

**PERSONAL VS. HISTORICAL NOSTALGIA:
A DIVISION OF EMOTIONS**

Chris Marchegiani¹
School of Marketing, Curtin Business School
Curtin University of Technology

2009014

Editor:

Associate Professor Ian Phau
School of Marketing

**MARKETING
INSIGHTS**
Working Paper Series
School of Marketing

ISSN 1448 – 9716

¹Corresponding author:

Chris Marchegiani
School of Marketing, Curtin Business School
Curtin University of Technology
GPO BOX U1987
Perth, WA 6845
Australia
Tel (+61 8) 9266 7735
Fax (+61 8) 9266 3937
Email: chris.marchegiani@cbs.curtin.edu.au

PERSONAL VS. HISTORICAL NOSTALGIA: A DIVISION OF EMOTIONS

ABSTRACT

While previous studies have explored emotions in nostalgia in a ‘unified’ view, a distinction between the emotions that may occur resulting from the specific type of nostalgia experienced has not been made. This study examines emotional responses of 806 respondents experiencing Personal or Historical Nostalgia with an experimental research design. Although some emotions are common between the groups some distinctly different emotions are found as a result of the type of nostalgia experienced. This research assists in clarifying the difference in respondent’s reactions to the two nostalgic types and supports the postulation that the two appeals are distinctly different.

INTRODUCTION

Emotional responses to nostalgic reactions have been studied by previous researchers with mixed results. Holak and Havlena (1998) perhaps discuss this best in their revelation that emotions under nostalgic cues are often too complex for common measures that divide emotions into two (e.g. positive and negative) or three (e.g. pleasure, arousal, dominance) factors. This paper examines the effect of Personal and Historical Nostalgia as a reason behind this level of complexity. Basically, the previous studies that have explored nostalgia may in fact be examining respondents who are feeling one (or a mixture) of two distinct nostalgic types, thus increasing the complexity of the emotions. Furthermore, the two variants of nostalgia could be expected to have emotions unique to each other. Of course the previous studies on emotions in nostalgia are still entirely valid, but they could be examining only the emotions that are common between the two nostalgic response types, rather than encapsulating all the emotional reactions being experienced. These may be revealed if the two appeals were examined independently of one another. This research begins with a brief background before moving to underpinnings and research question development. Results and discussion follow, and future directions and limitations are discussed.

BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH QUESTION

According to Kleinginna and Kleinginna (1981, p. 355) emotions are “...a complex set of interactions among subjective and objective factors, mediated by neural /

hormonal systems, which can: (a) give rise to affective experiences such as feelings of arousal, pleasure / displeasure; (b) generate cognitive processes such as emotionally relevant perceptual effects, appraisals, labeling processes; (c) activate widespread physiological adjustments to the arousing conditions; and (d) lead to behavior that is often, but not always, expressive, goal directed, and adaptive". A more succinct definition is provided by Richins (1997) of an emotion being a 'valenced affective reaction to perceptions of situations'. There is no doubt that emotions are often instrumental in shaping a range of consumer reactions and that they are of upmost importance to marketers and brand managers alike. In terms of the differences in nostalgia, Stern (1992) and Havlena and Holak (1991) provide a clear definition explaining 'Personal Nostalgia' as responses generated from a personally remembered past ('the way *I* was') and 'Historical Nostalgia' as reactions that may occur as a results of a time in history that the respondent did not experience directly, even a time before they were born ('the way *it* was'). In light of this definition, Personal Nostalgia deals with one's own past and makes 'personal connections' (Krugman 1967). This autobiographical cognitive reaction (see Sujana, Bettman, and Baumgartner 1993; Brewer 1986; Neisser 1988 and others) although often considered to be 'filtered' of negative memory (Belk 1990; Davis 1979; Stern 1992) is still self referencing. Historical Nostalgia does not share this reaction, and is instead collective or imaginary / virtual in nature (Halbwachs 1950, 1992; Holak, Matveev, and Havlena 2008). This is expected to result in different emotional reactions in respondents.

