

11th International Marketing Trends Conference
Venice, 19-21 January 2012

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**“Things were better before”:
what is the power of nostalgia toward the brand?**

Abstract

The growing interest of companies for nostalgia such as branding strategies has witnessed the emergence of a profusion of marketing research on nostalgia since 1979. Nowadays prior researchers have made a distinction between nostalgic brands and non-nostalgic brands and have found no agreement on the definition and the composition of a nostalgic brand. However the level of nostalgia evoked by a brand may vary from one consumer to another as well as from one nostalgic brand to another. Therefore this paper aims at seeking: 1) a depth understanding of the features characterizing the level of nostalgia evoked by a brand that we call the power of nostalgia toward the brand, 2) a definition of the power of nostalgia toward the brand. It points towards qualitative research by conducting six focus groups with consumers. Our findings suggest that a high level of brand awareness as well as an occasional consumption or buying of the brand are two conditions to satisfy otherwise a brand could not elicit nostalgia. Moreover three characteristics that form the power of nostalgia toward the brand are revealed: perceived oldness of brand, recall of consumers' lived or learned past memories and elicitation of feelings. Managerial and theoretical implications are discussed and further research opportunities are highlighted.

Keywords: *Nostalgic brand, power of nostalgia toward the brand, qualitative research*

Introduction

Nostalgia is an emerging theme in society which has strongly been used by companies for the positioning and/or the management of their brands (Baker & Kennedy, 1994; Havlena & Holak, 1991). Such strategies are employed in so many product categories. For example Côte d'Or launched in 2008 a limited edition of three branded products with approximately the same packaging as the one in 1911. Polaroid sells again cameras enabling to have snapshot pictures as its previous models did. The reason is that, for several years, economic and politic problems as well as major transitions in consumers' life have created cultural anxiety (Divard & Robert-Demontrond, 1997; Naughton & Vlastic, 1998; Reisenwitz, Iyer, & Cutler, 2004). People are looking for security (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry Jr., 2003a), authenticity (Brown, et al., 2003a; Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry Jr., 2003b), familiarity, safety and warmth as well (Moore, Wilkie, & Lutz, 2002). They hope a return to simpler times by buying products that evoke past joys (Stern, 1992). Prior studies showed that a brand is likely to evoke nostalgia and reconnect consumers with past events (Brown, et al., 2003b; Kessous & Roux, 2010; Loveland, Smeesters, & Mandel, 2010). Consequently companies might use nostalgia in their branding strategies to allow consumers to find those searching values and reassure them.

Nowadays prior researchers like Brown, et al. (2003b), Kessous & Roux (2010), Loveland, et al. (2010) have categorized nostalgic brands and non-nostalgic brands in two groups and have found no agreement on the definition and the composition of a nostalgic brand. Nevertheless a nostalgic reaction elicited by a stimulus (i.e, a brand) may vary in intensity (Divard & Robert-Demontrond, 1997). In fact, the level of nostalgia evoked by a brand may vary from one consumer to another as well as from one nostalgic brand to another. This level may depend on several factors such as for example the type of nostalgia evoked by a brand or the position of the brand on nostalgia. According to that, we suggest to take into account the intensity of nostalgia produced by a brand rather than to classify brands in nostalgic brands and non-nostalgic brands. Nowadays no attention has been paid to understand and examine in depth the composition of the level of nostalgia evoked by a brand that we call the power of nostalgia toward the brand.

The objectives of this paper are twofold: 1) a depth understanding of the features characterizing the power of nostalgia toward the brand through a qualitative research, 2) a definition of the power of nostalgia toward the brand. In this paper, we first review the definition of nostalgia and give special attention to previous literature on nostalgic brand. Afterwards is an outline of the method employed for the study including sample, data

collection and data analysis. We then present our findings divided in two sections, namely conditions to elicit nostalgia and characteristics of the power of nostalgia toward the brand. The paper ends with a discussion, limitations of the paper, suggestions for future research and managerial implications.

Literature review

Nostalgia

Etymologically nostalgia has a Greek derivation with two roots: "nostos" ("return home or to one's native land") and "algos" ("pain"). The origins of nostalgia can be traced in medicine when Hofer ([1688] 1934) considered it as a fatal disease. Since 1979, researchers in marketing have become increasingly interested in this topic but until now there has been no agreement with its definition. Indeed nostalgia can be viewed as an evocation (Davis, 1979), a mood (Belk, 1990), a preference (Holbrook & Schindler, 1991), an emotional state (Stern, 1992) or an affective reaction (Divard & Robert-Demontrond, 1997). In this paper, we refer to the definition of Divard and Robert-Demontrond (1997) because it is the most common one. Principal definitions of nostalgia in marketing are provided in table 1.

