
The Usage of Nostalgia in Marketing

Overview – Nostalgia as a Selling Point

Nostalgia is one of life's greatest feelings that can be incredibly gratifying. Everyone is easily drawn back to a better, simpler time in her/his life. In a time where everything is monetized, can Nostalgia be a selling point too?

In post-modern society, films and shows are one of the major vessels to deliver nostalgia to the masses. Everyone is well aware of the status held by Star Wars. The original three were a cultural phenomenon that fully impacted and altered the entertainment industry for the next 40 or so years (Wohler, 2017). 'Stranger Things' by Netflix is another show banking on nostalgia. It is an 80s show and is the 3rd most watched series in Netflix history, as per Variety.com.

Nostalgia is being used to popularize the sales of merchandise and show spinoffs. Millennials are the biggest consumers of nostalgia which makes them the perfect target market for industries ranging from tech to entertainment. Using nostalgia, companies are trying to fill the void in their creativity department.

The Big question is, Is Nostalgia a selling point or just a fad? It's success in entertainment industry doesn't duplicate well with other industries and thus needs a deep dive into the question.

Interestingly for the time being, irrespective of whether Nostalgia can be a selling point or not, consumers are buying memorabilia that can give them the comfort of the yester years and thus every marketer is trying to encash on it, but for how long? Can this effect be extended, or the reality is different from what meets the eye.

I will discuss counter views and my personal views in this paper and try to reach a conclusion on the notion of considering Nostalgia as a selling point.

Motivation behind the research

Nostalgia is driving sales throughout the globe, be it Nokia phones, Netflix shows, Audi Cars or Coca-Cola. Nostalgia has become such an important tool in marketing that without knowing, Nostalgia is evolving into an industry. Nokia 3310 mobiles are in the shops. Star Wars films fill the screens. Vinyl record stores overflow with hipsters. Pauline Hanson (Australian Politician) is in Parliament. Actually, let's not bring politics into this! Wait a minute, does anyone know what year it is?

In the post-modern era monetization of humans' natural emotions have been the greatest marketing gig, be it the Valentine's day for love, Christmas for festivity or anniversary celebrations to commemorate togetherness. Nostalgia is not far from these emotions.

Nostalgic marketing taps into the yearning for a time in the past as well as the fondness attached with memories. The current state-of-affairs across the globe in terms of political, social

and economic developments creates a perfect storm to stir up nostalgia. Brands that tap into this emotion are rewarded with emotional connection with the customers, which is priceless.

Life as a kid always seems much better, isn't it? No worries, no responsibilities and no troubles. Marketers play to this and do what they always do: joyously focus on the positives and quietly downplay the negatives. Today nostalgic marketing is bigger than ever. Suddenly all the brands across globe are trying to get into it. Tried and tested is great but dated and out-of-touch? Not so much (Grant, 2017). Still, using Nostalgia as a selling point is akin to walking on a tight rope. Go too far, you lose connection with the consumers as the Brand will look tired and lazy due to a lack of originality.

Wait a minute, nostalgia should work for brands which have a long history such as Disney, McDonald and Cadbury, but a quick look across the stores and we will see new brands trading on a heritage they don't have. So, what makes nostalgia work for some while still eluding others from success? What kind of companies can use nostalgia and to what extent? Is it growing and continue to grow or is it just a bubble waiting to burst? All these moments, questions and facts, inspired me to enquire further into the myth or reality of Nostalgia as a selling point.

Analysis – Nostalgia as a Marketing tool

Nostalgia marketing is all around us and drives our purchases, without us realizing about it. Some of the brands like Facebook (by connecting us with our friends and memories), Nokia (with its flip phone) and Coca – Cola (the iconic bottle) stands testimony to this statement. Chanel is still using Marlin Monroe's photo to sell Chanel No. 5 while the movies such as Star Wars and Once Upon a Time in Hollywood are running in theatres, thanks to their ability to tap into the nostalgic memories of the yesteryears. In fact, brands such as Netflix and Disney are working on projects that specifically creates experience of the past for the adult consumers to relive their past. Shows such as Friends and Pokemon enjoy a loyal fanbase, thanks to nostalgia.

As per Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, emotional needs are more important than functional need and every marketer knows this. Thus, a positive nostalgia can evoke fond memories and take the target audience to a happy place. Marketers who can tap into this can use the positive emotions stirred by their brands to stir happy emotions and sway purchase decisions.

