

How to Construct Nostalgic Marketing in a Dormant Brand Resurrection

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Keywords: Dormant brand, Genuine nostalgia, Artificial nostalgia, Inter-generational nostalgia, Real nostalgia

Abstract: When some brands failed and withdrew from the marketplace, they fell into dormant station and may evoke nostalgia after some time. This study investigated the role of nostalgic marketing in reviving dormant brands by constructing two types of nostalgia strategies: genuine nostalgia (including real nostalgia from personal experience and inter-generational nostalgia from previous generation experience) and artificial nostalgia. The results of two experiments revealed that: (a) both artificial nostalgia and genuine nostalgia can trigger people's nostalgic emotion; (b) the nostalgic emotion evoked by genuine nostalgia from real personal and parents experience is higher than that of artificial nostalgia; (c) inter-generational experience can also evoke strong nostalgia, which strengthens consumers' brand familiarity and repurchase intention. The findings suggest that either from personal experience or previous generational experience could elicit nostalgia, and highlight the role of dormant brand dormant brand revival and nostalgic marketing in theory and practice.

1. Introduction

Nostalgia is a complex emotion that generates self-positive and social connections (Sedikides et al.,2015)^[1]. Marketers try to develop new products or resurrect disappeared brands to arouse individuals' nostalgic feelings and then promote their consumption. Holbrook and Schindler (1989)^[2] were the first to introduce nostalgic emotions into the field of marketing research. Subsequently, the marketing topics related to nostalgia have become an important topic that scholars pay attention to. In the marketing domain, products and advertising messages based on nostalgia have increased over the past three decades (Marchegiani and Phau,2011)^[3]. We may mix past and present narrations to improve consumer behaviour towards retro-brands through the mediating role of consumer nostalgia proneness (Volpert and Michel,2022)^[4]. For example, Cadbury, a well-known British candy maker, has repeatedly launched old brands, flavours, styles, and names to awaken consumers' nostalgic emotions and thus influence their purchase decisions. The research on using nostalgia in the marketing field is divided into three main aspects: (1) The positive effect of adding nostalgic elements to advertising and packaging design can trigger consumers' positive

attitude and better experience (Stephan,2014)^[4]. (2) Using the nostalgic concept to establish a good relationship between consumers and brands to promote brand loyalty, previous studies reported that the more nostalgic the consumers are, the more inclined they are to trust and get attached to the brand (Yi and Minggui,2012; Baojun,2014)^{[5][6]}. Researchers also confirmed the effect of building nostalgic cultural assets on reshaping brand influence in the revival strategy of time-honoured brands (Yingnan and Minggui,2016)^{[7][8]}. (3) The impact of different personal characteristics; consumers who emphasise an independent self are more inclined to initiate personal nostalgia. Consumers who emphasise the interdependent self are more inclined to virtual collective nostalgia (Junwu et al.,2011)^[9]. However, these studies mainly focused on extant brands.Nostalgic elements can also be implanted in the revival of corporate cultural assets and brand assets of disappeared brands (Nasreen et al.,2019)^[10]. Since “brand” is a combination of functionality, value expression, and social regulation, nostalgia and brand evaluation are important driving forces for reviving disappeared brands (Davari,2017)^[11].Although many previous studies were focused on the application and theories of nostalgia in marketing, they failed to reveal whether nostalgia in different dimensions can be applied in the revival of disappeared brands and how to implant nostalgia. Moreover, the reaction of consumers to the usage of nostalgia and how they use nostalgia to recall beautiful memories of their past lives are yet to be established. Thus, the issue of how to evoke consumers’ nostalgic feelings and promote their repurchase intention requires urgent attention.

Therefore, this study considered three scenarios(1) artificial nostalgia of extant brands, (2) nostalgia of disappeared brands from personal consumption experience, (3) and nostalgia of disappeared brands from inter-generation consumption experience to test (a) whether nostalgic feelings can be evoked by showcasing not only self but also other individuals’ experiences in reviving disappeared brands and whether nostalgia promotes the willingness to repurchase; (b) whether existing brands can use artificial methods to trigger significant nostalgic feelings.

