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Nostalgia, autobiographical memories and brand communication: a semiotic analysis

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Abstract

Based on a semiotic analysis, this paper contributes to a better understanding of how to use nostalgia in brand communication. The study is based on 3 series of interviews with the same sample. First, 20 subjects were asked to discuss the products and brands connected with a pleasant moment in their lives as a way to grasp nostalgic association without mentioning it. Then, a year after, 16 out of the original 20 were interviewed again and shown the pictures of the nostalgic brands previously mentioned. They associated what came to mind when they saw these visuals. Finally, 13 of these participants discussed the memories they associated with 4 photographic forms representing four important stages in life. The study defined a classification of 4 profiles of nostalgic consumers ("kidult", traditional, transitional and transgenerational). It identified 4 possible nostalgia applications for brand communication that are related to the above moments and profiles.

Key words – nostalgia, autobiographical memories, consumption, brand communication, semiotics.

1. Introduction

Even though nostalgia is an old concept, first described in 1688 in the field of medicine, its use in marketing is relatively new and dates only from the late twentieth century, a period that witnessed great progress, but also a myriad of economic, social, food and health crises. Feelings of insecurity arising from such crises generate a desire to return to "basic values". Consumers both seek and need reassurance and can find it through the reconstruction of past experiences (*Goulding 2000; Loveland/Smeesters/Mandel 2010*). Nostalgia thus becomes a marketing tool for brands.

It is noteworthy how many brands return to older forms of packaging, thus endearing themselves to consumers and capturing their attention. For example, in the food industry Cadbury has relaunched the Wispa bar, Orangina has reintroduced its iconic glass bottle and in 1994, Coca-Cola doubled its sales volume with bottles like those used in 1923. Nestle has announced that the Drifter bar is set to return. Other brands have chosen to re-run their best historical ads, such as the detergent brand Persil, to capitalize on its longevity, thus enhancing brand credibility and authenticity. Nostalgia is also a way for some brands to expand their customer segments. In ready-to-wear, for example, Levi's launched the first 501 Kids Baby "My first Levi's." Nostalgia can also play a part in differentiation strategies, enabling the brand to remind consumers that it is the forerunner in its field and remains timeless: New Beetle, New Mini, New Fiat 500 and DS3 are typical examples.

Capitalizing on the emotions it arouses among consumers, nostalgia gives brands a sense of credibility, authenticity, durability and quality, as well as emotional bonding – thus attracting the interest of managers. Although marketing practitioners widely use nostalgia as a communication tool, no study has sought to define the conditions for its application in brand management. Given its impact on consumption, understanding what nostalgia means to consumers appears to be of particular importance. Thus, the aim of this study is to better understand how to use nostalgia in brand communication.

Semiotic analysis is used as an appropriate method of analysis since it gives a meaning to complex phenomena (*Humphreys 2010; Stuart/Fuller 1991*) and favours the decoding of word-for-word corpus on spatio-temporal relations (*Floch 1988, 2001*). A semiotic perspective “*analyzes the structures of meaning-producing events, both verbal and nonverbal and the system of signification that underlies them*” (*Mick 1986, p. 197*). In order to identify the invariants of nostalgic significations that structure consumer brand relationships (*Fournier/Yao 1997; Fournier 1998; McInnis/Park/Priester 2009*) this research builds on a

semiotic square, as a tool that has proven its contributing value to research in brand management (*Hetzel/Marion 1995; Mick 1986; Mick/Oswald 2006*). The results propose a classification of four nostalgic moments associated with four distinct consumer profiles, suggesting four specific brand differentiation strategies.

The article is divided into four sections. The first section examines the interpretations of nostalgia in semiotics. The second section presents the methodological choices and the symbolic contents of the consumer-nostalgia brand relationship through a semiotic grid. The third section proposes four possible applications for nostalgia in brand communication management. The last section emphasizes the contributions, limits and research paths.

