First steps towards conceptualization and measurement of consumers’ perceptions of the nostalgia aroused by brands

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Summary

Nostalgia evoked by brands is at the forefront of contemporary marketing theory and practice. To date, scales have been developed to measure the propensity to be nostalgic as an individual difference but little attention has been paid to understanding consumers’ perceptions of the nostalgia aroused by brands. This article outlines research designed to conceptualize, develop, and validate a new scale to measure brand nostalgia. Results indicate that our three-dimensional scale is valid and shows a high degree of reliability.

Keywords: Brand nostalgia; scale development; brand management.

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Abstract:

Nostalgia evoked by brands is at the forefront of contemporary marketing theory and practice. To date, scales have been developed to measure the propensity to be nostalgic as an individual difference but little attention has been paid to understanding consumers’ perceptions of the nostalgia aroused by brands. This article outlines research designed to conceptualize, develop, and validate a new scale to measure brand nostalgia. Results indicate that our three-dimensional scale is valid and shows a high degree of reliability.

Keywords: Brand nostalgia; scale development; brand management.
1. Introduction

Understanding brand nostalgia is crucial to help companies effectively allocate their resources to influence consumers’ attitudes and behaviours. Current research on nostalgic brands, however, offers little guidance. The objectives of this research are twofold: 1) to contribute to theory by proposing a novel approach for conceptualizing and measuring brand nostalgia, with a thorough exploration of the construct; 2) to contribute to practice by providing a short, reliable and valid measurement instrument of the nostalgia evoked by brands. This research is a first step towards accomplishing these goals.

2. Conceptualization

We define brand nostalgia as “positively valenced past feelings experienced when a perceived old brand evokes positive past memories, lived or learned.” Brand nostalgia is conceptualized as consisting of four dimensions:

Past feelings. Nostalgic brands have the ability to elicit past feelings (Loveland, Smeesters, & Mandel, 2010). Consumers associate a past emotion with brands and try to re-experience this emotion through them (Ladwein, Carton, & Sevin, 2009). When in contact with brands, individuals experience more positive past feelings than negative ones. In a study conducted by Holak and Havlena (1998), participants described nostalgic experiences pertaining to persons, events and objects mostly by positive emotions (e.g., warmth) and to a lesser extent by negative emotions (e.g., sadness).

Perceived brand oldness. Consumers perceived nostalgic brands as having existed for a long time. Indeed, many nostalgic brands come from a prior historical period (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry Jr., 2003; Kessous & Roux, 2010). We examine the perceived oldness of the brand and not the objective age of the brand, because consumers are not always aware of when brands are launched, and because some new brands are explicitly marketed as nostalgic (i.e. La Laitière, a French dairy product brand).

Personal memories. Brands have the ability to evoke personal nostalgia (Havlena & Holak, 1996). By consuming nostalgic brands, consumers can “relive” a past situation by reminding themselves of a particular experience in order to bring back past memories (Brown et al., 2003; Loveland et al., 2010). Memories are selective and often filtered through “rose-coloured glasses” in consumer’s memory (Havlena & Holak, 1991). Prior studies investigating the evocation of nostalgia by a nostalgic advertisement show that more positive nostalgic thoughts are elicited than are negative ones (Muehling & Sprott, 2004).

Historical memories. A strict focus on personal memories is insufficient, however, because a brand is likely to bring to mind both personal and communal memories (Havlena & Holak, 1996). Past memories should be either lived or learned for people to have a nostalgic reaction (Sierra & McQuitty, 2007). For the same reasons as personal memories, consumers are more often reminded of positive (vs. negative) historical memories.
3. Method

Following Churchill (1979), we generated an initial item pool of 84 items by conducting six focus groups and a review of relevant branding and nostalgia literature. Three marketing researchers evaluated the face and content validity of each item, resulting in a set of 61 items. Studies 1a and 1b aimed to refine our scale. Study 2 assessed its dimensionality and reliability.

In study 1a, undergraduate students were evaluated brand nostalgia of two different brands using a 7-point Likert scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Each participant evaluated one nostalgic brand (either Carambar or Kidibul), or one non-nostalgic brand (either Tic Tac or Sprite), and all participants evaluated the Belgian cookie brand Jules Destrooper. 179 surveys were collected (46% male, M age=20.94). The analysis was based on 358 brand ratings.

In study 1b, we administrated our scale to a sample of 201 respondents in an online survey (30% male, 82% of 18 to 35 years/18% of 45 to 65 years). Each participant rated one brand randomly chosen among the following nostalgic (as identified through pre-testing) brands: Nutella and La Laitière for food products, Levis and Petit Bateau (a French brand) for clothes, and Twingo and New Beetle for cars.

In study 2, 889 non-student consumers completed, in an online survey, the brand nostalgia scale in reference to one brand (50% male, M age=38.78). Based on the findings from our focus groups, we studied three brands in each of the following product categories: dairy products, cars and clothes. The brands were: non-nostalgic brands (Vitalinéa (a French dairy product brand), Kia and Esprit), brands that are positioned and marketed on nostalgia (La Laitière, Mini and Petit Bateau), and brands that are nostalgic due to their long presence in the market (Danette, Ford and Lacoste).

4. Major findings

Based on statistics of Studies 1a and 1b, the 61-item brand nostalgia scale was reduced in a set of 14 items. The exploratory factor analyses revealed a three-factor solution with satisfactory Cronbach’s alphas: 6 items with .92 alpha for personal memories and feelings; 5 items with .88 alpha for perceived brand oldness; and 3 items with .82 alpha for historical memories (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006).

Results from our Study 2 corroborate the findings from Study 1 and indicate that the three-factor correlated model achieved the best fit relative to other estimated models (Hair et al., 2006). The χ² statistic was 613.35 with 74 degrees of freedom. CFI, TLI, RMSEA and SRMR were respectively .94, .93, .10 and .04. Moreover the χ² difference test between the three-factor uncorrelated model and the three-factor correlated model was statistically significant (Δχ²(3) = 450.32, p<.001).

The findings of Study 2 also demonstrated reliability and structure of each dimension of brand nostalgia. Average variance extracted exceeded .50 except for historical memories (AVE = .46) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Each dimension met desired criterion Cronbach’s alpha level of .70, values ranging from .72 to .96 (Hair et al., 2006).
5. Conclusion

Our research proposes a conceptualization and a validated multi-dimensional brand nostalgia scale that represents the multi-faceted nature of this construct. Future research should further assess the validity of our scale and study the effects of brand nostalgia on consumers’ attitudes and behaviours.

References