2. Theoretical background and research hypotheses

2.1. Comparative study of real nostalgia, inter-generational nostalgia and artificial nostalgia

Nostalgia has become a prevalent emotion among all ages across different cultural groups (Hepper et al., 2014; Yuanyuan et al., 2021)^{[12][13]}. Nostalgic experience is no longer limited to the elderly group, nor is it just an individual’s simple memory of past events (Guoxuan et al., 2018)^[14]. Yan et al. (2016)^[15] pointed out that young individuals are becoming an important group of nostalgic consumption. Nostalgia is a complex system that includes many factors, such as environment, time, space, emotion, cognition, self, and others. Therefore, the following assumption was put forward.

H1a: People will perceive feelings of nostalgia from a genuine approach and an artificial approach.

H1b: People will perceive stronger feelings of nostalgia from a genuine approach than an artificial approach.

Davis (1979)^[16] proposed real nostalgia and inter-generational nostalgia based on whether nostalgia originated from the self or others. Real nostalgia comes from personal experience: Inter-generational nostalgia refers to the memory of the past through indirect ways such as contact and interaction with others. Considering the era and population together, nostalgia may be divided into real nostalgia, simulated nostalgia, and common nostalgia (Baker and Kennedy,1994)^[17]. Simulated nostalgia refers to an individual’s perception of historical figures and important events. Therefore, we classified nostalgia from personal consumption experience as real nostalgia, and nostalgia from inter-generation consumption experience as inter-generational nostalgia. Both real nostalgia and

inter-generational nostalgia are called as genuine nostalgia. The following assumption was made.

H2: People will perceive stronger feelings of nostalgia from inter-generational nostalgia than from real nostalgia.

2.2. Brand nostalgia and customers repurchase intention

Sultan and Muehling (2010)^[18] reported that brand advertising with nostalgic themes have a significant impact on the formation of customers' purchase intentions. Baker and Kennedy (1994)^[17] indicated that nostalgia can be regarded as an emotional feeling of past experiences, which can affect the customers' behavioral preferences. Currently, there are many brands in a dormant state although the sales and services of brand products have ceased, other forms of interactions continue. For example, the exchange of product information and knowledge will leave a mark of the past, which may disappear after some time, and this provides an opportunity for the renewal of the relationship (Gadde and Mattsson, 1987; Havila and Wilkinson, 2002)^{[19][20]}. Managers refer to these dormant brands as "sleeping beauties". Therefore, the following assumption was made.

H3: The familiarity and nostalgia of disappeared brands have a positive and significant impact on repurchase intention.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Stimuli materials

To operate these two types of nostalgia products, this study adopted real photos of disappeared brands and product photos of existing brands with a nostalgic filter. To eliminate the factors of familiarity and participants' fatigue, the same product category (e.g., beverages and snacks) was chosen, and two types of brand products correspond in variety and quantity. The dormant brands selected were Jianlibao (beverage), Xurisheng (beverage), BlackBerry (mobile phone), and Nokia (mobile phone). The existing brands with nostalgic filters selected were Coca Cola (beverage), Wanglaojie (beverage), Samsung (mobile phone), and Huawei (mobile phone). To control the visual features of each photo, all photos were presented in the same size (800*600 dpi). The familiarity of all the photo materials was pretested. Thus, in the genuine nostalgia condition, participants viewed the original photos of the dormant brands, and in the artificial nostalgia condition, participants viewed the artificial photos of existing brands with a nostalgic filter (Yuanyuan et al., 2021)^[13].