2. Nostalgia and semiotics

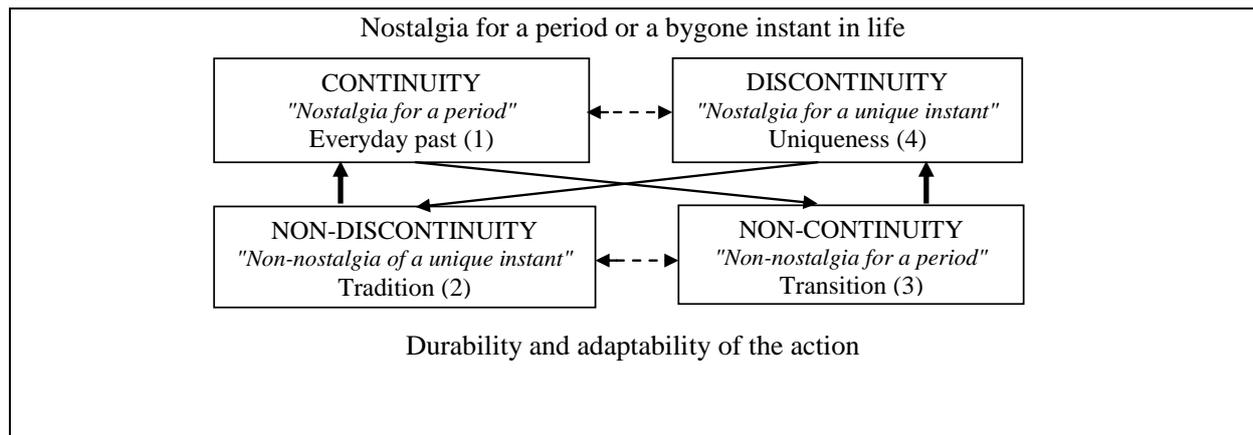
While medicine describes nostalgia as the pathology of subjects physically away from their countries (*nostos* = return; *algos* = pain; *Hofer 1688*), the great philosophers of the 18th century, Rousseau and Kant, presented it as a regret for a time that has passed. In psychoanalysis, nostalgia is linked to two poles: an object pole which understands nostalgia as a desire to return to the foetal state and a narcissistic pole which defines it as an identity injury. In the 20th century, sociologists linked nostalgia to the discontinuities of life: individuals feel nostalgia during transformation phases in their lives and use nostalgia to preserve their identity (*Davis 1979*). Psychologists identify two temporal perspectives in the nostalgia concept: present (i.e. maladjustment to the environment; *Rose 1948*) and future (i.e. an anguishing perception of the future; *Nawas/Platt 1965*).

In marketing, scholars propose the following definitions of nostalgia: a mood (*Belk 1990*), a preference (*Holbrook/Schindler 1991*), a state (*Stern 1992*), a desire (*Baker/Kennedy 1994*), an emotion (*Holak/Havlena 1998*). *Holbrook/Schindler's* definition (1991, p. 330) is probably the most quoted reference: "A preference (general liking, positive attitude, or favourable affect) toward objects (people, places, or things) that were more common (popular, fashionable, or widely circulated) when one was younger (in early adulthood, in adolescence, in childhood, or even before birth)". According to this logic, nostalgic products are defined "as products that were more common or popular when one was younger" (*Loveland/Smeesters/Mandel 2010*).

To better understand nostalgia, *Greimas (2002)* was the first to propose a semiotic analysis of its dictionary definitions. He described nostalgia as: "a state of wasting away and languidness // caused by an obsessive regret // of one's native country, a place where one lived

for a long time". In the first part of this definition, two terms are in opposition: wasting away and languidness. Wasting away means "weakening through gradual consumption" and reflects the idea of reduction. The antonyms of languidness are activity, force. These two terms "provide us information on the semantic value that this reduction is subjected to [...] the **life vs. death**" couple (*Greimas 2002*). The described state is therefore the gradual passage of one phase (i.e. languidness → life → **continuity**) to another (i.e. wasting away → death → **discontinuity**). The triggering element – obsessive regret – understood as "a state of painful consciousness caused by the loss of a possession", therefore comes from separation of the subject and the object with which he/she was previously connected.

