

## **Personal and Historical Nostalgia - A Comparison of Common Emotions**

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**Abstract:** *This research examines the differences in emotional responses of 806 respondents experiencing Personal or Historical Nostalgic reactions to advertising appeals using an experimental research design. Five emotions common to both conditions are revealed and significant changes in intensity of these emotions are examined. As hypothesized, Upbeat / Elation, Loss / Regret, and Warm / Tender related emotions are significantly more intense under the Personal Nostalgic condition compared to the Historical. However, Negative / Irritation and Serenity / Calm related emotions did not significantly alter. This research highlights the need to treat Nostalgia as two separate appeals and provides insight useful to practitioners about consumer's reactions to each specific appeal. It also suggests the need for future research into Personal and Historical Nostalgia's effect on various other consumer behavior responses.*

**Keywords:** consumer behaviour, advertising effectiveness, marketing strategy, advertising

Personal and Historical nostalgia existing as two distinctly different appeals has been discussed by a number of academics (e.g. Baker and Kennedy 1994; Batcho 1995; Havlena and Holak 1991; Hirsch 1992; Holak and Havlena 1992; Stern 1992). We look to Stern (1992) and Havlena and Holak (1991) for definitions of these appeals who explain that 'Personal Nostalgia' are responses generated from a personally remembered past ('the way *I* was'), while 'Historical Nostalgia' are responses generated from a time in history that the respondent did not experience directly, even a time before they were born ('the way *it* was'). While nostalgia in its 'unified' form is studied commonly, the comparable differences in consumer reaction between Personal and Historical Nostalgia has been widely overlooked, despite suggestions that the two nostalgic appeals are distinctly different. This study begins to close this empirical gap by examining emotions under these two specific appeal types. The paper starts with a brief background concern specifically with nostalgia and emotions before moving to the underpinnings and hypothesis development. Next method, analysis, results, and discussion occurs. Finally, some inherent limitations and future directions are discussed.

## **BACKGROUND, UNDERPINNINGS AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT**

A variety of reactions (including warmth, joy, gratitude, affection, and innocence) have been attributed to being elicited by nostalgic thoughts as well as negative feelings such as 'homesickness', and 'bittersweet' feelings of sadness and loss (Holak and Havlena 1998). 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, Sprott and Muehling (2002) posed the question of whether or not consumers actually "think" about the idealized 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 suggested further investigation of this issue might assist in providing a better understanding of how nostalgic ads are processed. 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 nostalgic group as one pool. From this point exploratory factor analysis can be conducted revealing the emotion items that make up the factors common to both Personal and Historical Nostalgia. The mean scores of these reactions can then be compared. As the two types of nostalgia have not been independently tested previous to this research, it is unknown exactly what emotional constructs will be revealed that are common between the two groups. As such, a specific hypothesis as related to individual emotional responses is difficult to construct. However, there are some aspects of emotion responses that

can be drawn from the literature. It is expected that those experiencing Personal Nostalgia would be expected to 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 Nostalgic group is expected to draw upon autobiographical responses, often characterised as being more salient and are of a higher intensity than other cognitive responses (Brewer 1986; Neisser 1988; Brewer and Pani 1983; Tulving 1972, 1984; Belk 1990, 1991; Davis 1979; Havlena and Holak 1991; Holak and Havlena 1992; Stern 1992; Krugman 1967; Greenwald 1968; Nelson 1993). 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; Halbwachs 1950, 1992; Holak, Matveev, and Havlena 2008; Belk 1990). This will result in less self-referencing and intense responses. Based on this literature Hypothesis 1 is as follows:

*H1: Compared to respondents experiencing a Historical Nostalgia reaction, respondents experiencing a Personal Nostalgia reaction will experience at the time of ad exposure a higher intensity of emotions.*

## **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 (DeVecchio 2000; Yavas 1994). A manipulation check capable of indicating levels of each nostalgic type independently of one another was used to divide respondents into groups experiencing Personal or Historical Nostalgia. The total usable number of respondents experiencing Personal Nostalgia was 514. The Historical Nostalgia group was comprised of 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 in the Personal and Historical nostalgic test. Selected items in Holbrook and Batra's (1987) 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 from Burke and Edell (1989), and 3 items developed from review of the literature. This resulted in 57 items expected to measure nostalgic reactions in respondents. Demographics were also collected.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This study is focused 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. The EFA can be seen at Table 1. These five components were 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 could be considered low (0.57), however, viewing the items and the emotional component as a whole, we would expect this to be an important inclusion for nostalgic testing, and as such, it was kept for analysis. As discussed previously, it was unknown exactly what the emotions revealed would be when exploring respondents that have 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 that revealed Tender, Irritation, Elation, Loss, Fear, and Serenity emotions under a unified nostalgic response. The following research

explores differences in these emotions between the two nostalgic type response groups and draws conclusions based on the literature. Significance is discussed as  $p < .05$ . A summary of these emotions and their significant difference (if any) can be seen at Table 2.

