



Effects of advertising-evoked vicarious nostalgia on brand heritage



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ABSTRACT

Why do people feel emotional attachment to events occurring before they were born? This paper examines ad-evoked vicarious nostalgia-induced longing for a time period that an individual did not live through. Vicarious nostalgia impacts brand heritage and leads to stronger brand attachment. Qualitative research (Study 1) and a literature review identify two vicarious nostalgia dimensions—fantasies about past eras and emotions. Initial quantitative research (Study 2) refines these measures, while subsequent quantitative research (Study 3) relates vicarious nostalgia to both antecedents (alienation, fantasy proneness, and nostalgia proneness) and consequences (brand heritage and brand attachment). Self-referencing moderates the relationship between nostalgia proneness and fantasies, while vicarious nostalgia partially mediates the relationship between nostalgia proneness and brand heritage. Both individual propensities (nostalgia proneness) and advertising-evoked vicarious nostalgia enhance or build brand heritage perceptions.

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1. Introduction

A brand's heritage tells a wonderful tale. Aaker (1991, 2004) describes the importance of heritage in building corporate and product brands. Coca Cola, Ivory, and Budweiser provide examples of companies that frequently leverage brand heritage to bolster their brands. Consumers tend to associate a brand's longevity and stability with heritage (Urde, Greyser, & Balmer, 2007). Evoking heritage appears instrumental in driving brand strength (George, 2004) and brand personality (Keller and Richey, 2006). Stability and continuity are crucial, especially during times of crises (financial, economic, or political), because a brand's heritage imparts a sense of grounding and safety.

Marketers often reassure consumers and provide a sense of security through nostalgic advertising (Boyle, 2009). These ads can precipitate consumer longing for their lived past (personal nostalgia) (Sullivan, 2009) or evoke emotional feelings for a time period before the consumer's birth (vicarious nostalgia). For example, Sears evokes vicarious nostalgia in their advertising campaign, "Sears, where else" (Elliott, 2002), by using now-and-then spots to recreate scenes of everyday life throughout the 20th Century. These ads remind consumers that

Sears sold their ancestors everything from farm equipment to saddle shoes. Numerous examples exist for many other products and services that utilize vicarious nostalgia, such as Levi's jeans, Total cereal, Volkswagen, Wawa, and Macy's (Elliott, 2002; Horovitz, 2011).

This paper posits that advertising-evoked vicarious nostalgia is instrumental in building consumers' brand heritage perceptions. While previous studies examine nostalgia, they focus mainly on ad-evoked personal nostalgia. To date, academic studies ignore vicarious nostalgia's effects on brand heritage perceptions. This research aims to fill this gap by conceptually developing and empirically testing a model that examines the impact of advertising-evoked vicarious nostalgia on brand heritage. Measures of these constructs are also developed based on both qualitative and quantitative research. Study 1 develops a conceptual model, ten research hypotheses and preliminary measures of the focal constructs by reviewing the literature and synthesizing the results of five focus groups. Study 2 refines the measures of advertising-evoked vicarious nostalgia and brand heritage, while Study 3 empirically tests the hypotheses.

This research: (1) proposes and examines several antecedents (nostalgia proneness, fantasy proneness, alienation, and vicarious nostalgia) in brand heritage's nomological network; (2) contributes to the nostalgia literature by explicating advertising-evoked vicarious nostalgia as a two-dimensional experience that includes fantasies about past eras and emotions; (3) establishes that both individual propensities (nostalgia proneness) and advertising-evoked vicarious nostalgia enhance or build brand heritage perceptions; and (4) reveals that advertising-evoked vicarious nostalgia is a positive experience that enhances consumer comprehension and interpretation of the brand's meaning, which augments emotional attachment.

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2. Hypotheses development

2.1. Vicarious nostalgia

Personal nostalgia encompasses a longing for the lived past (Merchant, LaTour, Ford, and LaTour, forthcoming). Vicarious nostalgia on the other hand, “deals with nostalgia for a period outside of the individual’s living memory” (Goulding, 2002, page 542) that was never directly experienced by the consumer (Baker and Kennedy, 1994). Vicarious nostalgia, also referred to as historical nostalgia, examines the experience of emotionally connecting to and fantasizing about experiences and associations from past eras (Stern, 1992). Recent research links vicarious nostalgia to positive ad and brand attitudes (Marchegiani and Phau, 2011; Muehling, 2011). Rose and Wood (2005) allude to fantasy elements in vicarious nostalgia. Previous descriptions indicate that vicarious nostalgia can influence the purchase of automobiles (Leigh, Peters and Shelton, 2006), cigarettes, tea (Holak, Matveev and Havlena, 2008), beverages, sneakers and apparel (Horovitz, 2011). Companies frequently attempt to evoke vicarious nostalgia through advertising across a variety of products, including cars (e.g., Chrysler, Chevrolet), alcoholic beverages (e.g., Jack Daniel’s), non-alcoholic beverages (e.g., Mountain Dew), and banks (e.g., Wells Fargo). Vicarious nostalgia serves to build, detail, and reinforce the heritage of the advertised brand.