Table 1. Principal definitions of nostalgia in marketing

Author(s) and Year	Definition of nostalgia
Davis (1979)	"A positively toned evocation of a lived past " (p. 18)
Belk (1990)	"A wistful mood that may be prompted by an object, a scene, a smell, or a strain of music" (p.670)
Holbrook & Schindler (1991)	"A preference (general liking, positive attitude, or favorable affect) toward objects (people, places, or things) that were common (popular, fashionable, or widely circulated) when one was younger (in early adulthood, in adolescence, in childhood, or even before birth)" (p. 330)
Stern (1992)	"An emotional state in which an individual yearns for an idealized or sanitized version of an earlier time period" (p. 11)
Divard & Robert-Demontrond (1997)	"A bittersweet affective reaction, possibly associated with a cognitive activity, and which is felt by an individual when an external or internal stimulus has the effect of transposing him for a period or an event from an idealized past, in keeping or not with his own life" (p. 48)

Nostalgic brand

Divard & Robert-Demontrond (1997, p. 48) stated that “an external or internal stimulus has the effect of transposing him [an individual] for a period or an event from an idealized past, in keeping or not with his own life”. Prior studies showed that a brand could be considered as one stimulus likely to evoke nostalgia and reconnect consumers with past events (Brown, et al., 2003b; Kessous & Roux, 2010; Loveland, et al., 2010). Those authors categorized brands into two categories: nostalgic brands and non-nostalgic brands. They proposed a definition of a nostalgic brand and/or different features enabling to consider a brand as nostalgic.

Brown, et al. (2003b) suggested a definition of a nostalgic brand based on literature pertaining to nostalgia, brand heritage and brand revival. Those authors defined a retro brand as “a product or service brand from a prior historical period, which is usually but not always updated to contemporary standards of performance, functioning, or taste. Retro brands are distinguishable from nostalgic brands by the element of updating. They are brand new, old-fashioned offerings” (p. 20). Therefore we can suppose two features of a nostalgic brand: (1) brand from a prior historical period, (2) not updated to contemporary standards of performance, functioning, or taste. According to those authors, the oldness of a nostalgic brand could give it the negative image of an old-fashioned brand. However the following quotes from marketing directors underline the fact that a nostalgic brand may evolve because of the evolution of the market and of the changes in consumers’ needs and wants:

‘As a brand with real and depth roots, we should, as one of the actors on the market, we should, even compared with our history and our cult products, we should innovate. What does innovate mean? But you should say, that is antinomic to innovate on a product which is still the same but the association of materials, the associations of colors, the customization we can do, means that this brand is always planning to bring something new even though it is always the same shoes.’ (Marketing director, sport shoes company)

‘Knowing that nostalgic, it may stay nostalgic by bringing something new ... That is the reason why there is a part of the population that may continue to feel it as nostalgic because it has always followed him or her but by making evolve the brand.’ (Marketing director, cheese products company)

However a nostalgic brand should not be associated to the most modern, cutting-edge and technological brand in its product category. Even though a nostalgic brand follows the evolution of the market, it comes from a prior historical period as mentioned by Brown, et al. (2003b) and it still remains coherent, consistent and loyal to its past values. According to

Keller, Apéria & Georgson (2008), this consistency corresponds to the “brand essence” of a brand, in other words a brand stands for its core values that are vital elements to brands. By remaining coherent, consistent and loyal to its past values, a nostalgic brand may be viewed as a marker with safe values and consequently reassure consumers. In fact people are looking for a sense of security (Brown, et al., 2003b; Kessous & Roux, 2008; Stern, 1992), familiarity, safety and warmth (Moore, et al., 2002) in time of sociocultural and economic turbulence. Contrary to Brown, et al.’s (2003b) definition, we consider that a nostalgic brand should be viewed more as contemporary rather than old-fashioned because it harmonizes the past consistency with the present and future evolution (new technology, new benefits, new delivery modes). A nostalgic brand should provide an offering that appeals to the desire for familiarity, safety and warmth but also incorporates the needed product improvements, updates and modifications to stay current in today's marketplace (Moore, et al., 2002).

Kessous & Roux (2010) did not define a nostalgic brand but proposed different characteristics to judge a brand as nostalgic, which were based on nostalgia literature: (1) oldness of the brand, (2) high level of brand awareness, (3) intergenerational or generational character of the brand, (4) brand symbolizing occasions of familial buying or giving a present, (5) control of gender (i.e., brands should be addressed to men and women).

As previously mentioned by Brown, et al. (2003b), a nostalgic brand comes from a prior historical period and therefore the oldness of a brand should characterize the nostalgic feature of a brand. However Kessous & Roux (2010) did not specify if they assimilate the oldness of the brand to the objective age of the brand or to the age perceived by consumers.

The high level of brand awareness should be considered more as a condition necessary to evoke a nostalgic reaction rather than one feature of a nostalgic brand. Indeed consumers should recognize the brands otherwise they could not produce a nostalgic response. Moreover this characteristic is not specific to old brands because new brands could also have a high level of brand awareness.

