Consumer Chronic Affect and Persuasiveness of Nostalgia Advertising Appeals

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We propose the relative effectiveness of nostalgia advertising will be moderated by viewers’ chronic affective state. Specifically, for viewers who are high on chronic positive affective state, nostalgia advertising will be more persuasive (in term of attitude toward ad, brand, and purchase intention) than non-nostalgia advertising; whereas for viewers who are low on chronic positive affective state, nostalgia advertising will not be more persuasive than non-nostalgia advertising. Enhanced persuasion of nostalgia advertising was mediated by positive emotion evoked after exposing to the ad. Our hypothesis was strongly supported by an experimental study. Implications to nostalgia advertising were discussed.

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**Extended Abstract**

As the nostalgia boom in the popular culture continues to expand in its depth and scope, nostalgic themes are frequently seen in advertising campaigns as well (Crain 2003; Goulding 2001; Muehling and Sprott 2004; Naughton and Vlasic 1998; Stern 1992). A growing number of marketers (e.g., Ford, Mars, PepsiCo, and GE) often connect or pair their brands with words, pictures, scenes, or music in their promotions by portraying a by-gone era to evoke nostalgia among viewers (Bussey 2008; Naughton and Vlasic 1998; Vranica 2009).

Even though the use of nostalgia as a promotional tool is on the rise, research on the topic—especially nostalgia in an advertising context—remains scarce, and the effectiveness of such marketing practice is not well understood (Bussey 2008; Crain 2003; Muehling and Sprott 2004; Stern 1992). Some research has found that nostalgic cues are capable of triggering positive thoughts in consumers and may result in positive attitude toward the advertised brand (Muehling and Sprott 2004). Nevertheless, others have viewed the use of nostalgia ads as a minefield (Bussey 2008; Crain 2003), noting that although nostalgia may be a useful approach for advertising, it has the likelihood of potentially alienating consumers and may even cause boomerang effects if nostalgic appeals are not accurately matched with target consumers.

Though previous research has demonstrated that nostalgia advertising can evoke positive thoughts and emotions in viewers and can subsequently enhance persuasion, few studies have examined the role of viewers’ characteristics on the effectiveness of nostalgia advertising. In the literature, researchers have long hinted that consumers’ characteristics play an important role in understanding individuals’ nostalgic experience. For example, Baker and Kennedy (1994) proposed that individuals’ responses to nostalgia would vary by gender and personal life experience. Holbrook (1993) proposed and empirically demonstrated that consumers could be segmented by their nostalgia proneness (i.e., individuals’ susceptibility and tendency to feel nostalgic). Extending this line of research to nostalgia advertising, it seems reasonable to expect there are important individual differences in how consumers will respond to nostalgia advertising, i.e., other individual characteristics may moderate the persuasiveness of nostalgia advertising.

One individual characteristic that bears consideration is consumers’ affective state. A considerable body of research has shown the impact of consumers’ affective state on the advertising persuasion process (see Cohen, Pham, and Andrade (2008) for a review). In addition, consumers’ affective state can usefully be differentiated by time frame, e.g., feelings at the present moment, chronic feelings during the past few days, and chronic feelings during the past few weeks and beyond (Watson, Clark, and Tellegen 1988). In our opinion, consumers’ chronic affect is especially important for nostalgia advertising since it is expected to influence viewers by evoking memories of the past, thereby, activating positive emotional resonance. In general, the more positive the emotional resonance, the more effective is the nostalgia advertising in influencing ad and brand attitudes. It is our contention, however, that the efficacy of nostalgia advertising at evoking positive emotional resonance depends on both the ad itself and on the viewer’s affective state (i.e., is the viewer’s general state of mind one that would be considered positive?). Holding the nostalgia advertising constant, we expect that the higher the viewers’ chronic positive affective state, the more positive emotional resonance will be evoked and subsequently the more persuasive the nostalgia advertising will be.

Thus, we expect the persuasiveness of nostalgia advertising to be moderated by viewers’ affective state, specifically, viewers’ chronic positive affect. For viewers who are high on chronic positive affect, nostalgia ads will work together with affective state (i.e., an additive effect) and subsequently arouse more positive emotional resonance in viewers, which in turn should boost nostalgia advertising persuasiveness. For viewers who are low on chronic positive affect, nostalgia ads are expected to mismatch with viewers’ affective state and, as a result, are expected to be less effective at arousing positive emotional resonance and be persuasive.

