

Personal and Historical Nostalgia – A Comparison of Common Emotions

Abstract

This research uses an experimental research design to examine differences in the emotional responses of 806 respondents experiencing specifically personal or historical nostalgic reactions to advertising appeals. Changes in intensity of five emotions common to both reactions are examined. Upbeat/elation, loss/regret, and warm/tender emotions are significantly heightened under the personal compared with the historical nostalgic response. Negative/irritation and serenity/calm-related emotions are not significantly different. These results highlight the need to examine nostalgia as two separate reactions and provide insights useful to practitioners regarding emotional reactions to each form. It also suggests the need for future research into personal and historical nostalgia's comparable influences on other responses.

Keywords: nostalgia, emotions, consumer behaviour, advertising effectiveness

1. Introduction

While nostalgia in its 'unified' form is often examined, the comparable differences in consumer reactions between personal and historical nostalgia have been widely overlooked, despite suggestions that the two nostalgic appeals are distinctly different. This study begins to close this empirical gap by examining common emotions under these two specific responses to advertising appeals. The paper is organised in several sections beginning with a review of the existing literature on nostalgia and emotions, leading to the underpinnings and development of the research question. These are followed by a description of the research method and a discussion of the findings and analysis. Finally, the managerial implications and limitations of the study are presented.

2. Background, Underpinnings and Hypothesis Development

2.1 A brief background of nostalgia and nostalgic types

Nostalgia is commonly described in the marketing literature 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)' (Holbrook and Schindler, 1991, p. 330). A nostalgic response may be caused by a number of elements including music, photographs, movies, events (often 'special' or 'momentous'), settings, odours, advertisements, clothing, people's appearance, heritage, retailing, furniture, gifts, 'close others' (family members, friends, partners), political imagery, threatening stimuli, and as a deliberate response to an uncomfortable psychological state, to name a few (Allen et al., 1995; Areni et al., 1998; Goulding, 2001; Greenberg et al., 2004; Havlena and Holak, 1991;

Hirsch, 1995; Holak and Havlena, 1992; Howell, 1991; Lowenthal, 1981; Norman, 1990; Orth and Bourrain, 2008; Schindler and Holbrook, 1993; Tannock, 1995; Wildschut et al., 2006; Witkowski, 1998).

A number of academics discuss or indicate the possibility of examining personal and historical nostalgia as two distinctly different appeals (e.g. Baker and Kennedy, 1994; Batcho, 1995; Havlena and Holak, 1991; Hirsch, 1992; Holak and Havlena, 1992; Marchegiani and Phau, 2010a; Merchant and Ford, 2008; Stern, 1992). Stern (1992) and Havlena and Holak (1991) provide definitions of these responses in their explanations that personal nostalgia is generated from a personally remembered past ('the way *I* was'), while historical nostalgia is generated from a time in history that the respondent did not experience directly, even a time before they were born ('the way *it* was').

2.2 Nostalgia in retailing

The use of nostalgia in the retail environment can be seen in a number of avenues. For example, in fashion retail, second-hand clothing has found new life in 'retro' shops (with a corresponding increase in price!), attractive to many due to its ability to promote nostalgic imagery and the revival of a 'mythical golden age or a shared past culture' (Goulding, 2002). New labels are also closing in on the 'retro-revolution', for example the 2010 introduction of Madonna's 'Material Girl' label at Macy's, judged by some as appealing due to the nostalgic effect the label has (Soo Hoo, 2010). Interestingly, both 'parents and tween-aged daughters' are indicated as part of the consumer market, indicating that both forms of nostalgic appeal (personal for the parent and historical for the 'tween-aged') may be in use. One clothing store offers 'modern nostalgia' as a selling point (Buffalo Rising, 2009). Prescott (2010) indicates nostalgia's appeal in beverage retailing with a recount of the popularity of a Fifties/Sixties Soda Shop, which allows customers to 'relax and reminisce', and again indicates popularity