**[Insert Table 1 here]**

### **Emotion: Negative / Irritation**

In comparing the Personal with the Historical nostalgic group we see 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, we would hypothesis that it would be the case), as it should be noted that the mean score of both the groups were low on comparison to other scale results, which could indicate that both nostalgic responses result in a low level of this emotion. However, without a non-nostalgic comparison this is impossible to statistically address in this case. In regards to the focus of this study however, we can see that the level of this emotions did not change between the two types of nostalgic response. In other words, Personal Nostalgia reactions compared to Historical Nostalgia does 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 negative (or bittersweet) nostalgic response that could occur under each nostalgic response type, but are rather general.

### **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

in 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 to Historical. 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 nostalgic influence. Existence of a Positive / Elation emotion is also very common in emotion literature (e.g. Burke and Edell 1989; Holak and Havlena 1998; Watson, Clark, and Tellegen 1988).

### **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, we see the personal nostalgic experiencing 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 view 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 the respondent is feeling regret for.

### **Emotion: Serenity / Calm**

In comparing the Personal with the Historical Nostalgic group we see no significant change in the serenity calm emotion ( $t(804) = .48, p = .631$ ). 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, we would hypothesis 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, we can see that the mean score for both groups are in this case are higher than the mid range of the 7 point scale, and serenity/calm is probably not an emotion that we would normally expect to be so prevalent in standard/non-nostalgic advert. However, without a direct similar comparison to 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).

### **Emotions: Warm / Tender**

Significant increase in warm / tender emotion is seen in the Personal compared to 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 through literature on both nostalgic and non-nostalgic responses to advertising appeals (Aaker, Stayman and Hagerty 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 significantly provoke warm / tender emotions is an argument for its use over Historical as it may transfer positive effects on other aspects of consumer behaviour.

**[Insert Table 2 here]**



In summary, H<sub>1</sub> is considered ‘partially accepted’ as respondents experiencing the Personal Nostalgia reaction did experience a higher intensity of emotions, but not in all emotions.

## **SUMMARY DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

This study has achieved two key outcomes. First, it shows the need to examine nostalgia as two separate appeals as they are shown to significantly stimulate respondents in different ways. This has implication for future research on the wide variety of reactions related to nostalgia. Second, it provides practitioners with an understanding of the emotional reactions to the two nostalgic types, both of which are used in the market place, which was previously unknown. 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 explored independently of each other, there might be emotions revealed that are exclusive to one or the other response group. For example, Personal Nostalgia may have emotions that reference a ‘sense of loss’ or ‘desire to return’, that those experiencing historical nostalgia may not experiencing due to the difference in processing as a result of the nostalgic type. Further research on emotions between the two specific nostalgic types is warranted. Also, how those experiencing different intensities of each nostalgic response differ from one another would be worthwhile. Finally, this research uses students with a mean age of ~20 years old. Future research needs to be undertaken to ensure generalisability of results. This is may also be extended to the need to explore different cultures, life stations, and execution types also.

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**Table 1: Emotions Common to Personal and Historical Nostalgia**

**Rotated Component Matrix(a)**

|                                   | Component  |                     |                  |                    |                  |
|-----------------------------------|--|---------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|
|                                   | Negative /<br>Irritation                               | Upbeat /<br>Elation | Loss /<br>Regret | Serenity /<br>Calm | Warm /<br>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 $\alpha$               | .83  | .80                 | .75              | .62                | .57              |
| Eigenvalues<br>(% of<br>Variance) | 23.31  | 17.31               | 8.31             | 6.60               | 5.81             |
| KMO                               | .839   |                     |                  |                    |                  |
| Bartlett                          | Approx. Chi-squared = 4980.094<br>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.

**Table 2: A Summary of Results, Means, and Standard Deviations**

| <b>Emotions</b>       | <b>PN</b>   | <b>HN</b>   | <b>Significance / Result</b>                   |
|-----------------------|-------------|-------------|--|
| Negative Irritation / | 1.77 (0.93) | 1.78 (0.94) | No change between nostalgic types              |
| Upbeat / Elation      | 4.00 (1.27) | 3.57 (1.15) | Significantly more in Personal Nostalgia group |
| Loss / Regret         | 2.63 (1.16) | 2.43 (1.20) | Significantly more in Personal Nostalgia group |
| Serenity / Calm       | 5.00 (1.08) | 4.96 (0.98) | No change between nostalgic types              |
| Warm / Tender         | 4.66 (1.14) | 4.38 (1.05) | Significantly more in Personal Nostalgia group |

PN = Personal Nostalgia, HN = Historical Nostalgia