

THE IMPACT OF CONSUMER NOSTALGIAS AND SELF CONCEPT ON BRAND EVALUATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Even though the uses of nostalgic appeals in marketing are seen on the rise, research on nostalgia marketing remains scarce and researchers and practitioners generally disagree on the best approaches to take with nostalgia marketing (Bussy 2008). Many marketers use nostalgic appeals in marketing as a fresh approach to grab consumer attention and emotionally connect advertised brands with consumers (Naughton and Vlastic 1998). The typical approach of nostalgia marketing has been simply juxtaposing nostalgic symbols (e.g., words, images, and music) with promoted products and counting on the positive nostalgic feelings aroused to benefit the advertised products. Indeed, research found that nostalgic cues in ads could trigger positive thoughts and result in positive attitude toward both the ads and the advertised brands (Muehling and Spratt 2004; Pascal, Spratt, and Muehling 2002).

Nevertheless, other marketers view the use of nostalgia marketing as a minefield and call for extreme caution in employing the tactic because the use of nostalgia marketing could potentially undermine years of brand heritage (Crain 2003). This is in line with research findings showing that, in addition to positive emotional feelings, nostalgia could also evoke a poignant mixture of mental pain at the extreme and sadness and distress at a less severe level with the realization of the loss or by-gone of something desirable (Holak and Havlena 1998; Stern 1992). Furthermore, research shows that not all segments of consumers have the same amount of appetite for nostalgic appeals in marketing. For example, some consumers can be categorized as low in nostalgia proneness (a personality trait) and are defiant to nostalgic impulse (Holbrook 1993).

Researchers have theorized that consumer nostalgia experience functions fundamentally to fulfill consumers' basic needs of self idealization and self affirmation through recollecting, reliving, and even actively reconstructing a prime past (Belk 1990; Stern 1992). Imaginably, as individuals' self idealization goals differ, so do their nostalgia experiences. Thus, one fruitful approach to unearth the rich implications of consumer nostalgia for marketing might start with making refined differentiation consumer nostalgias experience in the light of consumer self idealization process. Then, marketers can tailor a specific nostalgia appeal to a particular segment of consumers to connect with consumers at a more intimate and meaningful level that goes beyond a simple warm feeling.

In this research, we seek to explore two different types of nostalgia experience that might be activated by consumer brands: individual nostalgia appeal (i.e., yearning for a personal past prime time) and collective nostalgia appeal (i.e., yearning for a heyday of a generation, a culture or a nation) (Baker and Kennedy 1994; Holak, Matveev, and Havlena 2008). Furthermore, we studied how marketers can connect their brands with target consumers in a unique and meaningful way to boost promotion effectiveness by aligning the brand-evoked nostalgia to consumers' self concept: the independent and the interdependent (Markus and Kitayama 1991). We propose that brands evoking individual nostalgia will be evaluated more favorable by consumers who have a dominant independent self concept, whereas brands evoking collective nostalgia will be evaluated more favorable by consumers who have a dominant an interdependent self concept.

We test our propositions in the context of revitalization of Chinese time-honored brands through nostalgia marketing. Our main experimental study employed a 2 (brand-evoked nostalgia type: individual vs. collective nostalgia) x 2 (self concept: independent vs. interdependent) between subject factorial design. Nostalgia type was manipulated by presenting subjects with the two brands selected in the pre-tests. The brands were presented to the subjects with a brief brand history, brand logo, and a Time-Honored Brand Certificate from the Ministry of Commerce of China. The self concept was measured using the Singelis' (1994) Self-Construal Scale and subjects were divided into either an independent self group or an interdependent self group. Main dependent measures include the brand attitude, the purchase intentions, and the brand and self image fit. A total of 113 undergraduate students from a major university in southern China participated in the experiment for course credits. Supporting our hypothesis, ANOVAs revealed significant interaction effects between nostalgia type (individual vs. collective) and self concept (independent vs. interdependent) on all the dependent measures (all $p < .01$).

References Available on Request.