with various age groups, although perhaps for different reasons. Burger King has been drawing upon the nostalgic appeal through the design and imagery of some stores, and the 2005 opening of a flagship McDonald's store indicated it to be 'going retro' due to its resemblance to its predecessor of 50 years ago (Barista, 2005). A 2008 analysis of the most effective holiday retail TV ads by Nielsen IAG indicates that 'narratives and nostalgia trump price appeals' in terms of likability towards the adverts in this retail sector (Nielsen, 2008). Nostalgia is also evident in selling cars (Volvo's reference to the Sixties as well as nostalgic appeals by Mazda, Peugeot, and more), food products (e.g. the revitalisation of spokes-characters such as 'Mr. T' for Snickers), movie production (take the hundreds of remakes capitalising in part on the audience's nostalgic desire), retail store choice and experience, TV shows (e.g. Madmen, That '70s Show), packaging (Coke's reintroduction of the glass bottle), and more (Brand Strategy, 2007; McIntyre, 2009; Meyers, 2001; Morganosky and Cude, 2000; Moutinho et al., 1996; Muehling and Sprott, 2004).

With global insecurities in many marketplaces throughout the world, the retail climate is judged by some to be perfect for nostalgic appeals to be utilised. For example, Clarke and Schmidt (1995) indicate that consumers often revert to a desire for the past/nostalgic occurrences when there is a loss of trust in the future or when change is occurring rapidly. Importantly for the discussion of personal and historical nostalgia, nostalgic appeals are not just being aimed at those who have experienced the time/product/experience being depicted, but in fact historical nostalgia seems to be a key appeal as businesses attract younger consumers with nostalgic appeals from times they did not experience directly. Beard (2009) quotes the UK Next Big Thing founder and futurologist, William Higham, as one who has identified this shift and has commented that the desire for 'heritage-inspired products is driven by Gen Y, who've grown up on technology but are now interested in other types of manufacture and the old ways'. These and other occurrences in the marketplace indicate that

nostalgia is alive and well in the retail environment, often as a focus of many campaigns and as a successful strategy. Additionally, nostalgia seems to appeal to a considerably large demographic of consumers, although, especially in regard to age, which particular type of nostalgia is elicited and whether this type has any influence on other consumer behaviour reactions is largely empirically unknown.

2.3 Nostalgia and emotions

The concept that consumers may have affective/emotional reactions to a commercial stimulus is well ingrained in the literature. The term 'affect' denotes the emotion or feeling reactions of the consumer and this term 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 (Burke and Edell, 1989; Homer and Yoon, 1992), although 'emotions' is often used to denote reactions more 'extreme' or 'intense' than feelings (Aaker and Myers, 1987; Aaker et al., 1988). Silk and Vavara (1974) summarised the literature on the significant roles of pleasant or unpleasant emotions evoked by advertisements from as far back as 1929 (MacKenzie et al., 1986). Empirical evidence indicating that advertising can create feeling states that ultimately influence attitudes and purchasing behaviour also already exists throughout the literature (Holbrook and Batra, 1987a). For example, Edell and Burke (1987) report on how the feelings of consumers influence consumers' attitude towards the advertisement (Aad), and this may in turn influence their attitude towards the brand, purchase intentions, advertisement recall, and other consumer reactions (Dube et al., 2003). It is also worthwhile noting that, as shown by Brown et al. (1998), ad-evoked feelings 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).

A variety of reactions (including warmth, joy, gratitude, affection, and innocence) have been attributed to nostalgic responses as well as negative feelings such as 'homesickness' and 'bittersweet' feelings of sadness and loss (Holak and Havlena, 1998). This view supports Larsen et al.'s (2001) view of 'happy and sad' emotions as 'bivariate' rather than bipolar reactions. This information is significant to marketers because consumers may begin to associate the advertised product with negative thoughts. However, a negative reaction/affect response is created by an advertisement, but if a way to remedy the feeling in question is offered (that is, by soothing the sense of loss etc. via a purchase or similar) then another avenue for the use of nostalgia in advertising is revealed. Burke and Edell (1989) successfully show upbeat, warm, and negative emotions as affecting a range of responses. The ability of a nostalgic cue ('exposure') to result in a particular nostalgic reaction (personal or historical nostalgia) that induces particular feelings ('feelings from the ad') is a significant tool for marketers, thus emphasis on developing our knowledge in this field is worthwhile. Pascal et al. (2002) pose the question of whether or not consumers actually 'think' about the idealised past when they are exposed to nostalgic ads, resulting in attitude and purchase intentions, or if this same outcome is actually a result of the evoked positive nostalgic 'feelings'. They suggest further investigation of this issue might assist in providing a better understanding of how nostalgic ads are processed. Baker and Kennedy (1994) performed an exploratory study on college students with a nostalgia-themed print ad and found that the feelings of nostalgia evoked by the ad (measured by Likert-scaled items) could be separated from general positive affects toward the ad. From this and consecutive studies, it is evident that nostalgia-related feelings can be identified and separated.