3.2. Methods

3.2.1 Research design

In nostalgic marketing, there are two types of construction approaches (Havlena and Holak, 1991)^[21]: (a) disappeared products and messages drawn directly from the past; (b) new products and messages that create a period feeling. This study adopted three different approaches for constructing nostalgia: genuine nostalgia and artificial nostalgia. Genuine nostalgia is divided into real and inter-generational nostalgia. Real nostalgia refers to the nostalgia evoked through pictures of the disappeared brand products that individuals have known. Inter-generational nostalgia refers to the nostalgia evoked through pictures of disappeared brand products that were known to the individuals' parents. Artificial nostalgia refers to the nostalgia evoked through pictures of existing brand products processed through a nostalgia filter. Three groups of product photographs were used to create contexts of real nostalgia, inter-generational nostalgia, and artificial nostalgia, to check their psychological impact on nostalgia, and the influence of nostalgia and familiarity of

disappeared brands on dormant brands repurchase intention.

Study 1 pretested the interference of brand familiarity and nostalgic filter on nostalgia. Study 2 tested H1a, H1b, H2, and the difference in nostalgic emotion intensity between artificial nostalgia and genuine nostalgia (real nostalgia and inter-generational nostalgia). Study 3 tested whether the familiarity and nostalgia of dormant brands have a positive and significant impact on repurchase intention. Both studies conducted online surveys on the Credamo Data Research Platform. In the pretest study, participants were assigned both genuine and artificial nostalgia experiments, received two groups of randomly presented photos, and were asked to report their feelings after viewing each photo. In the formal study, maturity factors and participants' fatigue were minimized. In genuine (real nostalgia and inter-generational nostalgia) and artificial nostalgia, two sets of product photos of dormant brands and one set of product photos of existing brands were adopted. The three sets of product photos correspond in quantity. The corresponding categories of each set of photos were the same, and they were randomly selected to balance the experimental design within the group to reduce systematic errors.

3.2.2 Data analysis

Statistical test included both within-group and between-group comparisons. As the ages typically differ in both the intensity of nostalgic feelings and the type of stimuli that evoke nostalgic feelings, the research included age as control variables. In addition, the stimulants were Chinese brand products, and the participants were people aged from 20 to 30 in China.

4. Study 1: Pretest the interference of brand familiarity and nostalgic filter on nostalgia

Editing the product photos of existing brands with the nostalgia filter to create nostalgic scenes was an artificial nostalgic method adopted by Yuanyuan et al. (2021)^[13] to constructing the buildings' appearance in nostalgic tourism destinations. Excluding other emotional effects caused by the nostalgia filter, the study compared the nostalgic degree generated by the nostalgic filter itself with the nostalgic emotion aroused by the product photos of the real disappeared brands. To avoid the interference of brand familiarity, a pretest was carried out before the test to ensure that the subjects had a certain familiarity with the test brand.

The stimuli were divided into two groups. One group comprised the dormant brands that have disappeared. The brand products include those that are familiar to their parents or belonged to that era but are unknown to the participants. In the other group, the pictures were treated with a nostalgic filter to form another group of pictures. The dormant brands adopted were Nokia (mobile phone), BlackBerry (mobile phone).

In total, 186 participants (115 women and 71 men, aged 20 to 30 years), were recruited from the subject pool of a Chinese online survey platform; they completed an online survey in exchange for 1 yuan. Additionally, all the participants lived in China. Participants were assigned to both groups, the genuine nostalgia condition (n = 558) and the artificial nostalgia condition (n = 558). In the former, the participants watched three product photos of dormant brands that could evoke inter-generational nostalgia. In a simulated nostalgic situation, participants watched the same pictures edited with a nostalgic filter. All product photos were randomly presented. After watching carefully, all participants were required to use the 5-point Likert scale to assess the intensity of nostalgia for each photo.

Compared with the original dormant product photos in the genuine nostalgia condition (Mean = 4.35, Standard Deviation = 0.817), photos with a nostalgic filter in the artificial nostalgia condition (Mean = 4.37, Standard Deviation = 0.913) were perceived as more nostalgic. However, compared with the original dormant product photos, artificial nostalgia photos were perceived as not

significantly difference ($t = -0.656$, $p = 0.512 > 0.05$). Although photos of inter-generational nostalgic brand products processed by the nostalgia filter also make the consumers highly nostalgic, they are not significantly different from the genuine inter-generational nostalgic brand products. This shows that nostalgia filter itself will not significantly increase the impact of nostalgia on genuine disappeared brand products, and that using a nostalgic filter on the pictures of existing brand products in formal research can enhance the nostalgic feeling, but it will not have a significant impact on the nostalgic emotional intensity of dormant brands.