Concerning the intergenerational character of the brand, Moore, et al. (2002, p. 17) stated that “intergenerational influence refers to the within-family transmission of information, beliefs, and resources from one generation to the next”. A brand may be transmitted from one generation to the next within a family context. Indeed intergenerational influences create special emotional bonds, like nostalgia, between a daughter and a particular brand previously bought within a family context (Moore, et al., 2002). A nostalgic brand gives an image of authenticity, quality and long lasting (Sierra & McQuitty, 2007) and the transmission of this brand from one generation to the next may partly result from this image. In fact, consumers

search for authenticity in time of sociocultural and economic turbulence (Belk & Costa, 1998; Holt, 1997; Peñaloza, 2000). Peñazola (2000) emphasized the fact that history or past should be considered as a marker of legitimacy and authenticity. Moreover the oldness of the brand gives it a guarantee of quality because the brand would have to disappear if consumers from one generation to the next had perceived the brand as a brand with bad quality. Furthermore Thompson, Pollio & Locander (1994) reported that brands with a past give the impression of lasting value and are perceived as resistant to the time. Due to the fact that a nostalgic brand gives an image of authenticity, quality and long lasting and that this image partly causes the transmission of the nostalgic brand from one generation to the next, the intergenerational character of the brand should therefore be considered more as a consequence of the evocation of nostalgia produced by the brand rather than a feature of a nostalgic brand.

The generational character of a brand means that consumers from the same generation remind events that they lived through the same period (Ladwein, Carton, & Sevin, 2009). The fact that a nostalgic brand reminds events that consumers from the same generation lived through the same period should be considered as one feature of a nostalgic brand. In fact, as mentioned by Divard & Robert-Demontrond (1997), a brand has the effect of transposing an individual from an event from an idealized past in keeping with his own life. However it is too restricted because the prior authors also mentioned that a reminded event from an idealized past may also be not linked to the individual's own life.

The fourth feature of a nostalgic brand mentioned by Kessous and Roux (2010) is the fact that a brand should symbolize an interpersonal relationship (i.e. sharing time between friends or family) in order to recall nostalgic memories. According to the fact that occasions of familial buying or giving a present should help consumers to remind memories, this character should be viewed more as a driver of a nostalgic brand rather than a feature of a nostalgic brand.

Finally the control of gender is not specific to nostalgic brands because non-nostalgic brands could be addressed to men and women as well. Therefore the control of gender should not be seen as a feature of a nostalgic brand.

According to all those assumptions, only the oldness of the brand and the generational character of the brand should be considered as characteristics to judge a brand as nostalgic but they seem too restricted.

Loveland, et al. (2010, p. 397) defined nostalgic brands as “brands that were popular in the past (and are still popular now)”. Their definition was based on Holbrook and Schindler's (1991) definition of nostalgia. Those researchers related to three features to view brands as

nostalgic: (1) liking brands (i.e. brands were and are still successful now), (2) remind past and (3) elicit nostalgic feelings.

The fact that a nostalgic brand remind past and elicit nostalgic feelings is consistent with Divard and Robert-Demontrond's (1997) definition of nostalgia. In fact, a stimulus (i.e. brand) has the effect of transposing an individual for a period or an event from an idealized past (i.e. remind past) and makes feel to the individual an affective reaction (i.e. elicit nostalgic feelings). However Loveland, et al. (2010) did not make any distinction between the past in keeping or not with the individual's own life and did not mention the valence of the nostalgic feelings elicited by the brand.

Furthermore nostalgia evoked by the brand is not a general evaluation about the brand such as "I like the brand". It may include bittersweet feelings triggered by a brand and result in a general evaluative judgment. According to this assumption, liking brand should be viewed more as consequence of a nostalgic brand rather than a feature of a nostalgic brand.

Nowadays many definitions and compositions of a nostalgic brand have been proposed but no one has been accepted unanimously. Moreover prior researchers like Brown, et al. (2003b), Kessous & Roux (2010) and Loveland, et al. (2010) proposed some features enabling to characterize a brand as nostalgic but a confusion between conditions, drivers, features and consequences of a nostalgic brand seem clearly existing.

Power of nostalgia toward the brand

All those prior authors made a distinction between nostalgic brands and non-nostalgic brands. However a nostalgic reaction elicited by a stimulus (i.e, a brand) may vary in intensity (Divard & Robert-Demontrond, 1997). The level of nostalgia evoked by a brand may vary from one consumer to another as well as from one nostalgic brand to another. In fact the intensity of nostalgia evoked by the brand may depend on different factors such as for example the position of the brand on nostalgia or the type of nostalgia elicited by the brand.

A study revealed different types of companies' utilization of nostalgia in marketing (Divard & Robert-Demontrond, 1997). First nostalgia may refer to a strategic element of the brand which is the founding of its positioning and permeates different marketing mix elements. Second other companies make use of nostalgia in a tactical purpose, that means it is not a unifier theme of the brand and nostalgia only appears in different marketing mix elements. Therefore, a brand, perceived from a prior historical period, is likely to evoke nostalgia to an individual even though it is not positioned on nostalgia. However the position of the brand on nostalgia may help consumers to remind past memories even though

consumers have no experience with this brand. So the position of the brand on nostalgia may vary the intensity of nostalgia produced by this brand.