By exploring the results of emotions experienced by respondents under each response category, we expect to reveal that those experiencing Personal Nostalgia have some different emotional factors from their Historical counterparts. For example, should Personal Nostalgia have items that reference a 'sense of loss' or 'desire to return', we could possibly see the Historical group not experiencing these reactions due to the difference in processing as a result of the nostalgic type. By that same token, Historical Nostalgic groups may experience a sense of 'uninvolvement' as an emotion due to the non-personal feelings or lack of direct interaction with the period being considered, which may not exist under the Personal condition. Even simple emotions such as happiness, warmth, and irritation may be common among the groups, but may be constructed of different items. This would signify that the emotions, though similar, could actually be specific to Personal or Historical Nostalgic groups. This

process and outcome would show that Personal and Historical Nostalgia are indeed significantly different and should be treated as such.

As such we propose a simple research question for this study: That analysis will reveal emotional components unique to Personal and Historical Nostalgia that can be supported by the literature, although some common emotions will still exist.

METHOD, SAMPLE, AND MEASURES

The research was conducted by exposing respondents to one of two constructed broadcast style adverts laden with either Personal or Historical Nostalgic cues. These adverts were heavily pretested in focus groups with respondents similar to that of the main study to ensure the intended forms of nostalgia were being produced. A manipulation check survey (Marchegiani and Phau 2007a, 2007b) capable of distinguishing between Personal and Historical Nostalgia was used to determine the respondent's nostalgic reaction and to ensure analysis was conducted with correct data. This resulted in 514 respondents in the Personal group and 292 in the Historical. The respondents in the study were students at a large Australian university. Students have been used successfully in previous studies on nostalgia (e.g. Muehling and Sprott 2004) and have been proposed as being representative of general consumers (DelVecchio 2000; Yavas 1994). Young people are also targeted with both types of nostalgic appeals. The study was conducted in a classroom style environment.

To test the range of emotions that may be experienced by respondents under the two conditions two key studies were examined. Holbrook and Batra's (1987) Standardised Emotion Profile (SEP) was used in Holak and Havlena's (1998) study on nostalgia which revealed emotion factors of Tenderness, Irritation, Elation, Loss, Fear and Serenity. These items, along with items from the original SEP, were selected. Additionally, three items from the 'warmth' dimension (Burke and Edell 1989) and 3 items developed from review of the literature. This provided 57 items that were expected to measure and cover the range of emotional reactions in respondents under the conditions. In order to reveal any difference in the emotions respondents experiencing Personal and Historical Nostalgia will be exposed to the same set of items and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) will be conducted to determine the emotional components experienced in each condition.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An EFA on those experiencing Personal Nostalgia revealed six components. Components and results appear at Table 1 with other appropriate statistics. It is noted that Cronbach's alpha of .58 is slightly below the general 'lower acceptability', but on review of the items it was felt that the component was necessary to keep to furthering our understanding of the differences in emotions under the two nostalgic conditions. Other statistics (KMO, Eigenvalues) shown in Table 1 are deemed acceptable.

Table 1: Emotions in Personal Nostalgia

	Rotated Component Matrix(a)					
	Negative / Irritation	Upbeat / Elation	Serenity / Calm	Warm / Tender	Uninvolved	Powerless / Regret
Angry	.818					
Annoyed	.812					
Disgusted	.755					
Mad	.738					
Excited		.816				
Active		.800				
Playful		.756				
Entertained		.721				
Peaceful			.753			
Restful			.715			
Calm			.692			
Serene			.649			
Sentimental				.797		
Reflective				.692		
Innocent				.657		
Uninformed					.764	
Uninvolved					.713	
Powerless						.825
Helpless						.787
Cronbach's α	.83	.80	.70	.63	.58	.62
Eigenvalues (% of Variance)	21.47	18.04	8.58	6.40	5.51	5.41
KMO	.825					
Bartlett	Approx. Chi-squared = 2988.646 Df.= 171, Sig.= .000					

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

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

The EFA for Historical Nostalgia revealed five components. These can be seen at Table 2, again with appropriate statistical support for this analysis. Again, these statistics are deemed acceptable.