Kessous and Roux (2008) proposed a semiotic square opposing the dimensions of "continuity vs. discontinuity" to better understand nostalgia in consumer behaviour. A semiotic square is a representation of how meaning is articulated. Four positions are inter-defined by three types of relationships and two processes: (1) relationship of opposition, i.e. continuity vs. discontinuity; (2) relationship of contradiction (contradictory terms and process of negation), i.e. non-continuity vs. continuity; (3) relationship of complementarity (process of assertion), i.e. continuity vs. non-discontinuity. The square presents a classification of four nostalgic moments: (1) everyday past, (2) tradition, (3) transition and (4) uniqueness (Fig. 1). It opposes the nostalgia of a period or a bygone moment in life (i.e. upper part of the square) and the nostalgia of adaptable and sustainable occurrences (i.e. lower part of the square). In the upper part of the square, two forms of nostalgia are differentiated: "Everyday past nostalgia" essentially refers to the carefree attitude of childhood and adolescence, whereas "Uniqueness of an instant" means an unforgettable unique event in the life of a person. In the lower part of the square, two forms of nostalgia are differentiated: tradition vs. transition. "Tradition" deals with the need to perpetuate the past and transmit one's history. In this case, nostalgia responds to a quest for reference points. "Transition" corresponds to the end of adolescence and the beginning of adulthood as an important period given the identity changes it triggers. The research presented in the following builds on that semiotic square as a basis for further investigation of each of these four nostalgic moments, via the consumption of specific products and brands.



Source: Adapted from Kessous and Roux (2008) p. 199.

Fig. 1. Semiotic square of four nostalgic moments

3. Nostalgia and brands: methodology

The research presented in the following consisted of a three-stage process which compared the data from three waves of interviews with the same sample. Using three interview stages reduces the possible bias attributed to faulty memory. The study included 49 semi-directive interviews, conducted in the South of France either at the interviewee's home or at their place of work. The interviews were taped, lasted from 30 to 60 minutes and were based on an interview guide. Two principles guided the composition of data to analyze: relevance and homogeneity. Relevance is concerned with interviewing people whose past illustrates a diversity of rites of initiation (e.g. first love, first employment...) and rites of passage (e.g. wedding, pregnancy, divorce...). Homogeneity deals with the substance (i.e. the type of discourse: an integral transcription of the 49 semi-directive interviews) and temporality (i.e. duration of the data collection: 29 months).

Twenty subjects (ten males and ten females), aged from 22 to 66 years, participated in the first series of interviews (T1). This sample aimed to represent a diversity of individual profiles in terms of age, gender, and occupation (Table 1). The interview guide started with the following question: "Can you discuss all of the products and brands that are connected with a pleasant moment in your life?". The interviewer did not mention the word nostalgia on purpose, in order not to influence interviewee responses. Among the 80 brands respondents associated with a pleasant moment, 20 showed close nostalgic connections.

For the second series of interviews (T2, a year later), 16 out of the original 20 interviewees agreed to participate again. Two former respondents had left the region for

professional reasons, one was abroad on vacation and one declined to give more interview time. This second series of interviews used projective techniques (*Lysaker/Bradley 1957; Rook 2006*). The interviewer showed pictures of the 20 nostalgic brands mentioned in T1 and started the interview with the following question: “What comes to mind when you see this picture?”.

Age Category	T1		T2 : a year later		T3: 17 months later		Gender	Occupation
	First name	Age	First name	Age	First name	Age		
[20-30]	Pascale	22	Pascale	23	Pascale	NA	F	Student in HR
	Eddy	24	Eddy	25	Eddy	NA	M	Student in medicine
	Chloé	24	Chloé	25	Chloé	26	F	Student in marketing
	Sandy	24	Sandy	25	Sandy	26	F	Student in law
	Michaël	25	Michaël	26	Michaël	27	M	Student in business
[31-40]	Nathalie	39	Nathalie	40	Nathalie	41	F	Dermatologist
	Christophe	33	Christophe	NA	Christophe	NA	M	Manager of a bank
	Bréchar	31	Bréchar	32	Bréchar	33	M	On the dole
	Adriana	37	Adriana	NA	Adriana	NA	F	Real estate agent
	Aurore	32	Aurore	33	Aurore	NA	F	Saleswoman
[41-50]	Chantal	44	Chantal	45	Chantal	46	F	Office clerk
	Annie	43	Annie	44	Annie	45	F	Beautician
	Michel	44	Michel	45	Michel	46	M	Building assessor
	Yves	49	Yves	50	Yves	51	M	Shopkeeper
	Franck	45	Franck	46	Franck	47	M	Real estate agent
[51 & +]	Sophie	52	Sophie	53	Sophie	55	F	CEO
	Patrick	53	Patrick	NA	Patrick	NA	M	Car dealer
	Christian	67	Christian	67	Christian	68	M	Dentist
	Eliane	66	Eliane	66	Eliane	67	F	Retired
	Francis	53	Francis	NA	Francis	NA	M	Bus driver