The type of nostalgia evoked by a brand may also vary from one brand to another (Havlena & Holak, 1996). Prior studies have made a distinction between personal (also called true or real) and communal (also called collective, cultural or virtual) nostalgia (Baker & Kennedy, 1994; Davis, 1979; Havlena & Holak, 1996). The former one is associated with individual life cycles and the latter one with epochal events not associated with individual life (Brown, et al., 2003b). A brand is likely to evoke personal and communal nostalgia (Havlena & Holak, 1996). It depends on the brand and on the lived or learned past of the consumer related to this brand. Personal and communal evoked nostalgia may produce different results (Marchegiani & Phau, 2010) and thus the type of nostalgia elicited by the brand may vary the level of nostalgia evoked by this brand.

According to those facts, it will be more accurate to consider the intensity of nostalgia produced by a brand rather than to classify nostalgic brands and non-nostalgic brands into two groups. Nowadays no attention has been paid to understand and examine in depth the composition of the level of nostalgia evoked by a brand that we call “the power of nostalgia toward the brand”. However nostalgia has strongly been used by companies from different product categories in their branding strategies (Baker & Kennedy, 1994; Havlena & Holak, 1991). They try to evoke nostalgia in order to reconnect consumers with past events and therefore reassure them. Nevertheless companies are unable to employ effectively the power of nostalgia evoked by a brand and to analyze its impact on attitudinal and behavioural factors without knowing exactly what this concept consists of. Therefore this paper will address two objectives: 1) a depth analysis of the features characterizing the power of nostalgia evoked by a brand, 2) a definition of the power of nostalgia toward the brand.

Methodology

The question of what the power of nostalgia toward the brand consists of has until now not been addressed. The lack of previous research in this area calls for an exploratory approach aimed at seeking a depth understanding of the concept of the power of nostalgia toward the brand and therefore points towards qualitative research.

Sample

We conducted qualitative research on consumers because nostalgia is an affective reaction felt by consumers (Divard & Robert-Demontrond, 1997). In fact, even though a company tries to position its brand on past, we should consider that this brand elicits nostalgia only if consumers feel nostalgic. Belgian consumers were recruited via convenience sampling. Sample selection parameters included age and gender. In fact prior studies showed that men are more nostalgic than women and the items which evoke feelings of nostalgia may differ from the gender (Baker & Kennedy, 1994; Holak & Havlena, 1998; Stern, 1992). Moreover age may also play a role in nostalgia, both in terms of the items and experiences that are associated with nostalgia (Loveland, et al., 2010; Schindler & Holbrook, 2003). We decided for two reasons to create two samples that represent two age cohorts: generation Xers between the ages of 20 and 40 years and baby boomers between the ages of 41 and 60 years. First this choice of two age cohorts was based on the age of the actual target group of the different brands used in this qualitative research. For some brands, the age of the target group was too restricted so we could not create a group with a large difference in the participants' age. Second prior studies showed that respondents from different age cohorts should experience nostalgia in somewhat different ways (Havlena & Holak, 1991; Holbrook, 1993; Schindler & Holbrook, 2003) so collective interaction should be limited with participants with a large difference in age. Respondents' details are provided in appendix 1.

Data collection

This study employed focus groups for the collection of data on consumers. The focus group method was chosen because this method is useful when information relatively rich in detail is seeking (Asbury, 1995). Indeed collective interaction is employed to generate data on a specific topic (Goldman & McDonald, 1987; Morgan, 1988; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Group interaction would generate a deeper level of discussion.

A basic research design issues were considered in the current study. These issues include the number of participants, the number of focus groups and concern for "saturation" of ideas. In this study, groups were constructed, ranging from six to nine participants in each group (Fern, 1982; Griffin & Hauser, 1993). In total, six focus groups, whose three focus groups with participants aged from 20 to 40 years and three focus groups with participants aged from 41 to 60 years, were conducted. The interviewing phase was concluded because the third focus group in both cases did not produce any new idea so theoretical saturation was achieved (Fern, 1982; Griffin & Hauser, 1993). Each focus group took place at researcher's or

researcher's parents' home in order to interview participants in a neutral and comfortable place which creates a relaxed atmosphere and consequently enabling free flow of communication. The final sample included 22 participants aged from 20 to 40 years (13 males and 9 females) and 24 participants aged from 41 to 60 years (8 males and 16 females). Each focus group met once for approximately 90 minutes and was tape recorded and the group conversations were transcribed.

The groups were moderated by a PhD student who employed a semi-structured discussion guide to provide a focused, yet open, form of dialogue. The question format was open and non-directive. All respondents started with a free association elicitation on a predefined nostalgic brand and then becoming increasingly specific by discussing the meaning of the concept of the power of nostalgia toward the brand in detail and talking about four specific predefined examples of brands of three product categories with a different level of consumer involvement. In this study, we showed to participants the packaging of different products of the brand because pictures or images can trigger stronger remembering (Schacter, Koutstaal, Johnson, Gross, & Angell, 1997).