Table 2: Emotions in Historical Nostalgia

	Rotated Component Matrix(a)				
	Negative / Irritation	Upbeat / Elation	Component Gratitude	Warm / Tender	Serenity / Calm
Mad	.781				
Angry	.778				
Irritated	.755				
Annoyed	.751				
Fearful	.747				
Afraid	.744				
Excited		.838			
Active		.836			
Playful		.687			
Entertained		.664			
Grateful			.893		
Thankful			.879		
Sentimental				.818	
Reflective				.811	
Calm					.838
Peaceful					.787
Cronbach's α	.87	.79	.87	.66	.63
Eigenvalues (% of Variance)	27.49	21.58	7.65	7.18	6.37
KMO	.824				
Bartlett	Approx. Chi-squared = 1941.171 Df.= 120, Sig.= .000				

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

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

From these two tables we can discuss the similarities and differences in the revealed emotions between the two groups. The first emotion component of Negative/Irritation in the Personal condition does consist of some different items that composed the same measure in the Historical group, although the similarities suggest the same component being measured overall. The items seem to be measuring a general negative emotional response not necessarily related specifically to either nostalgic group. However, it is interesting to see that 'fear' and 'afraid' items loaded on the Negative/Irritation

emotion only under the Historical Nostalgic response group. This could possibly be an emotional reaction specific to Historical Nostalgia due to some fear of the 'unknown'. Further research would need to be conducted into this. The Upbeat/Elation emotion is identical this suggests that this emotion is common to both types of nostalgia. These items are common in measures of this emotion outside of the nostalgic context also. The Warm/Tender and Serenity/Calm emotions are also very similar between the two groups, with only one extra item in the 'warm' component under the Personal response group, although there are two extra in the 'Serenity' component. Again this suggests the emotion is relevant to both emotions experienced under Personal and Historical nostalgic appeals.

In terms of changes in emotions, the Powerless/Regret and Uninvolved emotions revealed in the Personal Nostalgia response group did not emerge in the Historical. This is a understandable outcome as it is possible that those respondents experiencing Historical Nostalgia based responses did not have varying / significant feelings of involvement (they were perhaps equally uninvolved regardless of their level of Historical Nostalgia due to the lack of personally related cognitive responses). In terms of the Powerless/Regret emotion not appearing, this may be a similar case where these items simply were not relevant to Historical Nostalgia reacting respondents. It is possible that respondent feeling of regret due to loss (a commonly discussed reaction in nostalgia) is limited to Personal Nostalgia, in they cannot lose what they did not experience (which would be the case under the Historical Nostalgia response group).

The third component in the Historical group with the items 'grateful' and 'thankful' loading together did not appear in the Personal condition. Holbrook and Batra (1987) have used these two items (along with a third item not included in this study) previously as an emotion labelled 'gratitude' and we follow their lead. These items have, however, been used amongst other items and termed as 'tenderness' in past studies (e.g. Holak and Havlena 1998). The Gratitude emotion is an interesting development as it seems to be related only to the Historical condition. However, whether this is a emotions resulting from the respondents being 'grateful' that they did not experience the era they are associating the advert with (e.g. "I'm glad I didn't live in the past"), or a positive reaction of gratitude associated with the positive

feelings respondents often get when think about the past for enjoyment (e.g. “thankful that I was able to reminisce”) is unknown.

SUMMARY DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In conclusion, this research shows that respondents experiencing Personal or Historical Nostalgia do experience varying emotional reactions. Some emotions, such as Warm/Tender, Negative/Irritation, Upbeat/Elation, and Serenity/Calm appear to be similar or identical in the items that make up the emotion and appear to be common between the two response conditions. However, it is noted in the previous discussion that there are some differences in items that may be reflective of the type of nostalgia being felt and this needs to be further studied. Other emotions seem to be related specifically to the type of nostalgia being experienced, such as the Powerless/Regret and Uninvolved emotions in those experiencing Personal Nostalgia and the Gratitude emotion in the Historical condition. These emotions have been discussed and seem logical in their inclusion. This is important to academics as it further supports the need to treat and study nostalgia in its two specific dimensions, rather than assuming consumer reactions are common to both types. For practitioners it highlights the need to understand the specific type of nostalgia being felt rather than simply the unified view. These changes in emotions may indicate other important changes in consumer behaviour reactions, some of which may stem from this initial emotional response. These reactions are worth areas of future research.

This study is limited by its use of one age group, and generalisability would be improved by replication with varying respondents. Although it has been stated that nostalgia concerns all persons, regardless of ethnicity (Greenberg, Koole and Pyszczynski 2004), it has been noted that there may be cross-cultural differences in the intensity and nature of nostalgic experiences (Holbrook 1994). On this note, other cultures, product categories, and ‘life stations’ (see Davis 1979) are worth researching to uncover and changes due to these effects.

