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Asia Pacific Management Review

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/apmr

Nostalgia advertising and young Indian consumers: The power of old songs

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 30 January 2015

Accepted 14 November 2016

Available online xxx

Keywords:

Indian consumers

Nostalgic types

Popular songs

Product involvement

Singer gender

ABSTRACT

India's population of 1.2 billion suggests a large consumption potential; therefore, understanding Indian consumer behavior is very important for local, national, and international companies and marketers. Innumerable Indian TV ads use old Bollywood songs; however, little research has explored the effects of such songs on Indian consumers. This research explores the nostalgia-inducing ability of old songs used in Indian TV ads, compares the advertising effects of different nostalgic types, and examines the possible moderation of singer gender, gender match-up between singer and audience, and product involvement. The empirical results indicate the following: (1) old songs can evoke different nostalgic feelings; (2) historical nostalgia songs generate better ad effects on young Indian consumers, especially songs sung by female singers, are gender mismatched, and used to promote high involvement products; and (3) personal nostalgia songs lead to better ad effects only for low involvement products.

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1. Introduction

Popular music is increasingly used in commercials (Allan, 2008). It shapes consumer experiences (Kellaris, Krishnan, & Oakes, 2007), and it creates favorable emotional associations that can convey brand identity (Yalch, 1991). Additionally, advertising that uses popular music more effectively stimulates consumer attention and leads to better formed memories than advertising that does not use popular music (Allan, 2006).

Film songs constitute India's foremost genre of popular music and are ubiquitous in modern Indian life (Morcom, 2007). In India, where more than twenty languages are spoken, songs from films constitute a common language that overcomes intra-national communication barriers (Bamzai, 2011; Gopal & Moorti, 2010). Film songs also create a distinct international identity for the Mumbai film industry (Bamzai, 2011). These Bollywood songs are particularly popular outside India because of their entertaining quality and ability to project Indian culture and identity (Sarrazin, 2006).

In practice, innumerable Indian TV ads use old Bollywood songs.

Nostalgia is a desire for the past or a taste for possessions and activities from days gone by (Holbrook, 1993). When old popular songs are embedded in ads, they can generate nostalgic feelings (Chou & Lien, 2010). Perceived nostalgic songs have a positive effect on consumer nostalgia proneness (Leila & Gharbi, 2011). Despite the growing use of old songs in advertising, few studies have explored the effects of such auditory cues on consumers. The scope of most studies examining nostalgia in advertising has been confined to print ads and verbal/visual nostalgic cues (e.g., Marchegiani & Phau, 2011; Muehling, 2013; Muehling & Pascal, 2011, 2012; Muehling, Sprott, & Sultan, 2014; Pascal, Sprott, & Muehling, 2002). Chou and Lien (2010) employed auditory cues to evoke nostalgic feelings and found that nostalgic songs result in more favorable advertising effects than non-nostalgic songs. Their results established a preliminary understanding of the effects of old songs in TV ads, but much remains to be learned. For instance, they treated nostalgia as monolithic and did not decompose it into personal and historical nostalgia (Stern, 1992), and they discussed only the effects of personal nostalgia songs. However, "treatment of nostalgia as a unified concept may be inaccurate in predicting true consumer responses" (Marchegiani & Phau, 2010, p. 80). Furthermore, they did not explore product and song related variables that might modify the effects of nostalgic songs. Although Chou and Lien (2014) further tested the moderating effects of song familiarity and the lyrics' relevance to the advertised product, their discussions were limited to comparisons of personal and non-

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Peer review under responsibility of College of Management, National Cheng Kung University.

nostalgic songs.

In the West, Muehling and Pascal (2011, 2012) found that personal nostalgic ads were more effective than historical nostalgic ads in evoking nostalgia, self-reflection, positive affect, and favorable ad attitudes. Muehling (2013) further demonstrated that ad-evoked personal nostalgic responses had a greater effect on improving consumer brand attitudes than ad-evoked historical nostalgic responses. However, all of these studies used digital cameras as the experimental product. Because product involvement is an important factor that affects consumer processing of ad messages and ad effects (Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983; Te'eni-Harari, Lehman-Wilzig, & Lampert, 2009), the possibility that product involvement moderates the relative effects of different types of nostalgia is an issue that needs to be further explored. Furthermore, culture may influence the effects of nostalgic type, but little is known about its influence, especially India's collectivist culture.

A popular song has many attributes that may alter the effects of the nostalgia it induces. The effects of voiceover and spokesperson gender in ads have received considerable scholarly attention (e.g., Ali, Ali, Kumar, Hafeez, & Ghufuran, 2012; Dolliver, 2010; Stern, Gould, & Tewari, 1993; Whipple & McManamon, 2002). Thus, this paper also explores the moderating effects of a crucial but less studied characteristic of songs—singer gender.

The research objectives of the current paper are as follows: (1) test the nostalgia-inducing ability of popular songs from old Hindi films in TV ads; (2) compare the ad effects of historical and personal nostalgia songs on Indian consumers; and (3) investigate the moderating role of singer gender, gender match-up between singer and audience, and product involvement. The findings contribute to the understanding of nostalgia in advertising and its impact in the Indian context, which can help advertisers choose more suitable songs for advertisements according to product type and target audience.