Table 1: Sample description

In the third series of interviews (T3, 17 months after T2), 13 former respondents were ready to participate once more. As stimuli for the interview the researcher presented four photographic forms representing four important stages in life: 1) childhood/adolescence, 2) traditional celebrations, 3) beginning of adulthood 4) final stage of life. Each form consisted of six photos of identical size (3 photos of products/brands in full-color and 3 photos of moments in black and white) and a scenario (4 verbatim extracts from previous interviews). This method fostered personal introspection via a photographic essay and enabled an investigation of the nostalgic brand's role in the consumption experience (*Holbrook 2006*). The respondents were asked to recall the memories they associate with each of the forms. They discussed the forms in chronological order so as to allow for a progressive understanding of the different stages of life and to avoid interrupting the interview at too early a stage. The form representing the final stages of life was the most emotional. It caused all the

female participants to cry. Finally, respondents were asked to classify the visuals according to their degree of nostalgic intensity and to justify their classification. This allowed us to identify the main drivers of nostalgia.

All of the interviews were transcribed in their entirety. A semiotic square helped to identify specific consumer needs related to nostalgic moments, as well as the consumers' specific product/brand relationships.

4. Results: Four consumer profiles and four categories of nostalgic brands

The semiotic square of nostalgic moments provided a classification of consumers into four groups: (1) "Kidults", (2) "Traditionals", (3) "Transitionals" and (4) "Transgenerational". Each group reflected a different nostalgic anchoring and specific consumer brand/object relationships. Illustrations of the communication strategies of the brands allowed to highlight four applications of nostalgia in brand management (Fig. 2).

