

NOSTALGIA MAY NOT WORK FOR EVERYONE: THE CASE OF INNOVATIVE CONSUMERS

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Abstract. *In recent years, marketers have widely used nostalgia in their marketing strategies. However, little research has focused on understanding whether consumer responses to nostalgic communication are always positive. Seeking to fill this gap and referring to social identity theoretical framework, current research examines the relationship between nostalgia, innovativeness and consumer purchasing decisions. Empirical results demonstrate that innovativeness and nostalgia might indeed act in opposite directions. Managerial implications of the findings are considered and directions for future research suggested.*

Key words: *consumer behavior, nostalgia, innovativeness*

Introduction

Uses of nostalgic cues in marketing range from the development of new products with retro design elements to advertising campaigns using familiar past themes and evoking fond memories from bygone days (Euromonitor, 2012). Nostalgia is a powerful tool for marketing strategies (Lasaleta, Sedikides, & Vohs, 2014; Huang, Huang & Wyer, 2016), manifested in a variety of different product categories, starting from fast moving consumer goods, especially food and beverages, experiencing brands' or commercial jingles' revivals (e.g., limited edition of Crystal Pepsi, which re-appeared in shelves after two decades), and going further to re-introduction of sport shoes (e.g., Nike Air Jordan) or motor vehicles, such as Fiat 500 or Vespa Scooters. Even the worldwide success of "Pokemon Go" is the combination of both millennials' nostalgia for these big-eyed creatures and innovative technology, one of the first great applications of augmented reality (Routledge, 2016).

By definition consumer nostalgia is often conceptualized as a positive attitude (e.g., Holbrook & Schindler, 1991; Holak & Havlena, 1998; Pascal, Sprott & Muehling,

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2002). Holbrook & Schindler (1991) define it as a “preference (general liking, positive attitude, or favorable affect) toward objects (people, places, or things) that were more common (popular, fashionable, or widely circulated) when one was younger (in early adulthood, in adolescence, in childhood, or even before birth)”. Consumer nostalgia has been increasingly analyzed in consumer behavior and marketing literature and is perceived as an influential factor that may have a significant impact on consumer choices (e.g., Goulding, 2001; Holak & Havlena, 1998; Muehling & Pascal, 2011, 2012; Sierra & McQuitty, 2007). A range of studies show that nostalgia has a positive influence on attitude towards products and brands (e.g., Chou & Lien, 2010; Muehling & Pascal, 2012) and purchase intention (e.g., Sierra & McQuitty, 2007; Bambauer-Sachse & Gierl, 2009; Muehling et al., 2014). Research findings also suggest that appeals for charity which trigger personal nostalgia have an impact on consumers’ intention to donate (Zhou et al., 2012; Ford & Merchant, 2010). Also, feeling nostalgic weakens consumers’ desire for money because of its capacity to foster social connectedness (Lasaleta et al., 2014).

However, another set of studies reveal that in certain situations nostalgic products may evoke negative consumer reactions (Rindfleisch, Freeman & Burroughs, 2000; Gineikienė, 2012) and it is unclear whether all consumers react in the same way towards nostalgic products. This stream of research is little explored and is at odds with other existing studies’ findings. Answering the question whether nostalgia always generates positive reactions is of utmost importance to marketers, who base their campaigns on nostalgic cues, as it may be that nostalgic communication for some consumers not only generates positive, but negative reactions as well.

We argue that innovativeness might act as a variable that may cause negative consumer responses to nostalgic cues and products. Innovativeness is defined as the “degree to which an individual is relatively earlier in adopting new ideas than the average member of his social system” (Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971). Yet to date, few studies tried to explore what impact innovativeness and nostalgia have on consumer behavior. For instance, some research suggests that nostalgia does not have a significant influence on consumer preferences and it is better explained by such factors as attachment and innovativeness (Lambert-Pandraud & Laurent, 2010) and that consumers with more favorable attitude toward the past tend to be lower in innovativeness (Steenkamp, Hofstede & Wedel, 1999). Meanwhile, other authors argue that consumer innovativeness has a positive effect on attitudes towards products with nostalgic design (Fort-Rioche & Ackermann, 2013). These inconsistent findings suggest that there is a potential gap in literature which the current study aims to address.