We chose brands from different product categories and from different levels of consumer involvement in a product category because we did not want to limit our study to only one product category. In fact product category and level of consumer involvement in this product category may vary the production of a nostalgic reaction (Baker & Kennedy, 1994; Havlena & Holak, 1991; Holak & Havlena, 1998; Stern, 1992). Consistent with the consumers' goods classification system of Copeland (1923), we split the nine product categories into the three types of consumers goods named convenience goods, shopping goods and specialty goods. Convenience goods are defined as "those consumers' goods which the customer usually purchases frequently, immediately, and with the minimum of effort" (American Marketing Association, 1948, p. 206). Shopping goods are considered as "those consumers' goods which the customer in the process of selection and purchase characteristically compares on such bases as suitability, quality, price, and style" (American Marketing Association, 1948, p. 215). Specialty goods are defined as "those consumers' goods on which a significant group of buyers characteristically insists and for which they are willing to make a special purchasing effort" (American Marketing Association, 1948, p. 215). Kleinmenhagen (1966) stated that the distinction between the three types of consumers' goods can be made following the shopping effort the consumer makes while attempting a purchase and therefore following the level of consumer involvement in the product category. According to that, we made the distinction provided in table 2.

Table 2. Consumers' goods classification and product categories investigated

Consumers' goods classification	Product category
Convenience goods (low level of consumer involvement)	Biscuits
	Beers
	Cool products
Shopping goods (medium or high level of consumer involvement with a cognitive dimension)	Motorcycles
	Cars
	Cameras
Speciality goods (medium or high level of consumer involvement with an affective dimension)	Clothes
	Sport shoes
	Luxury perfumes

Data analysis

Interview and focus group transcripts as well as notes taken by the researcher formed the basis of analysis. Our analysis was informed by considering existing literature and personal experience to gain insights into the data. We followed the analytical operations of categorization, abstraction, comparison, integration, iteration and refutation as recommended by Spiggle (1994). Atlas.ti's coding was used for analysis purposes. First, all transcripts were open coded and then we developed axial code categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It is an ongoing process because axial codes were defined, compared, removed and named (Spiggle, 1994). Through this trial-and-error process, we read repeatedly transcripts in search of themes and relationships among them to assimilate and refine theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Then, separate transcripts were related to each other to emerge any common patterns. In the analysis, we moved back and forth between the data and existing literature on nostalgia and nostalgic brand.

Findings

Conditions to elicit nostalgia

Before mentioning the features of the power of nostalgia toward the brand elicited by informants, we observed that *a high level of brand awareness* as well as *an occasional consumption or buying of the brand* are two conditions to satisfy otherwise a brand could not evoke nostalgia to consumers.

Indeed consumers should recognize the brands otherwise they could not produce a nostalgic response.

Thierry (28): ‘Those two other brands, I do not know them and therefore nostalgia 0.’

Guy (58): ‘This brand, I would say that there is no nostalgia because this is a brand which has been known for less time. It is 10 years old and therefore we can not have memories that date from a very old period and consequently it is not nostalgia.’

Moreover informants expressed concerns that a brand should not be bought or consumed every day otherwise this brand could not evoke nostalgia. In fact if consumers buy or consume a brand too regularly, they could not feel nostalgic in contact with this brand. It doesn't mean that common branded products or branded products with a low level of consumer involvement enable to elicit nostalgia. Only the frequency of consumption or buying of branded products plays a role on the production of consumers' nostalgic reaction.

Isabelle (35): ‘Nostalgic brands are brands which are not common, which are not recurrent, not daily. No, we can not be nostalgic of something whose we have access all time.’

Chantal (55): ‘If we buy all time nostalgic brands, we could not have this nostalgia because that will become common.’

Additionally to those two conditions to elicit nostalgia, informants elicited a multiplicity of features that form the power of nostalgia toward the brand. These characteristics were grouped into three categories: (1) perceived oldness of brand, (2) recall of consumers' lived or learned past memories, (3) elicitation of feelings.

Characteristics of the power of nostalgia toward the brand

Perceived oldness of brand

The perceived oldness of the brand is one characteristic of the power of nostalgia toward the brand. In fact informants stated that a nostalgic brand comes from a prior historical period but they do not remember exactly when the brand was launched. Surprisingly a French brand launched six years ago on the market, named La Laitière, was perceived as an old brand by informants just because the company succeeds the position of its brand on old elements (i.e., an old dairywoman cooking “home made” deserts, mediaeval context, ...). Due to this fact, we observed that the power of nostalgia toward a brand is elicited due to the perceived oldness of the brand and not its objective age.

Ludovic (28): ‘This is a brand that you have seen since your childhood, which exists since your childhood.’

Fabrice (50): ‘We say that it is something old and which has its value by its oldness.’

For informants, the oldness of the brand does not mean that the brand looks like old-fashioned but that the brand appears to exist for a long time and have a long history, a brand heritage which can be eventually invoked to evoke consumers’ memories. Indeed, a brand can invoke its past either directly by promoting its history (e.g., using the birth date of the brand on the packaging) or indirectly by not referring to its past but consumers know that it is an old brand with a long history.