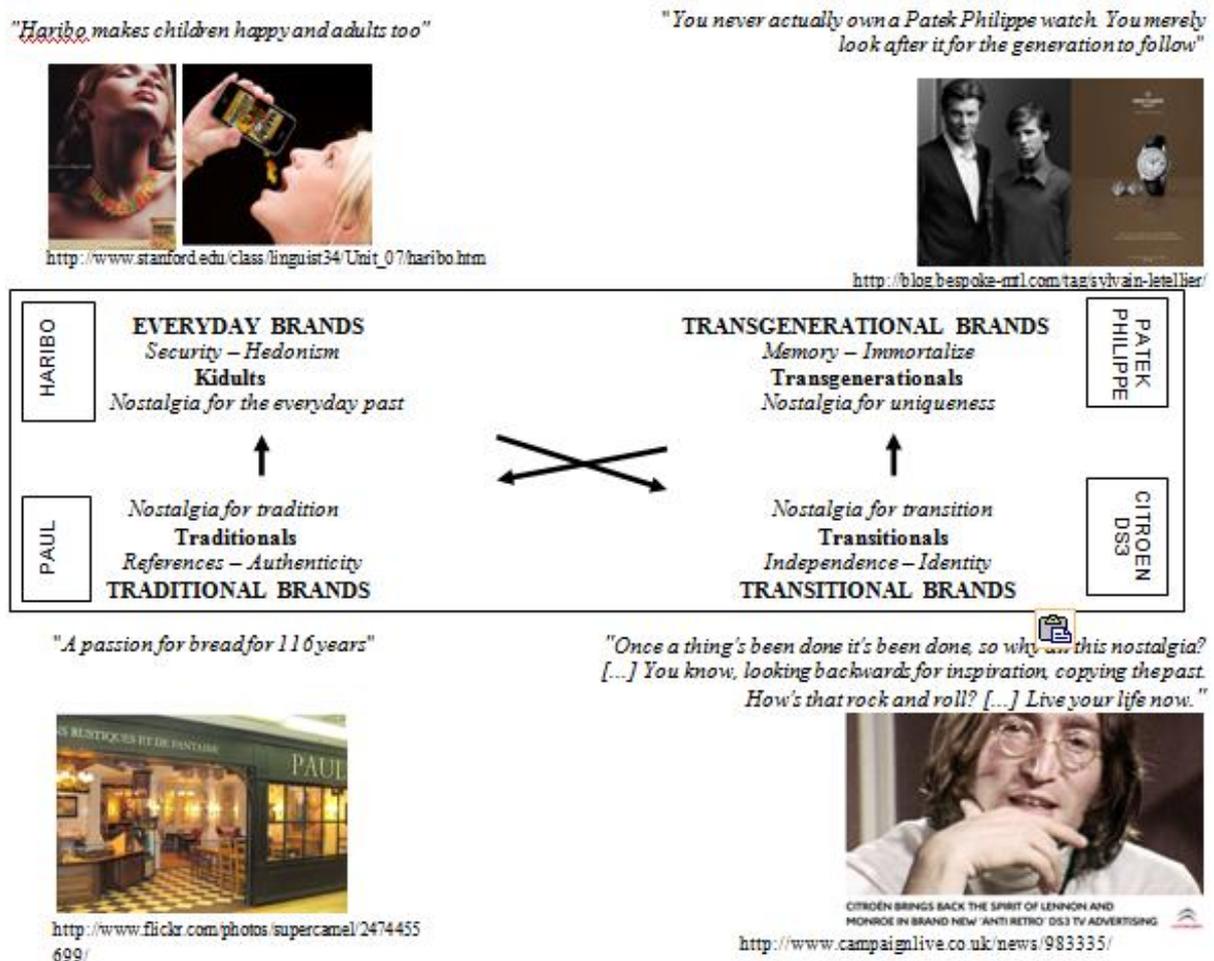


Fig.2: Four nostalgic profiles and four brands perceived as nostalgic

4.1. "Kidult" and "everyday brands"

The "kidult" group included mainly people in their thirties who are nostalgic for their childhood and belong to generation Y (1978-1988). They were born in a period, when new technologies started spreading that still are important. In the same period of time progress may be associated with danger and risks, as the "kidults" witnessed several major worldwide crises.

For this first group, nostalgia fulfills a need for security: consuming brands from the past period of their lives once they are adults is reassuring and comforting. In particular, kidults miss the ordinary moments in life such as breakfasts with the family or afternoon snacks after school. In order to re-experience these ordinary moments the individuals favour sweet food brands they were used to consume during childhood and adolescence (*Braun-LaTour/LaTour/Zinkhan* 2007; *LaTour/LaTour/Zinkhan* 2010). Kidults also emphasize hedonism: nostalgic consumption provides pleasure and allows reliving fun moments from the past via the participation in regressive experiences (*Cova/Pace* 2006; *Goulding* 2002; *Thomson/MacInnis/Park* 2005). This is the case of Pascale, a 22-year-old student, who asserts: *"The first time I went to Eurodisney, I was 15 years old. It was fabulous and every time I go back, I relive it.. I totally disconnect, I run and jump everywher., I say hello to Mickey. I go and kiss Dingo and take photos with him; I am still a little girl."*

Brands that target "kidults" belong to the "everyday" category and are predominantly sweet food brands from one's childhood (*Belk/Ger/Askegaard* 2003; *Braun-LaTour/LaTour/Zinkhan* 2007; *LaTour/LaTour/Zinkhan* 2010). A typical example is Haribo, a brand of candy created in 1920. Through its playful character Hariboy and its targeted slogan (*"Haribo, life's beautiful – for grown-ups and little ones"*) the brand stimulates the fondness for sweet things of the young and less young. In France, Haribo is a fashionable candy. To reach people in their 30's, the brand organizes special Halloween nights in discotheques. Consumer discourse reinforces the brand's character that is both transgenerational and young: *"When I eat Haribo candy, I feel that I am on the same wavelength as my nieces"; "Haribo is Candy Bar and Vodka Tagada cocktail nights (Michael, 27 years old)"*. The success of Haribo's strategy is beyond question: its paying subscription club has more than 7,000 fans. The Haribo Sweet Museum has existed since 1996. Top-of-mind awareness of the brand in the under 35 years bracket is 68%. Global brand awareness is 99% for 15-24 year olds and 96% for 35-49 year olds (BVA Study, 2008).