The purpose of the present paper is to empirically analyze the links between nostalgia, innovativeness, and consumer preferences for nostalgic products. We aim to contribute to the existent literature in three ways. First, drawing on Social Identity Theory, we develop and test a conceptual model analyzing the impact of nostalgia and innovativeness on consumer purchasing behavior, which has not been analyzed in the litera-

ture before. In the structural model, we simultaneously examine the impact of consumer nostalgia and innovativeness on consumer preferences and expand our understanding into the existence of other, negatively to nostalgia related variables. Second, unlike in most previous studies on nostalgia, we focus both on actual and on intended behavior. Third, our findings provide additional information and recommendations relevant to current marketers for choosing appropriate marketing and communication strategies.

1. Conceptual background and hypotheses development

Following Social Identity Theory (SIT), which explains the relationship between an individual and his or her group membership or social environment (Tajfel, 1979), we form a theoretical basis for our study. SIT is based on the hypothesis that individuals are motivated to reach, protect and maintain a positive social identity in the context of comparisons between the in-groups and out-groups (Tajfel, 1982; Turner & Oakes, 1986). Social Identity Theory suggests that the strive for positive self-esteem encourages individuals to differentiate themselves from others and define themselves by unique characteristics, such as being raised during a particular time period, and this has influence on their intragroup and intergroup behavior (Tajfel, 1982; Sierra & McQuitty, 2007). Identification with a certain era, related to group membership, might influence individual's responses to stimuli or products associated with that era (Sierra & McQuitty, 2007).

Earlier applications of SIT show that this theory contributes to a better understanding of consumer behavior and that social identity may influence consumer behavior (Kleine, Kleine & Kernan, 1993; Reed 2002; Sierra & McQuitty, 2007). Sierra & McQuitty (2007) were the first to apply SIT in the context of analyzing factors which affect the purchase of nostalgic products. The results of their study showed a preliminary support for SIT in this context: cognitive and emotional responses toward a particular period of time affect consumer behavior, resulting in increased intentions to buy nostalgic products. Furthermore, memories of past group membership are connected to the present individual's self-identity (Fairley, 2003; Brown & Humphreys, 2002), and nostalgic reflections help individuals to maintain their identity over time (Baker & Kennedy, 1994). Thus, nostalgia contributes to a person's self-identity and differentiation from others through shared experiences and group membership (Brown & Humphreys, 2002; Baldwin et al., 2015).

Similarly, research on social-identity attitude function in the context of consumer innovativeness shows that social identity function has a great impact on innovativeness (Grewal, Mehta & Kardes, 2000). In particular, attitudes serving the social-identity function "facilitate the interpersonal interaction by communicating consumers' consumption-related values and goals to other consumers" (Grewal et al., 2000). Also, social identification is analyzed in the context of innovative behavior of consumers, revealing that persons who feel connected with a particular group will define themselves

in the characteristics of this group and will be willing to spread a positive image of this group (Bartels & Reinders, 2011), in this way resulting in more innovative behavior.

The relation of consumer nostalgia and innovativeness has not been broadly analyzed in the literature. The findings of some research suggest that nostalgia has relatively little influence on consumer preferences to buy older products and it is better explained by such factors as attachment and innovativeness (Lambert-Pandraud & Laurent, 2010). Some studies show that consumer innovativeness decreases with a more favorable attitude toward the past (Steenkamp et al., 1999). In contrast, other authors argue that consumer innovativeness has a positive effect on attitudes towards new technological products with nostalgic design (Fort-Rioche & Ackermann, 2013), leaving it unclear whether all consumers react in the same way towards nostalgic products.