2.2. Brand heritage

The Cambridge dictionary defines heritage as “features belonging to the culture of a particular society, such as traditions, languages, or buildings, which come from the past and are still important” (<http://tinyurl.com/buqc2no>). Urde et al. (2007, page 4) describe brand heritage as “a dimension of a brand’s identity found in its track record, longevity, core values, use of symbols and particularly in the organizational belief that its history is important.” Over a period of time, a history composed of accumulated brand-related experiences shape brand perceptions (Aaker, 1991). Heritage provides an important driver. The brand’s early roots add sincerity and differentiation, especially as the brand’s history and origin are re-interpreted in contemporary times (Aaker, 2004). In some instances marketers extol a brand’s real history and heritage (Beverland and Luxton, 2005). In other cases, marketers embellish, augment, or create a fictitious heritage (Beverland, Lindgreen, and Vink, 2008; Holak et al., 2008). Brand heritage creates brand associations (Aaker, 2004) that potentially enhance brand personality and brand equity (Keller and Richey, 2006), reduce perceived risk, and enable a brand to command a price premium (Stewart-Allen, 2002).

2.3. Study 1: qualitative research

The literature and a qualitative study comprising five focus groups inform the conceptual model. The qualitative study’s objectives were to enhance the understanding of the antecedents and consequences

of advertising-evoked vicarious nostalgia and their impact on brand heritage perceptions. Each focus group consisted of six-seven consumers and lasted for about 90 minutes. Participants included 19 females and 14 males. Respondents were selected from a variety of different ages, incomes, and educational backgrounds. The participant profile was homogenous in each group and heterogeneous across groups. Initially, respondents were asked general questions about nostalgia. They were then exposed to four television commercials (Chrysler cars [ad available at: <http://tinyurl.com/chryslerhome>], Wells Fargo bank [<http://tinyurl.com/wellsbg>], Jack Daniel’s whiskey [<http://tinyurl.com/2a3o5mu>], and Mountain Dew [<http://tinyurl.com/yh5u7r3j>]), one at a time and their reactions were noted. Each ad attempts to evoke vicarious nostalgia through imagery and music. For example, the Wells Fargo ad (set in the times of the California gold rush) depicts the relationship between young Charlie and Wells Fargo bank as he saves enough money to send for his sweetheart. Similarly, the Jack Daniel’s commercial presents a series of black and white images, which morph through scenes depicting the life of Jack Daniel. A narrative describes how Jack Daniel first created his brand of whiskey and grew his distillery.

The order of the ads was rotated across the groups. The discussions were audio recorded and transcribed. In-depth transcript analyses were conducted by two assessors. Each reviewer evaluated the transcripts independently, and then the assessors met to discuss and achieve consensus on the results. Respondents’ names are changed to maintain confidentiality.

2.4. Conceptual model

Fantasy proneness and alienation influence the consumer’s nostalgia proneness. Nostalgia proneness affects brand heritage perceptions, both directly and indirectly through ad-evoked vicarious nostalgia (fantasies about past eras and emotions). Self-referencing moderates nostalgia proneness’ effect on fantasies about past eras. Fantasies about past eras influence emotions. These emotions influence brand heritage perceptions, which affect brand attachment. Thus, fantasies about past eras mediate nostalgia proneness’ effect on emotions, while emotions mediate the effect of fantasies on brand heritage. Fig. 1 shows the conceptual model.

2.4.1. Antecedents

2.4.1.1. Nostalgia proneness. Some individuals show higher propensities or proneness for nostalgia than others (Holbrook, 1993). McKechnie (1977) finds that nostalgia prone individuals enjoy antiques and historical places, appreciate artifacts of earlier eras, and frequently collect objects for emotional reasons. An individual’s life stage and other personality factors influence nostalgia proneness.

2.4.1.2. Fantasy proneness. Fantasy proneness is an individual’s proclivity to indulge in fantasies (Lynn and Rhue, 1986). Fantasy prone

Conceptual Model

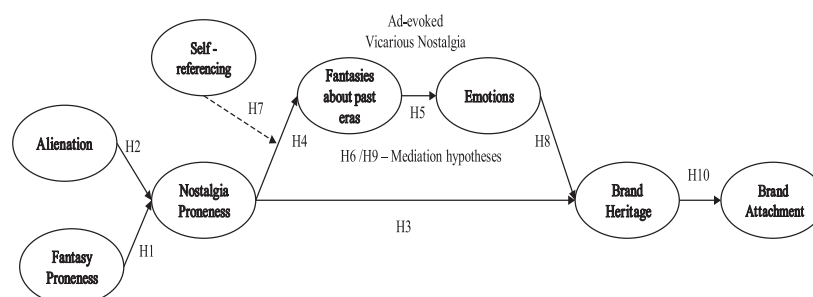


Fig. 1. Conceptual Model.

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