5. Study 2: A comparative study on the intensity of nostalgic emotion aroused by genuine nostalgia and artificial nostalgia

5.1. Participants

The participants (60 females and 140 males, with 6% under 20 years old, and 94% 21-30 years old), completed the online survey in exchange for 1 yuan. All the participants lived in China.

5.2. Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to two conditions: genuine nostalgia condition ($n = 600$) and artificial nostalgia condition ($n = 600$). All product photos were randomly presented. In the real nostalgia condition, participants viewed photos of two dormant brands (Jianlibao beverage, Xurisheng beverage). In inter-generational nostalgia (Blackberry, Nokia), participants viewed two pictures of dormant brand products consumed by their parents or the previous generation. In the artificial nostalgia condition, participants viewed two photos of existing brand products (Samsung, Huawei) edited with a nostalgia filter. After viewing each photo carefully, all participants were required to evaluate their specific feelings toward each photo using a 5-point Likert scale.

5.3. Results

5.3.1. Familiarity analysis

Participants reported that their familiarity with the product photos of existing brands (Mean = 4.48, Standard Deviation = 0.634) was higher than that of dormant brands (real nostalgia: Mean = 3.69, Standard Deviation = 1.230; inter-generational nostalgia: Mean = 4.01, Standard Deviation = 1.116). Participants have certain familiarity with all the test brands.

5.3.2. Analysis of different types of nostalgic emotion intensities

This study conducted a multivariate test, which showed that the degree of nostalgia of different nostalgia types was statistically different ($P = 0.000$). Simultaneously, a spherical test was carried out. The Mauchly's test statistic for nostalgia type was 0.982, $P = 0.167$, which was consistent with spherical. Therefore, considering the result of the first 'hypothetical sphere' as the analysis result, it is evident from the results of analysis of variance that there is a statistical difference in the intensity of nostalgia caused by different nostalgia types ($F = 23.652$, $P = 0.000$).

Therefore, a comparative study on the degree of real nostalgia, inter-generational nostalgia, and artificial nostalgia was carried out through repeated experiments in participants. Compared with the artificial photos with nostalgia filter under artificial nostalgia conditions (Mean = 3.62, Standard deviation = 1.025), the nostalgia caused by the original photos of dormant brands in the genuine nostalgia state was stronger (real nostalgia: Mean = 4.02, Standard deviation = 1.042; inter-generational nostalgia: Mean = 4.25, Standard deviation = 1.015). Real nostalgic photos are

considered more nostalgic ($P = 0.000 < 0.05$). Participants reported that the degree of nostalgia for real nostalgic product photos (Mean = 4.02, Standard deviation = 1.042) was lower than that of inter-generational nostalgia dormant brands (Mean = 4.25, Standard deviation = 1.015), but there was not significant difference between the two ($P = 0.10 > 0.05$).

5.4. Conclusion

The results of two experiments revealed that: (a) people could experience nostalgia both from artificial nostalgic photos and from genuine nostalgic photos, which proved H1a. (b) the nostalgic emotion evoked by genuine nostalgia from real personal and parents experience is significantly higher than that of artificial nostalgia, which proved H1b. (c) People can better perceive more stronger nostalgic feelings from inter-generational nostalgic photos than real nostalgia, but there was not statistically significant, which didn't prove H2.

6. Study 3: The familiarity and nostalgia of dormant brand have a positive and significant impact on repurchase intention

The logistic regression results show that the familiarity of disappeared brands has a significant impact on repurchase intention ($\beta = 0.355$, $WALD = 1.878$, $t = 6.447$, $p < 0.05$), and brand nostalgia has a significant impact on dormant brands' repurchase intention ($\beta = 0.321$, $t = 4.935$, $p < 0.05$).

The F value of the regression part is 69.929, and the corresponding p-value is 0.00, which is less than the significance level of 0.05. Therefore, the scoring model was highly significant.