With disposable income and an open mind, Gen Y are being recognized as the biggest consumer demographic for nostalgia however, Gen X and Gen Z are equally important target segments because Gen X wants to relate themselves with familiar products while Gen Z wants to explore the old time, as a new experience (Lobo, 2014).

Thus, nostalgia continues to be a prime way of selling old stuffs even today and seems to continue in future too. Some of the brands who have been successful in using Nostalgia as a selling point are:

1. Spotify (Music Industry). It used nostalgia by using original characters from the hit movie "The NeverEnding Story" to appeal to the millennial audience to use Spotify.
2. Versace, Michael Kors, Burberry (Fashion Industry). Fashion is in love with nostalgia, from the classic 90s-era tartan at Burberry and grunge references at Miu-Miu, to 80s

acid-washed denim at Stella McCartney and metallic jumpsuits at Isabel Marant. A sense of pre-smartphone time surfaced through the return of familiar trends and designers reviving their greatest hits (Hunt, 2018).

3. Pepsi & Coca-Cola (Food Industry). Pepsi & Coca-Cola both designed nostalgic promotions for reviving their old products and appealing to the loyal customers of those products. While Coca-Cola designed limited supply sale of 'Surge' a popular drink discontinued in 2014, Pepsi came with "Crystal Pepsi" as part of a limited run in 2016.
4. Adobe & Nintendo (Tech & Gaming Industry). Adobe promoted their "Adobe Photoshop Sketch" application for the iPad Pro using a picture of Bob Ross, a beloved 80s artist who saw resurgence in popularity in 2016. Similarly, Nintendo came out with mini-NES which was intended to give customers a chance to re-experience the reasons why they fell in love with Nintendo.
5. Netflix (Entertainment industry). Netflix came up with 'Stranger Things', a sci-fi thriller set in 80s. The show was such a big hit that Netflix went on to renew the series for 3 additional seasons, all set in 80s. Similarly, many movies like Ghostbuster, IT etc. have been remade to make Gen Y and Gen Z experience the thrillers of 80s and 90s.
6. Other industries (Social Media, Cars, mobiles, camera etc). Recently Nokia relaunched its iconic phones Nokia 3310 and flip phones to encash on the nostalgia these models carry. Even on social medias, the craze for retro looks is catching on and that's why many camera manufacturers modified their camera settings to include a filter titled 'Retro'.

Nostalgia – Is it real or a fad?

Brian Fargo, founder of inXile Entertainment, spent a decade creating sequels and spiritual successors to classics. Recently, Fargo gave a little indication that he was stuck in the past. 'We can't rely on nostalgia to sell,' Fargo said. 'Nostalgia is a two-edged sword because people's emotional attachment to the incredible experiences they had playing these games to begin with, were are at a moment in time that can never be recreated.' (Sinclair, 2018) There's a group of people who would love nostalgia, but that group is shrinking every year. Experience economy is growing every year and new experiences relate more to the current generation than the past experiences. The current generation believes that "the past is as elusive a dream as the future. Always distorted, always yearned for, and always seen as better. It keeps us from the truth of the present and the pain of reality" (Martin, 2014).

IPG Mediabrands' UM unit recently released findings of a global study wherein it identified 4 major cultural shifts: Nostalgia is one, dubbed as 'Retrograde' by UM, and the other three are centred around creating new experiences through 'Recreate', 'Resist' and 'Reglocalize (global reach and local connection)' (Mandese, 2019). While Gen X and Y relate more with Retrograde/Nostalgia, Gen Z is more attached to creating new experiences through Recreate, Resist and Reglocalize.

For newer brands, using nostalgia to sell can lead to cynicism from consumers. It's very hard to sell a historic brand story based on a brand history that never existed. So, is Nostalgia a fad? Probably, its' more of a tactic to drive sales and it's just something that is relevant to the brand at that point. One example of this is McDonald's – highlighting the past as it's relevant to its present given it's the brand's 40th year in Australia (Wilson, 2011).