However, previous studies on emotions in nostalgia in its 'unified' form have proven challenging, with Holak and Havlena (1998) discussing how nostalgic emotions are often too complex for common measures that divide emotions into just two (e.g. positive and negative)

or three (e.g. pleasure, arousal, dominance) factors. Studying the role of emotions under the two nostalgic conditions poses an even more significant challenge, as any differences in emotions under the specific nostalgic reactions are unknown. This research explores the emotional reactions using both the personal and historical nostalgia groups as one pool. From this point exploratory factor analysis can be conducted, revealing the emotion items that construct the emotion factors common to both personal and historical nostalgia. The mean scores of these reactions can then be compared.

Limited empirical research on consumer responses that distinguishes the type of nostalgia experienced has been conducted (e.g. Marchegiani and Phau, 2010b; Marchegiani and Phau, *in press*) and testing that compares the nostalgic varieties is also lacking. As emotions under personal and historical nostalgia have not been independently tested prior to this research, it is unknown exactly which emotional constructs will be revealed that are common between the two groups, although based on prior research (e.g. Holak and Havlena, 1998), emotion factors such as irritation, tenderness, elation, loss, fear, and serenity are expected. As such, hypotheses related to specific individual emotional responses are difficult to construct. However, based on the literature it is expected that those experiencing personal nostalgia would have a higher intensity of emotions than the historical nostalgia group due to the cognitive processing taking place and the connection to their own past. More specifically, the literature suggests that the personal nostalgia group is expected to draw upon autobiographical responses, often characterised as being more salient and of a higher intensity than other cognitive responses (Belk, 1990, 1991; Brewer, 1986; Brewer and Pani, 1983; Davis, 1979; Greenwald, 1968; Havlena and Holak, 1991; Holak and Havlena, 1992; Krugman, 1967; Neisser, 1988; Nelson, 1993; Stern, 1992; Tulving, 1972, 1984). Meanwhile, historical nostalgia does not share this autobiographical reaction. Instead it is expected to draw upon collective memory or imagined responses (e.g. Baker and Kennedy, 1994; Belk, 1990;

Halbwachs, 1950, 1992; Holak et al., 2008). This will result in fewer self-referencing and intense responses. Based on this literature the following is hypothesised:

H1. Compared with respondents experiencing a historical nostalgia reaction, respondents experiencing a personal nostalgia reaction will undergo a significantly higher intensity of emotions.

3. Method, Sample, and Measures

An experimental research design was used with respondents exposed to one of two constructed broadcast-style adverts laden with either personal or historical nostalgic cues. A student sample was used with students providing a relatively homogenous sample in terms of life station and age, as well as being representative of general consumers (DeLVecchio, 2000; Yavas, 1994). A manipulation check capable of indicating the levels of each nostalgic type independently of one another was used to divide the respondents into groups experiencing personal or historical nostalgia. The total usable number of respondents experiencing personal nostalgia was 514. The historical nostalgia group comprised 292 valid responses. No significant changes between groups were found in terms of age or gender.

In order to measure emotions a number of possible scales were explored, but finally, two key studies emerged as being most suited to the personal and historical nostalgia test. Selected items from Holbrook and Batra's (1987b) Standardised Emotion Profile (SEP) were used by Holak and Havlena's (1998) study on nostalgia, which revealed emotion factors of irritation, tenderness, elation, loss, fear, and serenity in examining nostalgic experiences. These items were selected for this study in addition to items from the original SEP, three items from the 'warmth' dimension of Burke and Edell (1989), and three items developed from the review of the literature. This resulted in 57 items expected to measure nostalgic reactions in respondents. Demographics (age, gender) were also collected.