We tested the regression coefficients and relevant statistics of the linear regression model. The constant of the model is 1.253, and the coefficients of brand nostalgia and brand familiarity are 0.355 and 0.321, respectively, indicating that the degree of brand nostalgia and familiarity are positively correlated with the degree of repurchase intention. The T values were 6.447 and 4.935, respectively, and the corresponding probability was 0.000, indicating that the coefficient was highly significant.

7. Results and Discussion

Through three experimental studies, this research explored the degree of nostalgia evoked by real nostalgia, inter-generational nostalgia, and artificial nostalgia conditions, and purchase intention of dormant brands elicited by nostalgia and familiarity. The results show that: (a) both artificial and genuine nostalgia conditions can evoke nostalgia; (b) the degree of nostalgia caused by genuine nostalgia is higher than that caused by artificial nostalgia; (c) inter-generational experience not directly experienced by self will also evoke more strong nostalgia than real nostalgia, which will lead to the strengthening of brand familiarity and the enhancement of purchase intention.

8. Conclusions

This study contributes to the revival of dormant brands and nostalgic marketing based on many aspects. First, implanting nostalgic feelings of disappeared brands that fit individuals' consumption experience can increase the familiarity of the brand and enhance the possible repurchase intention. Second, in the perception of historical figures and important events, individuals indirectly experience events they never experienced through an imagination and simulation function, which is a kind of nostalgia for the events experienced by others. The nostalgic emotion brought about by this inter-generational nostalgic experience can also increase brand familiarity. The study put

forward to remake brand elements with a sense of this time to revive disappeared brands, which have no direct connection with personal memory. We investigated old brand products with strong inter-generational nostalgia and used the memory of old products to stimulate people's inter-generational and historical nostalgia. Subsequently, we found that consumers can still stimulate nostalgia for brands whose products they have not purchased or consumed. This phenomenon of 'virtual nostalgia' may exist, which is particularly important for memory reconstruction and brand re-engineering after the revival of dormant brands. Thirdly, it proposes the idea of involving nostalgic elements in existing brands to increase consumers' purchase intention.

As for the methodology, by following strict and systematic experimental procedures, the study explored how different stimuli affect people's mental and behavioral responses and control irrelevant variables. This study evoked nostalgia by showing the participants three sets of photos and manipulating two different ways.

8.1. Practical implications

The research results provide guidance for stakeholders and for reviving dormant brands. On the one hand, genuine nostalgia can stimulate more positive emotions than artificial nostalgia, which demonstrates the market value of dormant brands. On the other hand, although the dormant brands have disappeared and are not currently accessed by individuals, as the memory of the former collective or the older generation is inherited, it affects individuals' consumption choices. These findings show that enterprises should use many elements of the past, such as traditional elements, national elements, and historical elements, to balance the disharmony in consumers' purchases. Concomitantly, appropriate implantation of nostalgic elements into existing brands is conducive to increase purchase intention.

8.2. Limitations and future research

The main restrictions include the experimental materials used, age of the investigated population, and nostalgic elements selected. In this study, dormant brands, and existing brands with a high degree of familiarity were selected. In future research, the selection of stimuli can be extended to brands with a low degree of familiarity or service brand or corporate brand. Simultaneously, the adoption of nostalgic elements only considers the nostalgic emotion caused by visual elements and does not consider other elements such as sound and taste, which can be considered in future research. Future research should explore key factors after reshape nostalgic value of dormant brand, we may use EEG equipment and eye tracker to find consumers' true neural response. Considering that nostalgia may be stronger owing to age, to control for age, this study only selected participants between 20–30 years old as the survey population. This study only considered real nostalgia, inter-generational nostalgia, and artificial nostalgia, without adding historical elements. The nostalgia caused by historical elements may bring greater benefits to the revival of some dormant brands.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the financial supports from Chongqing Natural Science Foundation of China (Grant No: cstc2020jcyj-msxmX0052); and Chongqing Technology and Business University Key projects of China (Grant No: 1952003).

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