999). The implications of a decrease in ad execution type thoughts as personal nostalgic thoughts increase is unknown. Possibly, we could assume that ad spend on 'ad execution' items may be less important under high personal nostalgic adverts as they will become less salient as nostalgia rises. This issue could be further explored.

**H1f)** Decrease in the number of brand / message related thoughts

No significant effect was shown between those with either low, med, or high personal nostalgia. This in contrary to the hypothesis which suggested that (as per Sujan, Bettman and Baumgartner 1993; Williams and Faber 1999) increased instances of autobiographical memory may make product/message related thoughts less accessible.

**H1g)** Increase in the valenced indices of personal nostalgic thoughts

This indicates that the level of Personal nostalgia has a significant effect on the valenced indices of personal thoughts. It also indicates that to have a significant effect, meeting the mid level is all that is necessary, as no significantly greater benefit is received from elicited high levels in this case (although it is not detrimental to do so).

**H1h)** Increase in the ratio of personal nostalgic related thought to total thoughts

As the level of personal nostalgia increases, so does the ratio of personal to total thoughts when comparing those experiencing low personal nostalgia with the other groups. However, no significant increase occurs between the mid level and high.

**Attitudes and Intentions Results**

Respondents completed items from commonly used scales (e.g. Cox and Cox 1988; Holbrook 1993; Holbrook 1994; Holbrook and Schindler 1994; Krishnamurthy and Sujan 1999; Bruner, James and Hensel 2001; Muehling and Sprott 2004) measuring Aad (4-items), Ab (4-items), and Ib (3-items). Cronbach's Alpha for each scale was .89, .88, and .92 respectively.

Results show the following for each hypothesis:

**H2a:** At each level of increase in personal nostalgia intensity, a significant positive increase ( $p < .05$ ) in attitude towards the advert was found.

**H2b:** At each level of increase in personal nostalgia intensity, a significant positive increase ( $p < .05$ ) in attitude towards the brand was found.

**H2c:** At each level of increase in personal nostalgia intensity, a significant positive increase ( $p < .05$ ) in intention to purchase the brand was found.

Due to the importance of these consumer behaviour responses, these results clearly show the importance of understanding to effects of personal nostalgia specifically. What's more, it shows some of the benefits in increasing the intensity of personal nostalgia in adverts.

## **CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

Considering the importance of consumer's thoughts, attitudes and intentions to marketing and the significant changes in these behaviours as a result of the intensity of personal nostalgic reactions, it is clear that personal nostalgia is an appeal that marketing academics and practitioners alike need to be informed about. The consumer reactions in this paper are of course of the utmost importance in order to allow better prediction and understanding and, combined with the use of nostalgia as a common advertising and marketing tool, these results fill an important gap in the knowledge. As a generally summery of the results, we can see that in many aspects of consumer behaviour, it is likely to be worthwhile for practitioners to take the steps necessary to create high levels of personal nostalgia in consumers in order to affect attitudes and intensions. We can also see that thoughts, however, seemed to 'peak' in significant changes at the mid level, although attitudes and intension did not. This indicates a 'missing reactions' that could be explored under a similar context, for example emotional reactions. As nostalgic cues are broad and varied, they are likewise able to have various intensities of personal nostalgia as a result. Due to our ability to control what the viewer see in advertisement, this paper has examined some of the major benefits and disadvantages that may have occurred in eliciting such responses in consumers. Results indicate that it is indeed worthwhile to draw out these higher levels of personal nostalgia (in comparison to settling for a low or at times mid levels) as benefits in cognition, attitudes, and intentions are the result.

Future research should provide similar evidence exploring reactions within historical nostalgia, comparison between personal and historical nostalgia, and inclusion of non-nostalgic reactions as a control. Additionally, non-student samples should be explored, as well as exploring possible variations between age, gender, and cultural groups, reactions

in different product categories for generalisability of the results, and exploration of emotions and other reactions related to nostalgia in specifically personal and historical nostalgic conditions.

**Table 1:** Summary of results

	Personal Nost. intensity comparison of groups					
	Low to Med	Med to High	Low to High	Low Mean & (sd)	Med Mean & (sd)	High Mean & (sd)
Increase in the number of thoughts overall	Sig.	n.s.	n.s.	6.11 (2.89)	7.36 (3.47)	7.09 (2.76)
Increase in the total number of positive thoughts	Sig.	n.s.	Sig.	3.76 (2.80)	5.84 (3.17)	6.04 (2.77)
Decrease in the total number of negative thoughts	Sig.	n.s.	Sig.	1.29 (1.77)	0.58 (1.03)	0.53 (0.98)
Increase in the number of personal nostalgia related thoughts	Sig.	n.s.	Sig.	2.64 (2.83)	4.99 (3.85)	5.00 (3.28)
Decrease in the number of ad execution related thoughts	Sig.	n.s.	Sig.	2.33 (2.28)	1.48 (2.04)	1.30 (1.62)
Decrease in the number of brand / message related thoughts	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	0.71 (1.09)	0.67 (1.02)	0.60 (1.01)
Increase in the valenced indices of personal nostalgic thoughts	Sig.	n.s.	Sig.	1.75 (2.25)	4.03 (3.41)	4.33 (3.15)
Increase in the ratio of personal nostalgic related thought to total thoughts	Sig.	n.s.	Sig.	0.38 (.35)	0.65 (.33)	0.67 (.32)
Positive increase in Aad	Sig.	Sig.	Sig.	6.24 (1.74)	7.30 (1.20)	7.90 (1.26)
Positive increase in Ab	Sig.	Sig.	Sig.	6.27 (1.17)	6.67 (1.23)	7.34 (1.36)
Positive increase in Ib	Sig.	Sig.	Sig.	5.51 (1.98)	6.33 (1.76)	7.18 (1.66)

Significance ( $p < .05$ ), mean score in groups (with standard deviation in parenthesis).

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