4.2. "Traditionals" and "traditional brands"

The second group consists of individuals from "Generation X" (1968-1977) and can be called the "traditionals". This generation was born during a phase of European social transition. It took time to grow up, to get higher education compared with the previous generation. As a consequence, this group got married later and entered professional life later as well. This generation includes the first divorced-couples kids, and is looking for points of reference. The name "Generation X" is also the name of a British pop rock group that reminds us of the anonymousness of such a generation highly conscious of its break-up.

For the "traditionals", nostalgia is an answer to a need for points of reference. This quest for points of reference is satisfied by the repetitive and systematic usage of the same brand associated with a specific event. Temporarily separated from the profane (Belk/Wallendorf/Sherry 1989), the brand gains a sacred dimension. Traditionals insist on the authenticity of the brand and on the fact that "fakes" or unauthentic products cannot encapsulate the memory power of "the real things" (Belk 1990, p. 671). For example, Eliane, a 66-year-old retiree, stated that: *"My children know my story with Floraline. I made it for them at the same moments – when they also were tired. I told them that my mother did that when I was tired and when you are tired, it can only do you good."*

Brands corresponding to traditionals are mainly natural food products. Projecting an authentic and sustainable image, nostalgia is a guarantee of quality and authenticity. The emblematic example is that of Paul bakeries whose traditional atmosphere is essentially communicated in their outlets. Rustic decoration is a determining element. Shelves, kitchen utensils, terracotta floor tiles, sculpted paneling and old photos reproduce a universe of yesteryear in harmony with the tradition of the profession. New batches of bread disperse their good aroma of hot bread and create a warm and refined atmosphere. Brand values are based on commitment and sharing. As such, Paul is a partner in the Action Against Hunger and Secours Populaire Français Associations. The slogan *"a passion for bread for 116 years"* emphasizes the precedence and the savoir-faire of the brand compared with its rivals. Fan discourse on Facebook is revealing: *"Paul is even better than my grandmother's bread!" I love it and in addition, the sales personnel are dressed in period clothing.* Today, Paul has over 330 bakeries in the world and 5 million French customers per month.

4.3. "Transitionals" and "transitional brands"

For the "transitionals", nostalgia mainly contributes to the definition and maintenance of their identity. This group is mainly made up of Baby-Boomers (1948-1967) who stand for the

principles of capitalism, free enterprise, and the right of ownership and freedom. *Strauss/Howe* (1991) viewed this individualist generation as self-obsessed. For them, nostalgia mostly satisfies a need for independence. For transitionals, objects evoking nostalgia are reminders of a first time. Transitional consumers are attached to objects of autonomy (i.e. vehicles), "forbidden fruit" items (i.e. cigarettes) or brands which have great importance in constructing identity (i.e. perfume) (*Myers* 1985).

Sophie's (52 years old, CEO) discourse provides an illustrative example: *"My first cigarette was a Pall Mall...I smoked it with the first man of my life. I was going to have my wisdom teeth taken out and the surgeon came to see me at the hospital on the eve of the operation. He offered me my first cigarette and I didn't dare tell him that I had never smoked. I had just turned 18..."* Chantal, 45 years old also states: *"I have been using the same perfume for twenty years... My husband offered it to me for the first time at Christmas, since we first met on december 12th; therefore it was two weeks after we'd met. This perfume symbolizes the beginning of our story. Futhermore it's called GEM, it's a part of me, it protects me, I feel good"*. In French, GEM is pronounced in a manner very similar to "j'aime" which means "I love (you)".