In this context, drawing on SIT, we presume that nostalgic identity may be connected with innovativeness identity in a negative direction. Nostalgic identity is related to differentiating oneself from others through shared past experiences and group membership, while at the same time individuals may define themselves as innovative in their current social environment. Individuals who are more innovative identify themselves with groups of more innovative people and this might be inconsistent with nostalgic identity. This may result in unfavorable nostalgic products judgment and intention to purchase nostalgic products, hence:

H1: Innovativeness is negatively related to nostalgic products judgment.

H2: Innovativeness is negatively related to nostalgic products purchase intention.

Consumer nostalgia contributes to individuals' consumption motivation and increases the likelihood of nostalgia-related purchases (Goulding, 2002; Sierra & McQuitty, 2007). The findings of various authors converge: many studies have shown that consumer nostalgia has a positive and significant impact on attitude toward products and brands (e.g., Muehling & Sprott, 2004; Chou & Lien, 2010; Muehling et al., 2014). Further, there is also research which indicates that consumer nostalgia contributes to the greater intention to purchase nostalgic products (e.g., Muehling & Sprott, 2004; Sierra & McQuitty, 2007; Bambauer-Sachse & Gierl, 2009; Muehling et al., 2014). Therefore, consistent with nostalgia literature, it is hypothesized that:

H3: Consumer nostalgia is positively related to nostalgic products judgment.

H4: Consumer nostalgia is positively related to intention to purchase nostalgic products.

Product judgment and intention to purchase are frequently studied as outcomes in consumer nostalgia or innovativeness research (e.g., Muehling & Sprott, 2004; Sierra & McQuitty, 2007; Bambauer-Sachse & Gierl, 2009; Muehling et al., 2014). In general, product judgment has a positive impact on consumer intention to purchase. This is also supported by the Theory of Planned Behavior, suggesting that the more favorable attitude a person has, the stronger will be his or her intention to engage in a particular behavior, specifically in intention to buy and consume nostalgic products

(Ajzen, 1991) as well as actual behavior. Therefore, consistent with other research, it is hypothesized that:

H5: Product judgment is positively related to intention to purchase nostalgic products.

H6: Purchase intention is positively related with actual purchase of nostalgic products.

2. Methodology

2.1 Data collection and sample

Data for this study were collected using a convenience sample. The initial sample consisted of 346 adult respondents in Lithuania. 29 questionnaires were eliminated from further analysis after controlling for response bias, and 4 because of too short response time. The sample consisted of 313 consumers, 39% of which were men. The age of respondents ranged from 20 years old to 75 years old with a mean of 36.0 years (SD=12.8). Most survey participants (89%) came from the biggest city in Lithuania, had a higher education (88%) and had an average or above average income per one family member (81%). Compared to the general population of Lithuania, the sample involves a larger proportion of women and younger and urban respondents with higher income (Statistics Lithuania, 2015).

2.2 Research measures

For the operationalization of the constructs, we used scales that had been validated and tested in previous research. To measure *consumer nostalgia*, the five-item Southampton nostalgia scale was selected (Routledge et al., 2008) (example item: *How often do you experience nostalgia? Very rarely – very frequently*, scale reliability: $\alpha=0.90$). *Innovativeness* was operationalized using a scale originally developed by Hurt, Joseph & Cook (1977) and shortened by Pallister & Foxal (1998). A shortened version of this 10-item innate innovativeness scale (7-point Likert scale from 1='totally do not agree', 7='totally agree') has improved reliability coefficients compared to the original 20-item scale (example item: *I rarely trust new ideas until I can see whether the vast majority of people around me accept them*, scale reliability: $\alpha=0.85$). *Product judgment* scale consisted of three-items, measured on a 7-point Likert scale from 1='strongly disagree', 7='strongly agree' (Keller & Aaker, 1992) (example item: *Better than currently existing products*, scale reliability: $\alpha=0.85$). *Intention to purchase* was measured using a modified version of Dodds, Monroe & Grewal (1991) intention to purchase scale adapted by Grewal, Monroe & Krishnan (1998). It is a 3-item 7-point Likert scale where specific items are anchored from 'very low' to 'very high' (example item: *The probability that I would consider buying this product is...*). *Actual purchase* was measured as the sum of all nostalgic products purchased during the last year.