Charles (27): ‘She is old, she has a history, a story.’

For a few informants, older is the brand, higher is the level of nostalgia evoked by the brand.

Benoît (35): ‘I try to find a brand not so old to see if you can say that we are nostalgic but it is difficult.’

Recall of consumers’ lived or learned past memories

For some informants, La Laitière was considered as less nostalgic than nostalgic competitor brands (i.e., Danette) because this brand does not really evoke personal memories to consumers. They did not consume this brand during their childhood and so they do not have a long experience with it. Emerging from our data, the recall of consumers’ past memories is another characteristic of the power of nostalgia toward the brand.

Two kinds of past memories were observed. Past memories should be either lived or learned for people to have a nostalgic reaction. Indeed informants made a distinction between personal memories associated to their own life (i.e., lived memories) and memories related to epochal events not linked to their life (i.e., learned memories).

Charles (27): ‘This brand reminds me, when I was a child, underpants with stripes. Yes, that reminds me that and that is the reason why I would say that there is nostalgia.’

Fabrice (50): ‘This brand is totally nostalgic, no problem. They had their success story in the 50’s and 60’s and then they have continued on the same values.’

A same brand can remind both types of memories. For example Coca-Cola reminds to some informants personal memories with this brand such as the glass bottles of Coca-Cola

consumed at grandparents' house. For other informants, Coca-Cola is linked to historical associations such as Santa Claus and Christmas.

As suggested by our data, consumers remind more lived past memories because they considered them as more relevant and memorable than learned memories. In fact consumers' memory is selective and those lived memories are easily recalled because they marked consumers during their youth or their childhood. Those memories are viewed by informants as important and affect-laden and so they are engraved in their memory.

Monique (56): 'That marked us. I think that it should be memorable in our youth or in our childhood to be nostalgic of that today.'

A last observation is that more positive past consumers' memories are reminded than negative ones. Consumers prefer reminding good memories and forgetting memories that could remember them bad events for example. As mentioned previously, consumers' memory is selective.

Benoît (35): 'That is rarely negative, that is rarely a memory..., nostalgic brand, that is rarely negative.'

Isabelle (35): 'Because you forgot, you keep only positive things.'

Sandrine (25): 'Memories are selective.'

Céline (27): 'Because you remember only positive things, not negative ones and therefore, we are, I think, very selective in memories we keep. We generally try to keep the positive ones and maybe less the negative ones.'

Guy (58): 'In general, that is maybe a slogan like that, "nostalgia: it was better before". Otherwise we do not have this feeling. We do not have nostalgia from a period that was bad or other.'

Chantal (55): 'Yes that is associated to something positive.'

Elicitation of feelings

Even though consumers recall memories of the past in contact with an old brand, those thinkings should be associated with feelings in order to produce a nostalgic reaction. In fact nostalgia is an affective reaction felt by consumers when memories are elicited. As mentioned by informants, without reviving past feelings, they can not presume that a brand evokes nostalgia, this brand just recalls memories. Elicitation of feelings linked to consumers' past memories is therefore a third characteristic of the power of nostalgia toward the brand. When nostalgia is evoked by a brand, consumers bring back past memories and relive some feelings linked to those memories.

Céline (27): ‘Feelings also, we relive sometimes some feelings.’

Jimmy (27): ‘A nostalgic brand wakes up feelings.’

As observed for memories, informants claimed that nostalgia evoked by a brand enables to elicit more positive feelings than negative ones. Therefore consumers have the ability to filter their memories as well as their feelings. Most of the time, they feel again happy when a brand reminds them positive past memories.

Anusha (24): ‘When we had one, we were so happy, I do not know.’

Monique (56): ‘When you see people that are so happy to see Chantal Goya, you tell yourself that they should be nostalgic.’

Discussion

To the best of our knowledge, no study has addressed the question of what the power of nostalgia toward the brand consists of. First, emerging from our findings, two conditions are necessary otherwise a brand could not evoke nostalgia to consumers. The brand should have a *high level of awareness* and should *not be bought or consumed daily*. In fact, if consumers are unable to recognize a brand, they could not feel nostalgic in contact with this brand. This condition relates to one of the features proposed by Kessous & Roux (2010) to consider a brand as nostalgic. Additionally consumers should not buy or consume a brand too regularly otherwise they could not produce a nostalgic reaction when brand-related stimuli are triggered. A procedure was employed by Wildschut, Sedikides, Arndt & Routledge (2006) to manipulate nostalgia in an experiment. In the nostalgic condition, participants read this message: “Bring to mind a nostalgic event in your life. Specifically, try to think of a past event that makes you feel most nostalgic....”. In the control condition, other participants read this message: “Bring to mind an ordinary event in your daily life - an event that took place in the last week....”. This manipulation was successful to produce a nostalgic reaction by individuals in the nostalgia condition and no nostalgic response in the other case. In fact when an event took place regularly and become ordinary, individuals do not feel nostalgic when they bring to mind this event. In a similar way, a brand consumed or bought daily by consumers could not produce a nostalgic reaction. However it doesn’t mean that common branded products or branded products with a low level of consumer involvement enable to elicit nostalgia. They can elicit a nostalgic response if they are consumed or bought occasionally.