Brands targeting transitionals can choose to re-launch products that were symbolic in the 20th century (*Brown/Kozinets/Sherry* 2003) and are representative of a transition stage in life (*Elliott/Wattanasuwan* 1998; *Holbrook/Schindler* 1989, 1996; *Shankar/Elliott/Goulding* 2001). The communication strategy associated with nostalgia can satisfy a logic of differentiation, emphasizing that the brand, associated with its period, was the forerunner in its domain but also remains timeless. Typical examples are the New Beetle, Mini, Fiat 500 and DS3 that are replicas of period cars with curves and technical attributes updated. In its advertising campaign, Citroën's DS3 uses two universal icons – Marilyn Monroe and John Lennon, who deliver the same message: "Do something of your own, don't look backwards, invent your own style, live your life here and now!" With the DS3, Citroën is not trying to recycle the DS, but to recapture the values that made it a myth.

4.4. "Transgenerational" and "transgenerational brands"

The "transgenerational" are mainly represented by the "after World War" generation (1928-1947). Getting close to the end of their lives, nostalgia satisfies a memory quest for these consumers. For the "transgenerational" group, transmitting an object enables them to ensure their postmortem future. The focus is put on interpersonal relationships and their discontinuity due to a separation such as the death of a cherished person. The attachment is

more linked to the objet itself than to a brand: for example, a heirloom, a scarf. As true memory objects, they symbolise an eternal link with the beloved one (*Curasi/Price/Arnould 2003. Price/Arnould/Curasi 2000*). This is what Christian, 68 years old stresses: "*I have kept a very small diary in which my mother would write ridiculous things. She died 43 years ago and I often hold it because it was hers...*"; Christian adds: "*I remember these Banania big iron boxes. My grandmother used to put her wire coils and her needles in ; I used to put my colour pencils. I remember the sound of the lid when we were pushing it, yellow, red and orange dominant colours. There was some kind of continuity, these are boxes that we kept and that my daughters kept thereafter*".

Brands that take an interest in transgenerationality can play the uniqueness card and put an accent on the symbolic and transmissible dimensions of the object. Here, the added value of nostalgia is a very unique brand heritage. Patek Philippe, a Swiss watch brand founded in 1839 is a good example. Its values "respect the past/fascination with the future" and its "Generation" campaigns, in vogue since 1996, reinforce an intimate link with their customers. Patek Philippe's black and white advertisements and the famous claim "*You never actually own a Patek Philippe watch. You merely look after it for the generation to follow*" contributes to the awakening of nostalgic feelings. The brand targeted fathers and sons, first. Having successfully established the intended positioning, the company started portraying mothers and daughters, thus extending their markets from masculine to feminine.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The presentation of four possible applications of nostalgia in brand communication management is in line with *Braun-LaTour/LaTour/Zinkhan (2007)*. These authors suggest that brands should associate "themselves with important childhood memory experiences...as in the manner of Proust and his "petite madeleine" (p. 56). *Braun-LaTour et al. (2007)* stress that life themes and landmark events could provide valuable symbols and images to incorporate into brand communications. The results of the presented research add to the findings of *LaTour/LaTour/Zinkhan (2010)*. The four categories of nostalgic brands presented here go beyond food products and the iconic Coca-Cola brand. Similarities and differences in the experiences of different generations also suggest segmented communication strategies and call for targeting of collective memories of different generations using autobiographical memories.

Three elements tend to characterise the classification of consumers that resulted from data analysis: the regretted moment, the need fulfilled by nostalgia and the corresponding generation. Thus, targeting each profile implies the creation of the relevant nostalgic atmosphere. Advertising campaigns can focus on the history, values, products and emblematic figures of each generation. "Kidults" for example, are individuals who are nostalgic for their childhood. They satisfy a need for security via certain forms of regressive consumption. In order to reach these young people in Generation Y, advertising with TV icons that were popular in the 80 and 90s for product categories such as candies and video games appears suitable. The nostalgia should insist on the hedonic dimensions of such consumption and usage. In order to grab the attention of kidults, psychedelic music, pop art, bright colours and reference to Woodstock could be used in advertising campaigns. "Traditionals" are more nostalgic of traditional celebrations and festivities. They use nostalgic consumption as an answer to a need for points of reference. Mainly from Generation X, they experienced the emergence of the hippie movement and carried the seeds of the cultural revolution related to the tendency to reject materialism. "Transitionals" are mainly represented by "baby-boomers", who tend to regret the end of their adolescences and their early adulthood. For them, nostalgic consumption tends to be related to a quest for independence. In order to re-experience such feelings and emotions, advertising should highlight products/brands associated with rebellion and freedom (jeans, motorcycles). Among "transgenerationals" we find many older people born after World War II. Since they have faced human and economic losses, nostalgia fulfils a need for "memory quest". Consumption may be used as a means for transmission of valuable objects and brands such as jewels or watches. Advertising might create a romantic atmosphere, using black and white visuals and iconic songs such as the ones of Ray Charles.