The list of nostalgic products for this research was formed after conducting five interviews with experts in marketing industry and a pre-test. Two different product categories were selected for this study: fast-moving consumer goods (sweets, cookies) and cultural products (music, movies). These product categories have also proven to be popular in other research on consumer nostalgia (e.g., Holbrook & Schindler, 1994, 1996; Sierra & McQuitty, 2007; Loveland et al., 2010; Bambauer-Sachse & Gierl, 2009; Kessous & Roux, 2010). The list of nostalgic products, which was generated after conducting interviews, was pre-tested with 50 adult respondents who were later not invited to participate in the main study.

3. Results

To test our hypotheses, we estimated a structural equation model using LISREL 9.1. The estimation of the model produced the following goodness-of-fit statistics: $\chi^2 = 246.236$, $df = 129$, $RMSEA = 0.0540$, $CFI = 0.983$, $SRMR = 0.0417$, which indicated a good fit. Standardized parameter estimates as well as associated t-values are shown in Figure 1. In support of hypothesis 1, innovativeness is negatively related to nostalgic product judgment ($\beta = -0.19$, $t = -3.12$, $p < .01$). However, no significant relationship between innovativeness and nostalgic product purchase intention was found, therefore hypothesis 2 was not supported. Next, supporting hypotheses 3 and 4, nostalgia is positively related to nostalgic product judgment ($\beta = 0.32$, $t = 4.99$, $p < .01$) and intention to purchase nostalgic products ($\beta = 0.43$, $t = 7.52$, $p < .01$). In line with hypotheses 5 and 6, product judgment is positively related to intention to purchase nostalgic products ($\beta = 0.38$, $t = 6.61$, $p < .01$) and purchase intention is positively related with actual purchase of nostalgic products ($\beta = 0.30$, $t = 5.34$, $p < .01$).

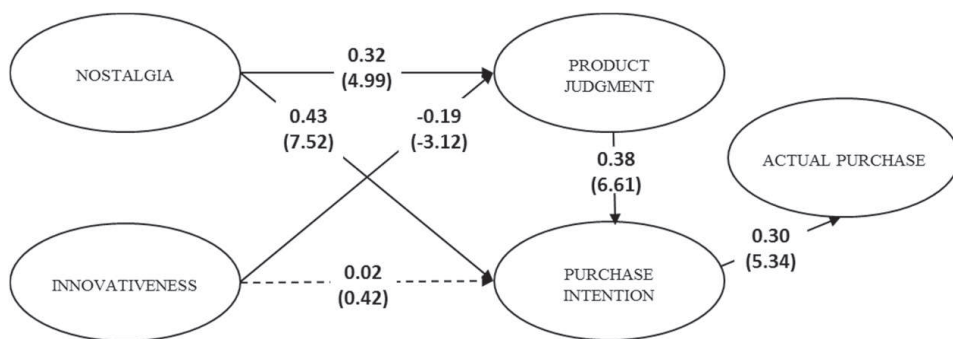


FIGURE 1. Hypotheses testing results

Note: standardized estimates shown (t-values in brackets), non-significant paths are dashed; all p-values < 0.01.

Conclusions

Our study sheds light on better understanding of consumer behaviour related to nostalgic products. Although the existing literature suggests positive effects of nostalgic cues, it may be unreasonable to expect that these effects can be generalized to all consumer groups and market conditions (Zhao et al., 2014). Nostalgic products elicit not only positive reactions as it has been extensively claimed in existing literature (e.g., Bam-bauer-Sachse & Gierl, 2009, Muehling & Sprott, 2004), in certain situations they can cause negative consumer reactions, which was proposed by other researchers (Rindfleisch et al., 2000; Gineikienė, 2012). In line with this research and building on social identity literature, this study examines the links between nostalgia, innovativeness, and consumer preferences for nostalgic products. We offer empirical evidence that innovativeness is related with consumer nostalgic preferences in a negative direction. In other words, the more innovative a consumer is, the less positive attitude he or she will have towards nostalgic products.