While looking at the future, companies should reduce their reliance on nostalgia. Continually relying on the past may display the brand as becoming tired and consumers could believe it's either outdated and/or not for them. The fast pace of our lives and the technological advances have served to de-personalize relationships and remove some of the emotions of our most cherished past-times. No wonder people are trying to "turn back the clock" and recapture some the analog charm of using devices that were almost on the brink of extinction. The question is how long can brands keep on assuming that people will hold on to their pasts? (Valentine, 2016)

My Personal View

In a world changing at a breakneck-speed, nostalgia gives you an escape route like wrapping yourself in a comfortable blanket of 'the good old days', when things were simpler such as not being worried about embarrassing social media photos and posts.

Nostalgia inspires people to spend money for the instant gratification in the form of happy memories. No matter how tech savvy we become, we will still be human and as humans, we will continue to be governed by our emotions. That's why, Nostalgia as a selling point will continue to exist, especially if marketers are smart enough to discover the value of connecting with customers on a more in-depth, emotional level. Funny part is that, you don't need a long history to enjoy the power of nostalgia. Connecting with old ideas and beloved concepts is a free tool that any company can use. With a little planning, even the most modern company can join the retro revolution and design a heart-warming nostalgia marketing strategy (Harvey, 2017).

With the current state-of-affairs, nostalgia is certainly here to stay, and big brands know this. The competition is on how innovative these companies can get with Nostalgia without losing their creative shine.

Going back in time for a nostalgic throwback can be worthwhile for both the young and old. How? The younger generation gets a taste of what it was like before their time, however, the older generation, who experienced the product originally also gets to relive their moments. See, that's why nostalgia is becoming a selling point.

Recently, I saw a Cadbury introducing retro boxes just in time for Christmas. The retro box was £20, while the original box was available for \$4. Which would Gen Y prefer? Retro, of course. I can imagine Gen Z going for the retro boxes too, just to get the "blast from the past" feeling and show their grandchildren what they used to have as a gift.

Interestingly what I have experienced is, the people buying most of the retro themed stuff are predominantly from Gen Z. They never experienced the time when these items were common, yet they are heavily invested in recreating old times. Through the power of nostalgia – many retro items have gone viral in recent years. Why am I mentioning this? Well, I think that nostalgia can also be felt by people who never had the original experience and that's why I believe Nostalgia will continue to be the biggest selling point in the near future too.

Bibliography

1. Grant, R. (2017, 06 21). Past masters: the power of nostalgic marketing. Retrieved from

-
- Marketing: <https://www.marketingmag.com.au/hubs-c/past-masters-power-nostalgic-marketing/>
2. Harvey, S. (2017, 10 24). Passion for the past: Nostalgia marketing and the retro revolution. Retrieved from fabrikbrands.com: <https://fabrikbrands.com/nostalgia-marketing/>
 3. Hunt, K. (2018, 01 02). Why Nostalgia Promises To Be Big In 2018. Retrieved from Elle: <https://www.elle.com/uk/fashion/longform/a40698/why-nostalgia-promises-to-be-big-in-2018/>
 4. Lobo, R. (2014, 03 27). Millennials: the perfect consumers? Retrieved from The New Economy: <https://www.theneweconomy.com/strategy/millennials-the-perfect-consumers>
 5. Mandese, J. (2019, 7 5). UM Study Finds Opposing Cultural Shifts: Nostalgia Vs. New Experiences. Retrieved from Media Post: <https://www.mediapost.com/publications/article/337836/um-study-finds-opposing-cultural-shifts-nostalgia.html>
 6. Martin, L. (2014, 7 17). The Science Behind Nostalgia And Why We're So Obsessed With The Past. Retrieved from Elite Daily: <https://www.elitedaily.com/life/science-behind-nostalgia-love-much/673184>
 7. Sinclair, B. (2018, 05 3). We can't rely on nostalgia to sell. Retrieved from gameindustry.biz: <https://www.gamesindustry.biz/articles/2018-05-03-we-cant-rely-on-nostalgia-to-sell>
 8. Valentine, J. (2016, 06 01). Nostalgia, Just a fad or here to stay? Retrieved from Pattern: <https://www.patternindy.com/nostalgia-just-a-fad-or-here-to-stay/>
 9. Wilson, N. (2011, 11 11). Around The Table: Is nostalgia across communications a fad? Retrieved from Marketing: <https://www.marketingmag.com.au/hubs-c/around-the-table-is-nostalgia-across-communications-a-fad/>
 10. Wohler, D. (2017, 12 16). Nostalgia As A Selling Point In Film. Retrieved from Odyssey: <https://www.theodysseyonline.com/nostalgia-film-selling-point>