4. Results and Discussion

This study focuses on examining the changes in emotions that are common to both nostalgic reactions. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is suitable for this task. An EFA revealed five distinct emotions, and can be seen in Table 1. These five components are acceptable in terms of eigenvalues (> 1) and the KMO and Bartlett scores (as seen in the table). The fifth emotion component does have a Cronbach's alpha score that is considered low (0.57); however, viewing the items and the emotional component as a whole, it is expected that this may be an important inclusion for nostalgia testing, and as such, this factor was retained for analysis. As discussed previously, it was unknown exactly what the emotions revealed would be when exploring respondents who felt varying levels of personal and/or historical nostalgia. However, it seems that the common emotions of 'upbeat', 'warm', and 'negative' (as seen in Burke and Edell, 1989) were evident. Likewise, the emotions are also similar to Holak and Havlena's (1998) research, which revealed tender, irritation, elation, loss, fear, and serenity emotions under a unified nostalgic response. The following research explores the differences in these emotions between the two nostalgia type response groups and draws conclusions based on the literature. Significance is considered as $p < .05$. A summary of these emotions and their significant differences (if any) can be seen in Table 2.

[Insert Table 1 here]

4.1 Emotion: negative/irritation

Comparing the personal with the historical nostalgia group there is no significant change in the negative/irritation emotion ($t(804) = -.20, p = .840$). The existence of a 'negative' emotional component is commonplace (e.g. Burke and Edell, 1989; Derbaix, 1995; Holak and Havlena, 1998; Izard, 1977). This is not to say that this emotion would not be

significantly different between nostalgic and non-nostalgic adverts (in fact, it could be hypothesised that it would be the case), as it should be noted that the mean score of both the groups were low in comparison with other scale results, which could indicate that both nostalgic responses result in a low level of this emotion. However, without a non-nostalgic comparison it is impossible to accurately address this statistically in this case. In regard to the focus of this study, however, it is evident that the level of this emotion did not change between the two types of nostalgic response. In other words, personal nostalgia reactions compared with historical nostalgia ones do not change the level of negative emotions. Examining the items, it seems that these negative emotions are not related to nostalgia, or more accurately, the possibility of a negative (or bittersweet) nostalgic response that could occur under each nostalgic response type, but are rather general.

4.2 Emotion: upbeat/elation emotion

A significant increase in the upbeat/elation emotion is seen in the personal group as opposed to the historical group ($t(804) = 4.72, p = .000$). This result supports the premise of this study that personal nostalgia, with more personal/autobiographical connections, results in more positive reactions than historical nostalgia. This gives some indication of the valence of personal nostalgia reactions compared with historical ones. This emotion seems to be positive in general terms and not related to any particular nostalgic response. This is significant as it possibly indicates that emotional and cognitive responses are in sync under a nostalgic influence. The existence of a positive/elation emotion is also very common in emotion literature (e.g. Burke and Edell, 1989; Holak and Havlena, 1998; Watson et al., 1988).

4.3 Emotion: loss/regret

A significant increase in the loss/regret emotion is seen in the personal group as opposed to the historical group ($t(804) = 2.23, p = .026$). Like the upbeat/elation emotion, it is seen that the personal nostalgia group experiences more loss/regret as a result of the more personalised connection being experienced. The loss/regret emotion could be considered as a negative response as people may not enjoy the feelings of sadness associated with the response. However, one of the common views of nostalgia is that it is 'bittersweet' (Baker and Kennedy, 1994; Havlena and Holak, 1991; Hirsch, 1992; Holak and Havlena, 1992, 1998), so even though this emotion may not be ideal under alternative advertising appeals, under the nostalgia appeal it is expected, and perhaps even useful, as an increase in loss/regret emotions (shown to be more prevalent under personal rather than historical nostalgia) could indicate a possible avenue for marketers if they provide respondents with some way to 'fill the void' or reconnect/recapture the scenario for which the respondent is feeling regret.

