

**VARYING LEVELS OF PERSONAL NOSTALGIA'S  
EFFECTS ON EMOTIONS**

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## VARYING LEVELS OF PERSONAL NOSTALGIA'S EFFECTS ON EMOTIONS

### ABSTRACT

Using experimental research design this research examines changes in emotions of 514 respondents experiencing varying intensities of Personal Nostalgia when exposed to advertising. Six emotions related to Personal Nostalgia are examined and subjects divided into three intensity groups. Mixed results are found with certain emotions significantly more prevailing under particular intensity levels, while other emotions have no significant change. Results are discussed. This research provides previously unknown insights into the particular emotions encountered by respondents experiencing specifically Personal Nostalgia as opposed to the unified view commonly taken. It also indicates the intensity of Personal Nostalgia needed to significantly affect emotions.

### INTRODUCTION

'Personal Nostalgia' is referred to as responses generated from a personally remembered past ('the way *I* was'), while 'Historical Nostalgia' are responses generated from a time in history that the respondent did not experience directly, even a time before they were born ('the way *it* was') (Stern 1992; Havlena and Holak 1991). Nostalgia as two distinct appeals has been discussed by a number of academics (e.g. Baker and Kennedy 1994; Batcho 1995; Havlena and Holak 1991; Hirsch 1992; Holak and Havlena 1992; Stern 1992). These two nostalgic reactions are expected to be distinctly different due in part to the type of cognitive response taking place, with Personal Nostalgia dealing with a form of autobiographical or personal connection cognition (e.g. Krugman 1967; Sujan, Bettman, and Baumgartner 1993; Brewer 1986; Neisser 1988; Belk 1990; Davis 1979; Stern 1992) and Historical Nostalgia dealing with more collective or virtual memory (e.g. Halbwachs 1950, 1992; Holak, Matveev, and Havlena 2008). As such, the emotions felt by those experiencing these two nostalgic reactions are also expected to differ. A previous study has indicated six emotions relevant specifically to Personal Nostalgia (Marchegiani and Phau 2009). However, the degree to which these emotions are felt is expected to change as a result of the level of Personal Nostalgia being experienced. This research explores this postulation. Further underpinnings and hypothesis development is discussed, before

method and analysis are revealed. Finally, the results, implications, limitation and future directions are conferred.

## **BACKGROUND, UNDERPINNINGS AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT**

Richins (1997) defines emotion as being a ‘valenced affective reaction to perceptions of situations’. The concept that consumers may have affective reactions to commercial stimulus is well ingrained in the literature. Affect denotes the emotion or feeling reactions of the consumer. The term ‘affect’ may be used to encompass all emotions, moods, feelings and drivers (Batra and Ray 1986; Taylor 2000). The terms ‘emotions’ and ‘feelings’ are also used synonymously in literature (Burke and Edell 1989; Homer and Yoon 1992). Empirical evidence indicating that advertising can create feeling states that ultimately influence attitudes and purchase behaviour already exists (Holbrook and Batra 1987a). Edell and Burke (1987) reported on how the ‘feelings’ of consumers have an effect on a consumer’s attitude towards the advertisement (Aad), and in turn attitude towards the brand, purchase intentions, ad recall and more may be effected (Dube et al. 2003). It is also worthwhile to note that as shown in Brown, Homer and Inman (1998), ad-evoked feeling influence brand attitudes independently of attribute beliefs (e.g. Batra and Ray 1986, Burke and Edell 1989, Mitchell and Olson 1981; Stayman and Aaker 1988). These and more studies clearly show the importance of understanding emotions when using any advertising appeal.

A range of emotions experienced has been found in nostalgic advertising, including warmth, joy, gratitude, affection, and innocence (Holak and Havlena 1998). Holak and Havlena (1998) also make the connection of these ‘positive’ emotions being linked to sadness and desire to produce an affective response. The concept of ‘negative nostalgia’ is also discussed in previous studies (Muehling and Spratt 2004). This corresponds with the research (Baker and Kennedy 1994; Havlena and Holak 1991; Hirsch 1992; Holak and Havlena 1992) in which researchers have identified nostalgia as a ‘bittersweet emotion’ such as ‘sadness and a sense of loss’ (Holak and Havlena 1998; Johnson-Laird and Oatley 1989). This view supports Larsen, McGraw and Cacioppo (2001) view of ‘happy and sad’ emotions as ‘bivariate’ rather than bipolar reactions. Holak and Havlena (1998) also found that use of the Pleasure, Arousal, Dominance (PAD) scale, a commonly used scale for testing emotions, was

