All Nostalgic Ads Are Not Created Equal: the Influences of Nostalgic Type, Product Type, and Self-Construal

Ching-Chiao Feng, National Sun Yat-sen University
Chun-Tuan Chang, National Sun Yat-sen University
Pei-Chi Chen, National Sun Yat-sen University

Impacts of product type and consumer self-construal are examined in nostalgic advertising. Experimental results indicate that personal nostalgia is more effective in privately-consumed product advertising, but historical nostalgia is more effective in publicly-consumed product advertising. The abovementioned results hold when interdependent self-construal is activated, not for those with independent self-construal.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1013740/volumes/v10e/E-10

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
All Nostalgic Ads Are Not Created Equal: The Influences of Nostalgic Type, Product Type, and Self-Construal
Chun-Tuan Chang, National Sun Yat-sen University
Ching-Chiao Feng, National Sun Yat-sen University
Pei-Chi Chen, National Sun Yat-sen University*

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Because nostalgia encourages self-referencing (Muehling and Sprott, 2004), nostalgia has been widely used to "cut through the clutter" and serves as a highly effective and persuasive advertising tactic. Two major types of nostalgia have been identified in literature: personal and historical nostalgia (Hovlak and Havlena, 1991; Marchegiani and Phau, 2010; Muehling and Pascal, 2011; Stern, 1992). Personal nostalgia pertains to one's own store of remembered events from a "personally experienced past" (e.g., attach nostalgia to experiences recalled from one’s own youth). Historical nostalgia reaches back historically so that it "engulfs the whole past" (Baker and Kennedy, 1994; Lowenthal, 1985), and combines ancient materials into invented traditions that serve the needs of the present (Hobsbawm, 1983). This research demonstrates that the choice between personal or historical nostalgia is influenced by two variables related to self-identity: product type (whether the product is used in public or in private) and consumer self-construal (whether a person sees him/herself as interdependent or independent).

A 3 (ad type: personal nostalgia vs. historical nostalgia vs. non-nostalgia) X 2 (product type: privately vs. publicly consumed) X 2 (self-construal: independent vs. interdependent self) between-subjects experiment was designed. The non-nostalgic ad condition served as a baseline to compare the effects of two nostalgic types. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the conditions above. Before the ad exposure, we manipulated participants' self-construal through a priming task. Tea was selected as the test product category. Participants in the public-use condition read the following instruction: "please imagine that you are going to buy tea to share with relatives/friends coming to home. You enjoy making tea in the living room for together moments. Those guests will have opportunities to judge you." Alternatively, participants in the private-use condition read: "please imagine that you are going buy tea to enjoy alone. You enjoy making tea at the bedroom for tranquil moments. No one will have opportunities to judge you." We used verbal-visual pun in our experimental ads. Participants were presented with one ad selected from a pool of three. The visual images and ad copy were manipulated to create personal nostalgia, historical nostalgia, and non-nostalgia conditions. The ads were comparable in visual elements, illustration, length of ad copy, and placement of brand logo. Three hundred and five adults participated in the experiment. After successful manipulation checks, a series of analysis of variance were conducted to examine proposed hypotheses. The results indicate that focusing on the comparison between two types of nostalgia without considering other factors may be overly simplistic. Three observations are noteworthy. First, the effects of nostalgic type were contingent on an individual's self-construal. This construct delineates the boundary conditions for the nostalgia on persuasion. Some nostalgic types work better on participants with interdependent self-construal. However, these differences did not emerge for participants with independent self-construal. This is consistent with Markus and Kitayama (1991) that interdependents are more likely to fluidly mutate across situations, whereas independents show more stable responses.

Second, an interaction between product type and nostalgic type on people with interdependent self-construal was observed. The results suggest that consumers with interdependent self-construal show a more positive attitude and higher purchase intentions in response to a historical nostalgia than a personal nostalgia when a product for public consumption is highlighted. Because individuals with high perceived interpersonal competence are more apt to harness nostalgia as a source of social connectedness by establishing proximity to close others (Wildschut et al., 2010), such orientations may lead people with interdependent self-construal to differ regarding what type of nostalgia to be used to promote a publicly-consumed versus a privately-consumer product. Reference group is an important source of user imagery and brand associations (Escalas and Bettman, 2005). A publicly-consumed product can serve a social purpose by reflecting social ties such as one’s family, community, and cultural groups. Researchers have long recognized the importance of goods in forming and symbolizing social relationships (e.g., Kamptner, 1991). One promising framework that researchers use to investigate the genesis of public meaning is social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). The public meanings of a product result from socialization and participation in shared activities (Richins, 1994). As symbols of heritage, historical nostalgia can add to and/or reinforce the way the consumer thinks about self from interpersonal perspectives.

Third, a personal nostalgia had an advantage when promoting privately-consumed products. Private meanings of a product are shaped by the private knowledge and experiences of the possessor with respect to the particular he or she owns (Richins, 1994). Autobiographical memory simulation is likened to personal memory (Brewer and Pani, 1983). Historical nostalgia does not share this response as this reaction by definition does not deal with autobiographical responses. The use of personal nostalgia is thus more effective than that of historical when promoting privately consumed products. The current investigation provides guidance for practitioners on how to frame the value of the product by choosing the right type of nostalgia and frame for the ad. Perceived public or private value determines which nostalgic type should be used. Altering the nostalgic type is a relatively straightforward task. Advertisers may improve advertising messages through judicious ad placement because audiences with different types of self-construal may have different lifestyles. Marketers can also use different types of nostalgia to attract consumers through various media such as direct mail catalogs, magazines, television shows, and movies. Marketers can make good use of these programs by placing commercials that are contemporaneous with the vintage programming. The marketers who wish to employ nostalgia appeals should identify consumers with interdependent self-construal. An appropriately presented visual should be incorporated into an existing marketing message or media campaign to increase its effectiveness when facing consumers with interdependent self-construal.

This research suggests that not all nostalgias are created equal, at least in terms of nostalgic type. When seeking the advantages that personal and historical nostalgia provide in obtaining and sustaining attention, advertisers should consider product type and individual differences in self-construal. Such knowledge is useful to advertisers who are interested in maximizing the impact of their advertising dollars.
REFERENCES