Second, the power of nostalgia toward the brand consists of three features: (1) *perceived oldness of brand*, (2) *recall of consumers' lived or learned past memories*, (3) *elicitation of feelings*. A low level on one feature may be compensated by a higher level on another characteristic to form the power of nostalgia evoked by a brand.

The first characteristic of the power of nostalgia toward the brand, called the *perceived oldness of the brand*, means that the brand looks like old, appears to come from the past and have a history, a brand heritage. The oldness of the brand was already mentioned by prior researchers such as Brown, et al. (2003b), Kessous & Roux (2010) as a feature of a nostalgic brand. When we are talking about the oldness of the brand, we refer to the oldness of the brand perceived by consumers and not the objective age of the brand. In fact consumers have rarely the ability to know exactly the age of the brand because they do not remember when the brand was launched. Moreover some brands may look like old by consumers just because of the position of brands on nostalgia. However an old brand does not mean that this brand looks like old-fashioned as previously suggested by Brown, et al. (2003b). An old brand may evolve and be updated to contemporary standards of performance, functioning or taste because of the evolution of the market and of the changes in consumers' needs and wants. However this brand still remains coherent to its past values. This brand does not start from scratch any time but it stands for its core values that form the bases of the brand.

The power of nostalgia toward the brand also has the ability to *recall consumers' past memories, lived or learned*. By consuming nostalgic brands, consumers can “re-live” a past situation by reminding a particular experience with the brands and bring back past memories (Brown, et al., 2003b; Ladwein, et al., 2009; Loveland, et al., 2010). These past memories should be either lived or learned for people to have a nostalgic reaction (Braun, Ellis, & Loftus, 2002; Sierra & McQuitty, 2007). As mentioned previously, prior studies made a distinction between personal (also called true or real) and communal (also called collective, cultural or virtual) nostalgia (Baker & Kennedy, 1994; Davis, 1979; Havlena & Holak, 1996). The former one is associated with individual life cycles (i.e., lived memories) and the latter one with epochal events not related to individual life (i.e., learned memories) (Brown, et al., 2003b).

We also notice that consumers *remind more lived past memories than learned memories* because they are considered as more relevant and memorable memories. Theories on memory process are important theoretical underpinnings for understanding the recall of certain memories. In fact our memory is selective and salient memories will be easily recalled because of the strength of the cue in memory (Bettman, 1979; Wright, 1980). Indeed

Sedikides, Wildschut & Baden (2004, p. 205) stated that “nostalgia is centered around personally relevant events, is dipped in affect ...”. These events should be important and affect-laden to be engraved in consumers’ memory. Personal past memories would also be judged as relevant when people were used to consume a brand like for example everyday food brands consumed during the consumers’ past. In fact the repeated exposure to a stimulus (e.g., a brand) helps the storage of the information in the short-term memory and implies the transfer of this information into long-term memory (Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968).

As suggested by our findings, the power of nostalgia toward the brand has the ability to *recall more positive memories than negative ones*. Indeed some authors suggested that nostalgia generates positive rather than negative consumer responses about the past (Davis, 1979; Sierra & McQuitty, 2007). Prior studies investigating the evocation of nostalgia by another stimuli such as a nostalgic advertisement also showed that more positive nostalgic thoughts are elicited by a nostalgic advertisement than negative ones (Braun, et al., 2002; Muehling & Sprott, 2004). This observation may also be justified by the selective process of consumers’ memory.

If an affective reaction is felt by an individual when a brand has the effect of transposing him in the past, we can claim that this individual produces a nostalgic reaction in contact with this brand. The third characteristic of the power of nostalgia toward the brand is therefore the *elicitation of feelings* linked to consumers’ past memories. In fact a nostalgic brand has the ability to elicit nostalgic feelings (Loveland, et al., 2010). Nostalgia can make consumers “relive” emotions linked to the past (Sierra & McQuitty, 2007). Indeed consumers associate a past emotion with brands and try to feel again this emotion through them (Ladwein, et al., 2009).

As proposed by our findings, the power of nostalgia toward the brand enables to *elicit more positive feelings than negative ones*. Indeed nostalgia generates positive rather than negative consumer responses about the past (Davis, 1979; Sierra & McQuitty, 2007). In a study conducted by Holak & Havlena (1998), participants described nostalgic experiences pertaining to persons, events and objects mostly by positive emotions (e.g., warmth, joy, affection and gratitude) and in a less extent by negative emotions (e.g, sadness, irritation and fear). In fact positive feelings seem to be selective and often filtered through “rose-colored glasses” in consumer’s memory process (Belk, 1990; Havlena & Holak, 1991; Holak & Havlena, 1992).