Indeed, individuals who are more innovative identify themselves with groups of more innovative people and this is inconsistent with their nostalgic identity. Thus, it is revealed that although the effect of nostalgia attracts more nostalgic consumers, at the same time it might repel the ones who are more innovative. These results differ to some extent from the findings of Lambert-Pandraud & Laurent (2010) research, which suggests that innovativeness can better explain consumer preferences than nostalgia. One issue that could be considered is different product categories that were studied – hedonic and luxury products (Lambert-Pandraud & Laurent, 2010) vs. fast-moving consumer goods (sweets, cookies) and cultural products (music, movies), which might have an impact on obtained results.

Also, the findings of our study confirm that consumer nostalgia plays an important role in consumer behavior – it is positively related with nostalgic product judgment and willingness to buy nostalgic products, which supports the results of prior research (e.g., Muehling & Sprott 2004; Chou & Lien, 2010; Muehling et al., 2014).

Managerial implications

The findings of our research also bear multiple practical implications. The results of this study are relevant for marketers and advertisers who use nostalgic appeals in their campaigns to attract consumers and benefit from their positive responses to nostalgia (e.g., Reisenwitz et al., 2004; Muehling & Sprott, 2004). From a practitioner's point of view, our findings suggest that the use of nostalgia in marketing should not necessarily yield universally beneficial results, irrespective of the target audience (Muehling et al., 2014).

As the results of present research revealed, consumer nostalgia and innovativeness may act in opposite directions, therefore, marketers should be careful using these appeals together because this might result in weakening the expected positive effect. Also, consumers who tend to be high in innovativeness may be unresponsive to nostalgic

cues and communication as they may be too closely tied with images of an out-of-date past to appeal to highly innovative individuals. Marketers are more likely to benefit from using a nostalgic theme if they exploit it in appropriate settings and thoroughly consider their target audience. To do so, they may wish to run a market research study analyzing their customer segment profiles and evaluating their levels of nostalgia and innovativeness in the context of other important characteristics. Taking into consideration this information about their target segments, marketers would be more confident in preparing marketing strategies and would be able to obtain the greater impact from nostalgia-based marketing campaigns as well as avoid the undesired responses from mistargeted consumers.

Directions for further research

Several potential directions for future research can be identified. First, this research was performed using convenience sampling, therefore the findings might be specific to this sample and should not be generalized for the whole population. For greater generalizability, additional replications are encouraged that employ more diverse population, varying in age, education, or culture.

Next, as the results of prior research show that effects of nostalgia may be object or product category specific, we suggest that future researchers replicate and extend our findings by using different types of products. In the present research, we tested products that are mainly intended for private usage. However, the observed effect may be even stronger for conspicuous products. Other product categories could also be considered, such as technological or luxury products. What is more, as product categories which were included in this study might not bear high innovation potential, future research could extend our research findings by analysing product categories which are similarly innovative and nostalgic.

Furthermore, current research might be the basis for future studies, examining the impact of consumer nostalgia, innovativeness and other relevant factors for consumers' behavior. Further research can extend our findings by analyzing other forms of innovativeness (e.g., domain-specific innovativeness) or different dimensions of consumer nostalgia, such as historical nostalgia, related to a time before one's birth (e.g., Baker & Kennedy, 1994).

Moreover, as we measured (rather than manipulated) nostalgia, we are unable to make causal assertions. Therefore, one more promising direction for extending our research could be to incorporate experimental designs. Longitudinal designs could also provide additional insights. Finally, present research could be extended into additional factors that might interplay together with innovativeness and nostalgia, such as time perspective or attachment.

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