not greatly useful in nostalgia studies as simply characterising an experience as pleasant, arousing or dominant (and their opposites) did not capture the richness revealed in the range of discrete emotions in nostalgic experiences. The view of nostalgic emotions as complex and requiring a high degree of cognitive appraisal is supported by other studies (e.g. Johnson-Laird and Oatley 1989; Sedikides, Wildschut and Baden 2004). Using items from the Standardised Emotion Profile (SEP) (Holbrook and Batra 1987b), Holak and Havlena (1998) identified Tenderness, Irritation, Elation, Loss, Fear and Serenity as emotions in examining nostalgic experiences. However, no studies have empirically explored emotions under the varying levels of intensity under each specific type of nostalgic appeal independently of each other.

The two nostalgic appeals mentioned have received some attention (e.g. Baker and Kennedy 1994; Batcho 1995; Havlena and Holak 1991; Hirsch 1992; Holak and Havlena 1992; Marchegiani and Phau in press; Stern 1992). However, despite indications from the literature that the two response types may be distinctly different in terms of consumer reactions (e.g. Marchegiani and Phau in press) empirical studies have not been undertaken. The same previously discussed expectation that Personal vs. Historical Nostalgia by definition is dealing with autobiographical vs. collective / virtual cognitive responses is also used in suggesting that the emotional reactions of respondents under these two reactions will also change. Marchegiani and Phau (2009) comparatively examined emotions under the two specific nostalgic responses and indicated six emotions specific to Personal Nostalgia. However, no analysis of how these emotions change dependent on the intensity of this specific nostalgic response was undertaken. However, it is expected that as the level of Personal Nostalgia significantly rises, so should the level of emotions being experienced. This is based on the theory that increasing autobiographical / self-referencing reactions (although studied as cognitive responses) should have a corresponding increase in salience (Greenwald 1968; Nelson 1993). Muehling and Spratt's (2004) study on nostalgia also supported the fact that the most salient thoughts of respondents exposed to a nostalgia evoking advertisement were those that made a connection (often personal) to something from the past. As cognition and emotions are commonly discussed as effecting one another (MacKenzie, Lutz and Belch 1986; Petty and Cacioppo 1986; Vakratsas and Ambler 1999) we also expect this increase in self-referencing to have an effect on the intensity

of emotions being experienced. This study examines these reactions as sets the hypothesis that an increase in Personal Nostalgia (in this case between Low, Mid, and High) will result in a corresponding increase in the intensity of the emotions experienced.

### **METHOD, SAMPLE, AND MEASURES**

An experimental research design was used with respondents exposed to two adverts laden with nostalgic cues. Manipulation checks capable of measuring specifically for Personal and Historical Nostalgia was used to identify respondents experiencing specifically Personal Nostalgia, thus separating out those experiencing the other form of nostalgia. This resulted in 514 subjects for analysis. Student sample was used as it provided a relatively homogenous sample in terms of life station and age, as well as being representative of general consumers (DelVecchio 2000; Yavas 1994). These subjects were split into three groups of Low, Mid, or High intensity levels of Personal Nostalgia, as judged by the Personal Nostalgia Scale generated using interquartile range. This resulted in the number of respondents for each group is as follows; Low group ( $n = 128$ ), Mid group ( $n = 258$ ), High group ( $n = 128$ ). ANOVA showed each group's mean score of the Personal Nostalgia Scale was significantly greater than the lower groups (Welch  $F(2, 262.25) = 1117.50, p < .05$ ). Cronbach's Alpha for the scale was also acceptable ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ). No significant difference in age was found between the three groups ( $F(2, 511) = 0.156, p > .05$ ). Emotions were measured based on a scale comprised of items from Holbrook and Batra's (1987) Standardised Emotion Profile (SEP). Holak and Havlena's (1998) also used a selection of these items in their study of nostalgia. Three items from the 'warmth' dimension from Burke and Edell (1989), and 3 items developed from review of the literature were also included. This resulted in 57 items to measure emotions in those experiencing Personal Nostalgia. Demographics were also collected. A previous study using these respondents identified six emotions, Negative / Irritation, Upbeat / Elation, Serenity / Calm, Warm / Tender, Uninvolved, and Powerless / Regret. ANOVA is used to compare the mean scores of these components between each of the three groups in order to show any significant change.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Results are discussed based on each emotion. Table 1 also provides a comprehensive summary of the results including Mean and Standard Deviation scores.