Therefore we define the power of nostalgia toward the brand as *“the intensity of feelings, principally positively toned, felt by an individual when a perceived old brand has the ability of recalling him mainly positive consumer’s past memories, lived or learned.”*

Limitations and future research

This study does not purport to have depicted a representative sample of Belgian consumers, much less worldwide so generalization to other contexts may be limited. However the objective of a qualitative study is not the generalization of the findings but rather the explanation of a phenomenon.

In our research, we only used one visual brand-related stimulus to elicit nostalgia, such as pictures of the packaging of branded products. In fact, informants were not exposed to real branded products. For some product categories such as biscuits, beers and cool products, it would have been financially feasible to show real branded products to consumers. However we had a limited budget for this study and therefore it was unimaginable to display real cars, motorcycles or cameras of four different brands. Therefore we decided to employ the same type of stimulus (i.e., pictures of the packaging of branded products) for all the product categories because we did not want to limit our study to a small number of product categories. Nevertheless, by being in contact physically with a branded product, other stimuli such as the taste, the smell or the hearing should also be triggered and the nostalgic reaction elicited by this branded product could be somewhat different. Future research would expose consumers to real branded products and examine the similarities and the differences with the findings of our qualitative study.

During the focus groups, informants referred to some nostalgic advertisements of the predefined brands. In fact nostalgia may also be produced by nostalgic advertisements and lived or learned past memories may be explicitly evoked through them to remember nostalgic memories. Nostalgic advertisements would be employed in further research to analyze the correspondence with our findings.

The better understanding of the composition of the power of nostalgia toward the brand in the present study may open the door to many exciting research opportunities to quantify and extend the present results.

For example, based on our findings, an instrument enabling to measure the power of nostalgia toward the brand would be developed. This scale would help researchers to evaluate the level of nostalgia evoked by brands from different product categories and by different groups of

consumers. Moreover a measure of the concept of the power of nostalgia toward the brand would allow researchers to empirically analyze its impact on attitudinal and behavioral consumers' responses such as brand attachment, brand loyalty, brand preference or brand equity.

Managerial implications

Our findings suggest multiple marketing strategy implications for managers.

First, managers would keep in mind that evoking nostalgia seems inappropriate for brands that consumers bought or consumed every day. Indeed daily consumption and nostalgia seems contradictory. Moreover managers would take care of the level of awareness of their brands. A brand with a low level of awareness will not be able to elicit nostalgia. The awareness of brands is therefore fundamental to elicit nostalgia and one of the objectives of the companies would be to increase the awareness of their brands.

Second, our study illustrates that the packaging of branded products enables to evoke nostalgia. The packaging of a branded product would therefore be considered by managers as one brand-related stimulus likely to produce a nostalgic reaction by consumers. No explicit linkage through the advertisement is required to remember nostalgic memories.

Third, the level of nostalgia evoked by a brand may vary from one brand to another and this power of nostalgia toward the brand is composed of three elements: perceived oldness of the brand, recall of consumers' lived or learned past memories and elicitation of feelings. If a company is not efficient on one of those features for its brand, it may compensate by the other ones to increase the intensity of nostalgia produced by its brand. Moreover managers can invoke the long past of their brand directly by promoting its history (e.g., using the birth date of the brand on the packaging) or indirectly by not referring to its past. Indeed, in most cases, consumers know that it is an old brand with a long history and therefore referring explicitly to its past is not obliged to elicit nostalgia. Additionally managers would pay special attention to the fact that consumers consider lived past memories as more relevant and memorable than learned past memories. In fact consumers remember easily this type of memories because those memories marked them. Therefore managers would try to recall personal consumers' memories so far as possible.

Fourth, trying to evoke nostalgia in their branding strategies would be used by managers with precaution. In fact a nostalgic brand may remind negative past memories and therefore elicit negative feelings in a few cases.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1. Respondents' details

Participants aged from 20 to 40 years			Participants aged from 41 to 60 years		
Name	Age	Gender	Name	Age	Gender
Anusha	24	Female	Chantal	55	Female
Anne-Sophie	24	Female	Carole	45	Female
Caroline	27	Female	Régine	47	Female
Brice	29	Male	Christelle	41	Female
Ludovic	28	Male	Nelly	59	Female
Guilliam	24	Male	Guy	58	Male
Avinash	28	Male	Rudy	45	Male
Aymeric	24	Male	Edouard	55	Male
Céline	27	Female	Carine	51	Female
Perrine	23	Female	Jacqueline	60	Female
Isabelle	35	Female	Christine	55	Female
Sandrine	25	Female	Chantal	55	Female
Benoît	35	Male	Hélène	50	Female
Anthony	26	Male	Patrick	52	Male
Charles	27	Male	Fabrice	50	Male
Delphine	26	Female	Martine	48	Female
Beth	27	Female	Jocelyne	57	Female
Jimmy	27	Male	Dominique	54	Female
Thierry	28	Male	Francine	49	Female
Benoît	27	Male	Marie-Ange	57	Female
Didier	27	Male	Monique	56	Female
Amaury	29	Male	Philippe	49	Male
			Joseph	57	Male
			Jean-Luc	58	Male