2. Literature review and research hypotheses

2.1. Nostalgia and related studies in marketing

Nostalgia is a preference (general liking, positive attitude, or favorable affect) towards objects (people, places, or things) that were more common (popular, fashionable, or widely circulated) in the past (e.g., in early adulthood, in adolescence, in childhood, or even before birth; Holbrook & Schindler, 1991). Though nostalgia can at times be bittersweet, it is principally a positive emotional experience and contributes to self-positivity (Routledge, Arndt, Sedikides, & Wildschut, 2008).

With the rise of nostalgia in popular culture, marketing research has focused on defining, categorizing, measuring, and analyzing this construct in an effort to fully understand how nostalgia influences consumer behavior (e.g., Baker & Kennedy, 1994; Havlena & Holak, 1991; Marchegiani & Phau, 2013a; Merchant, Ford, Dianoux, & Herrmann, 2015; Merchant, LaTour, Ford, & Latour, 2013; Muehling & Pascal, 2012). For example, Kessous and Roux (2008) identified the invariants of nostalgic meanings that shape consumers' experiences with products and brands and they suggested four movements that can trigger nostalgic feelings: everyday past, tradition, uniqueness, and transition. Sierra and McQuitty (2007) explored why consumers purchase nostalgic products and found that yearning for earlier times and attitudes about the past simultaneously affect consumers' purchase intentions. Hsiao (2013) found that nostalgic appeal positively affected consumers' internal reference price and perceived acquisition value of travel products. Researchers have also explored nostalgia's relationship with other constructs such as materialism (Rindfleisch, Freeman, & Burroughs, 2000), nostalgia proneness

(Schindler & Holbrook, 2003), nostalgic intensity (Reisenwitz, Iyer, & Cutler, 2004), brand attachment (Leila & Gharbi, 2011), and the desire for money (Lasaleta, Sedikides, & Vohs, 2014).

As for nostalgia in advertising, Ju, Jun, Dodoo, and Morris (2015) suggested that consumers' life satisfaction affects their receptivity to this type of advertising. Hafeez, Jowsey, Chong, and Muhammad Sabbir (2015) found that the ageing effect, past childhood experience, and event repetition frequency in the past positively affect consumer nostalgic sentiment sensitivity when exposed to nostalgic ads. Regarding the effects of advertising, several studies have demonstrated that ads that invoke nostalgia can influence consumers' thoughts and lead to more favorable responses than non-nostalgic ads (e.g., Chou & Lien, 2010, 2014; Muehling & Pascal, 2011, 2012; Muehling & Sprott, 2004). Affect transfer rather than a more cognitively based processing of ad elements may be driving consumers' brand attitudes in nostalgic ad conditions (Muehling & Sprott, 2004). Muehling et al. (2014) further found that the effect of a nostalgia-themed advertisement on improving brand-focused outcomes (brand attitude and purchase intentions) is more pronounced for consumers with some past personal association with the advertised brand; nostalgia's effects on improving ad-focused responses (ad involvement and ad attitudes) is not moderated by consumers' past association with the brand. Zhao, Muehling, and Kareklas (2014) demonstrated that the better effects of nostalgic (vs. non-nostalgic) ads on ad-evoked positive thoughts of the past, positive emotions, and attitudinal responses exist only when consumers are in a positive affective state.

In sum, a growing body of empirical research suggests that using nostalgic appeals in advertising can improve consumer attitudinal responses. However, other than verbal (e.g., headline, ad copy, and year referenced) and visual (e.g., the photographs used for ad background) stimuli, the effects of alternate ad stimuli that attempt to use auditory or olfactory cues to elicit nostalgic feelings are relatively under-researched. Furthermore, little research has examined the boundary conditions of the effects of nostalgia ads (Muehling et al., 2014). Both of these research gaps are concerns for practitioners who are considering employing nostalgic appeals in different forms and contexts.

2.2. Nostalgic types

Stern (1992) classified nostalgia into two types. One type is personal nostalgia, which is a longing for the personally experienced past. People experiencing personal nostalgia remember past things and events more positively than they actually were (Ford & Merchant, 2010). The other, historical nostalgia, is the desire to retreat from contemporary life by returning to a time in the past that is viewed as superior to the present. Where personal nostalgia draws upon a person's autobiographical memories, historical nostalgia relies on collective memory (Meyers, 2009; Stern, 1992). Phau and Marchegiani (2009) found that these two nostalgic appeals are distinctly different. Powerlessness, regret, and uninvolved emotions can be experienced in personal nostalgia, while historical nostalgia evokes gratitude.

Scholars have discussed some of the possible effects of personal and historical nostalgia separately. For instance, personal nostalgia can evoke a variety of emotions (Batcho, 2007), and it can effectively influence consumer preferences for products and services (Braun-LaTour, LaTour, & Zinkhan, 2007; Holak, Matveev, & Havlena, 2008). Merchant, Ford, and Rose (2011) demonstrated personal nostalgia's positive effect on donors' commitments to charitable organizations. Merchant and Rose (2013) identified two historical nostalgia dimensions (i.e., fantasies about past eras and emotions) and related historical nostalgia to both brand heritage and brand attachment. Previous investigations have also indicated

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