The cross-cultural scale development process: The case of brand-evoked nostalgia in Belgium and the United States

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ABSTRACT

Scale development in a cross-cultural context is demanding and exacting. The purpose of this paper is to follow the necessary protocols to examine the emerging construct of brand nostalgia. This research contributes to the literature by developing a rigorously tested, reliable and valid scale to measure the multi-dimensional nature of brand nostalgia across two countries – Belgium and the U.S. Following the rigorous scale development procedures suggested by Churchill (1979) and Devellis (2003), emic (country and market-specific) scales are developed in Belgium and the United States through a series of iterative studies. By using items common to both emic scales, a derived etic scale is created and tested. The scale's robustness is validated via tests of invariance, dimensionality, reliability, discriminant and nomological validity. Suggestions for future research and managerial implications are provided.

1. Introduction

Contemporary branding activities by a host of companies demonstrate a managerial interest in nostalgia as a practical marketing tool. Such activities, employed in a wide variety of product categories, aim to take consumers back to the past. For example, Old Navy gave their brand a boost by tapping into 1980s pop culture, while Herbal Essences re-released their "Shine and Smooth" hair care collection from the 1990s. In NBC Universal's's (2013) "Brand Power Index" study, which measures the 500 most talked about brands as determined by factors like social media buzz and online searches, brands evoking the past shot to the top of the Index. This suggests that brand nostalgia can be a key driver for consumer brand purchase (Braun-LaTour, LaTour, & Zinkhan, 2007; Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003). Little attention, however, has been paid to measuring the complex nature of this construct. More academic research is surely warranted to develop and validate a generalizable measure of brand nostalgia to help companies gauge and track the nuanced components of nostalgia associated with their brands.

Existing marketing research, however, has focused almost entirely on measuring consumers' nostalgic tendencies as an individual difference (e.g., Holbrook, 1993; Schindler & Holbrook, 2003) or the response to nostalgia-themed advertising stimuli (e.g., Merchant, LaTour, Ford, & LaTour, 2013; Merchant & Rose, 2013; Muehling & Pascal, 2011). Surely it is crucial, however, to deliberate on the nostalgia that is embedded in experiences (lived or idealized) with brands, and not just to focus on a reaction to an advertising stimulus. Keeping this in mind, brand nostalgia is conceptualized here as a "*reflection of the past comprised of memories, emotions and thoughts related to the consumer's lived or idealized experiences with the brand.*" Previous measures of brand nostalgia have been only single-item or unidimensional (e.g., Kessous, Roux, & Chandon, 2015) or have been developed ad-hoc, without following the necessary rigorous scale development procedures (e.g, Reisenwitz, Iyer, & Cutler, 2004). Furthermore, virtually all previous research on nostalgia has been conducted within a single country setting with a single language, limiting any cross-cultural applicability. Despite the clear managerial and theoretical importance of brand nostalgia, current research on measuring this construct offers limited guidance.

Considering this gap, this study's contribution to the literature is through developing a rigorously tested, reliable and valid scale to measure and decouple the multi-dimensional nature of brand nostalgia across two countries – Belgium and the United States. Following scale development procedures suggested by Churchill (1979) and Devellis (2003), emic (country and market-specific) scales were developed in Belgium and the United States through several iterative studies. By

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using items common to both emic scales, a derived etic scale is created. The scale's robustness is established via tests of invariance, dimensionality, reliability, discriminant and nomological validity. The research steps are summarized in Appendix 1.

2. Issues in cross-cultural scale development

Scale development in a cross-cultural context is a difficult process. A common practice in previous research has been to back-translate instruments developed in English in the United States into a variety of target languages and then to use these translations in foreign survey instruments without qualitatively assessing the cultural or linguistic equivalence of the construct scales involved. Douglas and Nijssen (2003) point out that this method risks imposing the original culture's perspective in cross-cultural research. The authors urge researchers to decenter their cross-cultural investigations, in order to avoid imposing a given culture's (typically, the U.S.'s) perspective on the research questions and results. Of particular concern is construct equivalence when the construct is socially or culturally embedded (Chidlow, Plakoyiannaki, & Welch, 2014; Douglas & Nijssen, 2003; Watkins, 2010). If proper cultural context is not established and the construct manifestations are not qualitatively evaluated for appropriateness in the new cultural setting, the results obtained from any survey work would be highly suspect (Watkins, 2010).

Scholars have found that a particularly problematic issue in survey execution in a cross-cultural context is the etic/emic distinction as propped by Pike (1967). The emic perspective is a market/culture-specific context for survey research as opposed to the etic perspective that attempts to build universal theories and constructs without the embeddedness of specific cultures (Morris, Leung, Ames, & Lickel, 1999; Watkins, 2010). Researchers too-often assume that emic measures, developed in a specific language and culture, are actually etic (universal) in nature, without doing the necessary qualitative and quantitative research to ensure that there are no serious culturally-specific aspects to the constructs in question (Douglas & Craig, 2006; Douglas & Nijssen, 2003).