	Kidults	Traditionals	Transitionals	Transgenerationals
Nostalgic moment	Everyday past "Childhood"	Traditional moments	Transition "end of adolescence – beginning of adulthood"	Uniqueness "end of life"
Need	Security Hedonism	References Authenticity	Independence Identity	Memory quest Immortalization
Generation	Generation Y	Generation X	Baby-boomers	After-war generation
Historic periods	Terrorism - AIDS- Unemployment New technologies	End of the Cold War Divorce, Hippie Movement	Post war decades of prosperity Women's liberation movement	Second World War Social progress
Main values	Hedonism Accomplishment	Diversity Baba-cool	Freedom Idealism	Respect-Authority Social conformity
Product category	Candy/video games	Not specified except natural products	Vehicles Ready-to-wear	Jewels Watches
Music group	U2	Abba	The Beatles	Ray Charles
Movie star	Johnny Depp	Tom Cruise	Harrison Ford	Cary Grant

Table 2: Four nostalgic consumer profiles and implications for communication

The reliability and validity of retrospective data have often been questioned (*Golden 1992*). Even though self-report is a main source of information in consumer research, it may be highly context-dependent (*Schwarz 2003*) and attributable to faulty memory or attempts to cast past behavior in a positive light (*Golden 1992*). As suggested by *Miller/Cardinal/Glick (1997)*, retrospective reporting is a viable research methodology only if the research setup provides adequate reliability and validity. *Aunger (1995)* and *Wilk (2001)* recommend using different types of inquiry, sequentially or cyclically in the same research. Using multiple perspectives can lead to a unitary truth since the different methods are additive and act as triangulation or convergence to the right meaning (*Wilk 2001*). In line with these suggestions and to ensure the validity of results (*Pratt 2009*) of this research data gathering and analysis procedures carefully adhered to the following criteria (*Lincoln/Guba 1985*):

(1) credibility: the respondents were presented 4 advertisements regarding the 4 nostalgic moments studied and were asked to link each advertisement with a nostalgic

moment. The classification of the respondents converged perfectly with the researchers' classification;

(2) reliability: the semiotic analysis drew on two researchers' independent analyses which showed convergent results;

(3) confirmation: analytical triangulations systematically provided comparable results, when comparing the semiotic study with lexical analysis.

Despite the contributions of a semiotic approach to better understand the relationships between consumers and nostalgic brands, more research is needed to confirm the proposed semiotic typology. In line with nostalgia understood as a bittersweet affective reaction, further research could also examine the four types of nostalgic communication in a comparative manner, in order to distinguish those that arouse positive reactions from those generating more negative reactions. Even if nostalgia involves a positive aspect – reconnecting back to the good old days, there may be also a dark side to it – being inseparably linked with the idea of the irreversibility of the past. Thus, nostalgia can arouse negative feelings toward a brand, portraying an out-of-fashion image of the product being promoted, communicating an outdated image of the brand. Some nostalgic influences can also lead to brand avoidance if a brand has come to symbolize long-standing resentments or other negative emotions related to earlier family life. This is illustrated by the following quote:

“The day before my father's death, I was only 11; I went to see him at the clinic where he had his surgery, he gave me some "Petit Brun" that I did eat with him; since this day, I ve never been able to eat some anymore, for me it just represents the last gift given by my father and his departure for the next world...” (Sophie, 52 years old).

Finally, the presented study was conducted in a French environment. Future research could profitably investigate the comparisons of nostalgic brand strategies between different cultures (Holak/Matveev/Havlina 2008).

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