### **Negative / Irritation**

ANOVA shows that the level of Personal Nostalgia being elicited has no significant effect on the negative/irritation emotion ( $F(2, 511) = 1.61, p > .05$ ). We can see that the emotion did decrease as the level of Personal Nostalgia increased, but this was not to a significant amount. It is noted that the level of this emotion could be considered low across all levels of Personal Nostalgia, and in comparison to a non-nostalgic advert it may be significantly lower, although this is unable to prove with the current information in this study. However, the purpose of this study in comparing the emotion between levels of Personal Nostalgia is achieved.

### **Upbeat / Elation**

ANOVA shows that the level of Personal Nostalgia being elicited has a significant effect on the upbeat/elation emotion at each level (Welch  $F(2, 255.52) = 35.40, p < .05$ ). This indicates that it is worthwhile to attempt to make respondents feel a High level of Personal Nostalgia as it significantly increases this emotion. This positive response may transfer to other consumer responses. This should be examined in future studies. Furthermore, the items in this emotion seem to be indicating a general positive emotion rather than related to specifically nostalgia. An increase in such emotions is a worthwhile result as it may indicate a positive increase across all aspects of the viewing experience as a result of the increase in Personal Nostalgia.

### **Serenity / Calm**

ANOVA shows that the level of Personal Nostalgia being elicited has a significant effect on the serenity / calm emotion at each level ( $F(2, 511) = 28.37, p < .05$ ). This indicates that it is worthwhile to attempt to make respondents feel a High level of Personal Nostalgia as it will significantly increase this positive emotion. The serenity / calm emotion is likely to be strongly connected with the respondent's increasingly autobiographical cognitive response as Personal Nostalgia rises. It is widely accepted that people often resort to nostalgia related response when feeling under threat as a

coping mechanism (e.g. Sedikides, Wildschut and Baden 2004) as the past is perceived as 'safe' and less complicated. Increase in the serene / calm emotions would be likely in this scenario, as is shown in these results.

### **Warm / Tender**

ANOVA shows the level of Personal Nostalgia being elicited has a significant effect on the warm / tender emotion at each level ( $F(2, 511) = 17.38, p < .05$ ). This indicates an attempt to make respondents feel a High level of Personal Nostalgia is worthwhile, as it significantly increases this emotion. The warm / tender emotion is perhaps one of the most commonly explored emotions under the nostalgic context (e.g. Holak and Havlena 1998). Like the serenity / calm emotion, feelings of warmth / tenderness are an unsurprising result of an increase in Personal Nostalgia but have been empirically unproven until now.

### **Uninvolved**

ANOVA shows significant changes in the uninvolved emotion as the level of Personal Nostalgia increases from the Low to High groups, but no change in comparing Low to Mid or Mid to High (Welch  $F(2, 249.00) = 5.22, p < .05$ ). This indicates that it is necessary to cause the respondent to achieve at least the High level of Personal Nostalgia intensity should any significant affect on this emotion be desired. This result is supported by the literature that suggests that people feeling Personal Nostalgia (in this case, a High amount compared to the Low amount) will likely draw upon Autobiographical Memory to construct their responses. This emotion of 'uninvolved' shows the level of uninvolved significantly decreasing as the level of Personal Nostalgia (hence more personal involvement) increases to the High level, as result perfectly in context to the underpinnings and findings so far of this research.