So given these issues and challenges, how should the cross-cultural marketing researcher deal with these problems? It would seem that the logical way to address the issues would be to starts from an emic framework and then moves toward an etic perspective. Indeed, Berry (1969) suggests that such a "derived etic" approach would be a logical way to tackle this problem, by employing an emic perspective in multiple cultural settings in order to find common components of a construct that would allow a basis for subsequent cross-cultural comparison. Building upon this approach, a particularly promising suggestion by Douglas and Craig (2006) is to build locally modified etic models and/or composite emic models where a final model is based upon commonalities found in separate, culturally-specific emic models. In the current study, the approach originally suggested by Smith and Schwartz (1997) was employed, which involves the development of parallel emic models, built individually within a given culture, which then serve as the foundation for a single common etic model, which holds across cultures (Watkins, 2010). The a priori assumption is that the individual emic models would be somewhat different from each other in terms of the underlying items and factor structures, but that by identifying commonalities across emic scales, it would be possible to derive an etic model with superior explanatory power (compared to the individual emic models).

3. Conceptualizing brand nostalgia

Although there is clear evidence that brands may produce nostalgia (Balmer, 2011; Braun-LaTour et al., 2007; Brown et al., 2003; Loveland, Smeesters, & Mandel, 1995), the conceptualization and definition of brand nostalgia are less obvious. Brown et al. (2003) suggest nostalgic brand as a product or service brand from a prior historical period, which is usually not updated to contemporary standards of performance, functioning, or taste. Other scholars provide a very broad definition: "brands that were popular in the past (and are still popular now)" (Loveland et al., 1995; p. 397). Orth and Gal (2012) associate nostalgic brands with nostalgic memories. Some authors define nostalgic brands by brand characteristics: everyday brands (e.g., Haribo gummy bears) that evoke past memories, traditional brands that project authenticity (such as Paul bakeries), transitional brands (like Citroën) which help maintain the consumers' identity and, lastly, trans-generational brands (such as Patek Philip) which are like heirlooms and move from one generation to another (Kessous & Roux, 2013). Lastly, Cattaneo and Guerini (2012) attempt to characterize nostalgic brands by leveraging nostalgic brand associations: (1) associations with any positive feelings; (2) associations with security; and (3) associations with strong distinguishing features (authenticity).

In this paper, a brand is considered as a stimulus which is likely to evoke nostalgia (i.e., Brown et al., 2003; Cattaneo & Guerini, 2012; Loveland et al., 1995; Orth & Gal, 2012). Brand nostalgia is defined as a "*reflection of the past comprised of memories, emotions and thoughts related to the consumer's lived or idealized experiences with the brand.*" Brand nostalgia is examined from an intra-psychic perspective as opposed to a strategic or managerial perspective. This conceptualization emphasizes the consumer's experiential state of brand nostalgia, distinct from (albeit related to) other constructs which define characteristics such as brand heritage. Balmer (2011) elucidates these differences by describing nostalgia as "seeking the happiness of the past," whereas corporate heritage as "going forwards with a brand's meaningful past" (p. 1383). Similarly, more recently, Pecot and De (2017) define brand heritage as "a set of symbols and values that reinforce the identity of the brand and express its anchoring in the past and the continuity between past, present and future that characterizes the concept of heritage" (page 9), thereby highlighting the omni-temporality of the brand. In the present study, the conceptualization of brand nostalgia is that of an experience comprising feelings and memories associated with past experiences connected with the brand. Pecot and DeBarnier further delineate the difference between these two constructs by proposing brand nostalgia as a consequence of brand heritage.

To the best of the authors' knowledge, there are three existing measures of brand nostalgia, all of which were developed ad-hoc as part of larger studies, and none of which have received extensive empirical validation. The first existing measure of brand nostalgia is Reisenwitz et al.' (2004) 4-item brand nostalgia scale, based on a pre-existing scale measuring the nostalgia felt toward an advertisement (Baker & Kennedy, 1994). The scale includes items like "I associate this brand/company with a happy experience, yet it makes me feel sad" and "The brand/company makes me think of an experience which I feel sad about because it is over, yet it is a happy memory." Another existing measure, not explicitly designed as a brand nostalgia scale, taps a similar construct: emotional significance (Ball & Tasaki, 1992). This 3-item unidimensional measure was designed to tap the associations of an object (i.e., a brand) with significant people and events in a person's life. This scale includes items such as: "My car reminds me of important people in my life," "My car reminds me of important things I've done or places I've been." Finally, Kessous et al. (2015) measure brand nostalgia by asking respondents "to what extent they perceive the brand as nostalgic" (p. 191). Although this single-item measure might be appropriate in an experimental setting, it does little to capture the diversity of emotions, memories and historical thoughts evoked by brands. In summary, while these existing measures are laudable for their goal of measuring brand nostalgia, they suffer from a number of limitations. First, the existing measures of brand nostalgia are uni-dimensional, unable to tap other potentially important facets of the brand nostalgia construct. Second, these measures have been developed in an ad-hoc manner as part of larger research studies, which means that they have therefore not received extensive testing to ensure their validity and reliability, which certainly limits their appeal. Third, they