4.4 Emotion: serenity/calm

Comparing the personal with the historical nostalgia group no significant change in the serenity calm emotion ($t(804) = .48, p = .631$) is evident. As was the case with the negative/irritation emotion, this is not to say that this emotion would not be significantly different between nostalgic and non-nostalgic adverts (in fact, one could hypothesise that it would be the case), but simply that the level did not change between the two types of nostalgic response. Similar to the negative/irritation emotion, the mean scores for both groups are in this case higher than the mid range of the 7-point scale, and serenity/calm is probably not an emotion normally expected to be so prevalent in standard/non-nostalgic advertising. However, without a direct similar comparison with a non-nostalgic advert using these items no accurate statistical inference can be made. However, the comparison between the two

nostalgic groups is valid and shows no significant difference. Serenity/calm emotions have been seen in previous nostalgic and non-nostalgic studies (e.g. Holak and Havlena, 1998).

4.5 Emotions: warm/tender

A significant increase in warm/tender emotions is seen in the personal compared with the historical nostalgia response group ($t(804) = 3.42, p = .001$). This emotion is a commonly discussed response to nostalgia, with the ‘warmth’ dimension of feeling appearing in literature on both nostalgic and non-nostalgic responses to advertising appeals (Aaker et al., 1986; Edell and Burke, 1987; Holak and Havlena, 1998; Mano, 1991). The items making up this component have also been used in a measure of a ‘love’ emotion by Richins (1997). A love emotion was also indicated by Shaver et al. (1987). Personal nostalgia’s ability to provoke a significant increase in warm/tender emotions is an argument for its use over historical nostalgia as it may transfer positive effects to other aspects of consumer behaviour.

[Insert Table 2 here]

In summary, H_1 is considered partially supported as the respondents experiencing the personal nostalgia reaction did experience a higher intensity of emotions than those experiencing historical nostalgia, but not in all emotions.

5. Summary, Discussion, Limitations, and Future Directions

This study achieves two key outcomes. First, it indicates the need to examine nostalgia as two distinctly different appeals as each response is shown to stimulate significantly respondents’ emotions in different ways. This has implications for future research considering the wide variety of reactions related to nostalgia (see Muehling and Sprott, 2004). Second, it provides

practitioners with an understanding of the emotional reactions that can be expected as a result of each nostalgic response type, both of which are used in the marketplace. As discussed by Yani-de-Soriano and Foxall (2006), understanding emotions is vital to understanding customers due to the role emotions play in the actions of consumers and managers alike in the retail environment. This has not been previously examined empirically. Specifically, it shows possible benefits and detriments of either nostalgic type.

In terms of limitations, it is firstly noted that this study explores emotions revealed by the EFA as common between the two conditions. If the two conditions were to be explored independently of each other, emotions might be revealed that are exclusive to one or other response group. For example, personal nostalgia may have emotions that reference a 'sense of loss' or 'desire to return', which those experiencing historical nostalgia may not experience due to the difference in processing as a result of the nostalgia type. Further research on emotions between the two specific nostalgia types is warranted. Also, it would be worthwhile studying how those experiencing different intensities of each nostalgic response differ from one another. Finally, this research uses students with a mean age of ~20 years. Future research needs to be undertaken to ensure the generalisability of the results. This may also be extended to the need to explore different cultures, life stations, and execution types.

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Table 1: Emotions Common to Personal and Historical Nostalgia

Rotated Component Matrix

	Component				
	Negative/ Irritation	Upbeat/ Elation	Loss/Regret	Serenity/ Calm	Warm/ Tender
Annoyed	.822				
Irritated	.772				
Disgusted	.727				
Skeptical	.720				
Angry	.678				
Excited		.844			
Active		.810			
Playful		.734			
Entertained		.707			
Regretful			.763		
Sorrowful			.735		
Remorseful			.728		
Helpless			.615		
Peaceful				.739	
Restful				.720	
Calm				.717	
Innocent					.745
Sentimental					.695
Tender					.646
Cronbach's α	.83	.80	.75	.62	.57
Eigenvalues (% of Variance)	23.31	17.31	8.31	6.60	5.81
KMO	.839				
Bartlett	Approx. Chi-Squared = 4980.094 df. = 171, Sig. = .000				

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a Rotation converged in 6 iterations. *NOTE: absolute values < .30 suppressed for clarity