### **Powerless / Regret**

ANOVA shows that the level of Personal Nostalgia being elicited has no significant effect on the powerless / regret emotion ( $F(2, 511) = .38, p > .05$ ). This is a somewhat surprising as it was expected that this emotion would increase with Personal Nostalgia. This could be due to the nature of the advertisement used. While negative emotions are usually a concern this may not be a case for nostalgia. Previous authors have discussed nostalgia as 'bittersweet' or as 'sadness and a sense of loss' (Muehling



and Sprott 2004; Baker and Kennedy 1994; Havlena and Holak 1991; Hirsch 1992; Holak and Havlena 1992; Holak and Havlena 1998; Johnson-Laird and Oatley 1989). It is possible a negative emotional response to nostalgia might be created by an advertisement, but that if the advert in question provided a way to remedy the feeling (that is by soothing the sense of loss etc. via purchase or similar) certain behaviours could be encouraged. The adverts in this test may have been perceived as offering a remedy in this case as it could be taken as a suggestion that Kodak (the brand in the study) may help you to ‘remember the past’ and ‘never forget’. As such, the powerless feeling may have been reduced to an insignificant amount as the respondents felt that they did actually have power in the use of taking pictures in solve the potential problem. Should an advert elicit Personal Nostalgia and not suggest a way to sooth this loss, then this emotion may be significantly changed after all. This could pose a problem and would be worthwhile future research.

**Table 1**

<b>Emotion</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S.D.</b>	<b>Groups</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Negative / Irritation</b>	Low	1.60	0.83	L → M H	n.s.	No significant change
	Mid	1.53	0.84	L M → H	n.s.	
	High	1.42	0.86	L → → → H	n.s.	
<b>Upbeat / Elation</b>	Low	3.24	1.21	L → M H	sig.	Significant increase at each level of Personal Nostalgia
	Mid	4.14	1.10	L M → H	sig.	
	High	4.47	1.32	L → → → H	sig.	
<b>Serenity / Calm</b>	Low	4.44	1.10	L → M H	sig.	Significant increase at each level of Personal Nostalgia
	Mid	4.88	0.87	L M → H	sig.	
	High	5.33	0.93	L → → → H	sig.	
<b>Warm / Tender</b>	Low	4.41	1.23	L → M H	sig.	Significant increase at each level of Personal Nostalgia
	Mid	4.95	1.08	L M → H	sig.	
	High	5.25	1.24	L → → → H	sig.	
<b>Uninvolved</b>	Low	2.91	1.43	L → M H	n.s.	Low group significantly lower than High
	Mid	2.65	1.13	L M → H	n.s.	
	High	2.36	1.33	L → → → H	sig.	
<b>Powerless / Regret</b>	Low	2.48	1.33	L → M H	n.s.	No significant change
	Mid	2.56	1.32	L M → H	n.s.	
	High	2.43	1.47	L → → → H	n.s.	

Groups column indicates group compared (L=low, M=Mid, H=High). Sig. =  $p < .05$ , n.s. =  $p > .05$ .

## **SUMMARY DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

Results of this research indicate that Upbeat / Elation, Serenity / Calm, and Warm / Tender emotions in the Personal Nostalgia response group significantly increased at each level of intensity examined. These emotions are likely to be considered positive, indicating that it is worthwhile to increase Personal Nostalgia levels to the High level in order to reap the benefit of these emotional reactions. No significant change was found in the Negative / Irritation, nor Powerless / Regret emotion as the level of Personal Nostalgia increased, although it was close in Powerless / Regret. Different circumstances, response groups, or nostalgic cue may have pushed this result 'over the line' so to speak so the possibility of this emotion being affected by the level of Personal Nostalgia intensity should not be entirely discounted. Finally, the 'Uninvolved' emotion had a significantly lower mean score in the Low group as opposed to the High, but not the Mid. This is a good indication of the underpinning of the study being accurate, as an increase in Personal Nostalgia to a high level should be more autobiographical and thus an emotion such as 'uninvolved' would be expected to be significantly lower in the Low Personal Nostalgia group, as is the case in this research. This research is significant to academics as it supports the need for future research in this area, especially in terms of other consumer reactions as this study is limited to only looking at emotional reactions. The results also provide practitioners with an understanding of how increasing the level of Personal Nostalgia experienced by respondents seems to be a worthwhile achievement as in most cases positive emotions are significantly increased by this result. However, the study is further limited as it only examines the responses of a narrow age group and uses respondent from one 'life station' (i.e. students). As such generalisability is a concern, although nostalgia has been indicated as concerning all persons regardless of age, gender, social class, ethnicity, or other social groupings (Greenberg, Koole, and Pyszczynski, 2004).

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