REFERENCES

- Belk, R. W. 1990. The Role of Possessions in Constructing and Maintaining a Sense of Past. (in) *Advances in Consumer Research*, 17, M. E. Goldberg, G. Gorn, and R. W. Pollay (eds.) 669-676, Provo, UT : Association for Consumer Research,
- Brewer, W. F. 1986. What is Autobiographical Memory? (in) *Autobiographical Memory*. Rubin, D.C. (ed), 25-49, Cambridge, England, Cambridge University Press.
- Burke, M. C., and Edell, J. A. 1989. The Impact of Feelings on Ad-Based Affect and Cognition. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 26 (1), 69-83.
- Davis, F. 1979. *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*. New York: The Free Press.
- DelVecchio, D. 2000. Moving Beyond Fit: the Role of Brand Portfolio Characteristics in Consumer Evaluations of Brand Reliability. *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 9 (7), 457-471.
- Greenberg, J. (ed), Koole, S. L. (ed), and Pyszczynski, T. (ed) 2004. *Handbook of Experimental Existential Psychology*, 200-214, New York, US: Guilford Press.
- Halbwachs, M. 1950. *The Collective Memory*. New York, Harper Colophon Books.
- Halbwachs, M. 1992. *On Collective Memory*. Lewis A. Coser (edited / translated). USA, The University of Chicago Press.
- Havlena, W. J., and Holak, S. L. 1991. The Good Old Days: Observations on Nostalgia and Its Role in Consumer Behavior. (in) *Advances in Consumer Research*, 18, R. H. Holman and M. R. Solomon (eds.), 323-329, Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research.
- Holak, S. L., and Havlena, W. J. 1998. Feelings, Fantasies, and Memories: An Examination of the Emotional Components of Nostalgia. *Journal of Business Research*. 42 (3), 217-226.
- Holak, S. L., Matveev, A. V., and Havlena, W. J. 2008. Nostalgia in Post-socialist Russia: Exploring Applications to Advertising Strategy. *Journal of Business Research*, 61 (2), 172-178.
- Holbrook, M. B. 1994. *Nostalgic Proneness and Consumer Tastes*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall.
- Holbrook, M. B., and Batra, R. 1987(b) Towards a Standardized Emotional Profile (SEP) Useful in Measuring Responses to the Nonverbal Components of Advertising. (in) *Nonverbal Communications in Advertising*, S. Hecker and D. W. Stewart (eds.), Lexington, M.A., D.C. Heath.

- Kleinginna, P., Jr., and Kleinginna, A. 1981. A Categorized List of Emotion Definitions, with Suggestions for a Consensual Definition. *Motivation and Emotion*, 5 (4), 345-379.
- Krugman, H. 1967. The Measurement of Advertising Involvement. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 30 (4), 583-596.
- Marchegiani, C. and Phau, I. 2007a. Advertising Appeals to “The Times of your Life”: Developing a Scale to Measure Personal Nostalgia. ANZMAC 2007 proceedings (Dunedin)
- Marchegiani, C. and Phau, I. 2007b. “Remembering the Way it Was”: Development and Validation of the Historical Nostalgia Scale ANZMAC 2007 proceedings (Dunedin)
- Muehling, D. D., and Sprott D. E. 2004. The Power of Reflection: An Empirical Examination of Nostalgia Advertising Effects. *Journal of Advertising*, 33 (3), 25-36.
- Neisser, U. 1988. What is Ordinary Memory the Memory of?. (in) *Remembering Reconsidered: Ecological and Traditional Approaches to the Study of Memory*. U. Neisser and E. Winograd (eds.), 356-373, Cambridge, England, Cambridge University Press.
- Richins, M. L. 1997. Measuring Emotions in the Consumption Experience. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24 (2), 127-146.
- Stern, B. B. 1992. Nostalgia in Advertising Text: Romancing the Past. (in) *Advances in Consumer Research*, 19, J. F. Sherry, Jr. and B. Sternthal (eds.), 388-389, Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research.
- Sujan, M., Bettman, J. R., and Baumgartner, H. 1993. Influencing Consumer Judgments Using Autobiographical Memories: A Self-Referencing Perspective. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 30 (4), 422-436.
- Yavas, U. 1994. Research Note: Students as Subjects in Advertising and Marketing Research. *International Marketing Review*, 11 (4), 32-37.