In the preliminary research reported here, one hundred thirty-seven undergraduate students (54.7% male, ranging in age from 18 to 25) participated in a two-factor between subject factorial experiment for course credits: 2 (Ad appeal: nostalgia ad vs. control) x 2 (viewers’ chronic positive affect: high vs. low). Participants’ chronic positive affect was measured using the positive affect sub-scale of the PANAS Scale, which measures the extent to which participants perceived they had experienced positive affect during the past few weeks (Watson, Clark, and Tellegen 1988). Consumer researchers have widely adopted and relied heavily on the scale in consumer
studies as well (Cohen, Pham, and Andrade 2008). Participants were placed into high and low chronic positive affect groups via a median-split procedure.

Two fictitious ads for Kodak digital cameras were adapted from the literature: one nostalgia ad and one non-nostalgia ad (i.e., control) (cf. Muehling and Sprott 2004). The ads featured a picture of a group of boys posing after a backyard basketball game on a summer afternoon. The two ads were comparable in visual format, color, illustration, length of ad copy, description of product features, and placement of brand logo, but differed in several important ways. Nostalgic cues replaced comparable, though non-nostalgic, cues in the headline (“Re-live the Moment” for the nostalgia ad versus “Capture the Moment” for the control ad), in the date inserted below the dominant picture (“Last day of Summer, August 28, 1998” versus “Last day of Summer, August 28, 2009”), in several statements placed in the ad copy (e.g., “It was a time like no other. . . . Remember?” versus “A moment just like this. . . . A stop in the action”), and in the tag line (“And, Kodak was there” versus “And, Kodak is there”). It is important to note that the highlighted product features (e.g., 10.2 MP, 3X optical zoom lens, etc.) were held constant across the two ads.

A set of two-way ANOVA analyses were conducted on the dependent measures including purchase intention, brand attitude, ad attitude, and ad-aroused positive emotion. Standard scale items were borrowed from the literature. Our hypotheses were all supported. A two-way ANOVA on intention to purchase revealed a significant interaction effect between ad appeal and viewers’ chronic positive affective state (F(1, 133)=6.47, p<.05). Subsequent pair-wise comparisons showed that, when participants were in a high chronic positive affect, those who viewed the nostalgia ad had a higher intention to purchase the advertised product (M=4.28) than those who viewed the non-nostalgia ad (M=3.75) (t(133)=2.00, p<.05). On the other hand, when participants were in a low chronic positive affect, those who viewed the nostalgia ad reported an intention to purchase the advertised product (M=3.52) comparable to those who viewed the non-nostalgia ad (M=3.92) (t(133)=1.59, p=.11). Similar results were found on other dependent measures.

REFERENCES

Temporal Construal, Categorization Processes, and Brand Extension Evaluation
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Extended Abstract
Categorization involves treating two or more distinct entities as equivalent (Medin 1989). Research in categorization has shown that perceptual similarity and conceptual coherence often serve as the two most common bases for judging the equivalence and subsequent categorization of objects into a particular group. For example, a robin and a nightingale can be classified into the same category of bird since they are perceptually similar such that both have feathers, wings and beak. In contrast, children, money, photo album and pets cannot be grouped together based on their physical appearance (i.e., perceptual similarity), but they may form a group based on their conceptual coherence (e.g., “things to take out of one’s house in case of fire”) (Barsalou 1983).

The basic difference in the above two types of categorization (which we term as perceptual and conceptual categorization, respectively hereafter) is that perceptual categorization involves mainly feature-matching among the category members, while conceptual categorization requires the identification of causal relationships or conceptual relatedness among the category members.

Various factors (e.g., cultural background and expertise) are found to moderate use of perceptual similarity or conceptual coherence in forming groups (Murphy and Medin 1985). We propose that the way an individual construes an event in time (near vs. distant future)–temporal construal of an individual, as another factor moderating the use of the two bases of categorization. Temporal construal...