Using Nostalgia For An Improved Brand Communication Strategy

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February 2014. In their study, â€œNostalgia, autobiographical memories and brand communication: a semiotic analysisâ€•, AurÃ©lie Kessous, assistant professor of marketing at INSEEC Business School, France, along with Elyette Roux, professor of marketing at IAE-Aix-Marseille University, France, explore how nostalgia can be used in brand communication.

Based on a semiotic analysis of interviews conducted over a period of two years, the study results in a classification of four types of nostalgic consumers (â€œkidultâ€•, traditional, transitional and transgenerational) and identifies four specific brand differentiation strategies related to the consumer profiles.In the late twentieth century - which, in spite of being an era of great progress, went through various economic, health and social crises - nostalgia became a marketing tool used by brands to reassure customers.â€œIt 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 re-launched 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,â€• said Kessous. â€œGiven 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.â€•For their research, the authors conducted 49 semi-directive interviews in 3 stages. First, 20 subjects were asked to discuss the products and brands connected with a pleasant moment in their lives. A year later, they were interviewed again and shown pictures of the nostalgic brands previously mentioned and were asked to associate what came to their mind when they saw these visuals. Finally 17 months later, the participants discussed the memories they associated with 4 photographic forms representing four important stages in their lives.A semiotic analysis of these interviews resulted in the following classification of consumers and the description of the possible corresponding brand communication strategies:â€¢Â Â Â â€œKidultsâ€•Kidults belong to the Generation Y (1978â€“1988) who are nostalgic fo childhood and satisfy their need for security through regressive consumption. â€œIn 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 suitableâ€•, said Kessous.â€¢Â Â Â TraditionalsThey are individuals from Generation X (1968â€“1977). Nostalgic of traditional celebrations, they need points of reference. Brands targeting this group should play on authenticity of their products.â€¢Â Â Â TransitionalsMade up mainly of Baby-Boomers (1948â€“1967), this group sees nostalgia as the definition and maintenance of their identity. For them, advertising should highlight products associated with rebellion and freedom.â€¢Â Â Â TransgenerationalsFor this group of people born after World War II (1928â€“1947), â€œconsur may be used as a means for transmission of valuable objects and brands such as jewels or watches and Advertising might create a romantic atmosphere, using black and white visuals and iconic songsâ€•.â€œDespite the contributions of our semiotic approach to better understand the relationships between consumers and nostalgic brands, more research is needed to confirm the proposed semiotic typology,â€• concludes Kessous. â€œFurther research could examine the four types o nostalgic communication in a comparative manner (positive reaction from negative) and between different culturesâ€•.The article â€œNostaligia, autobilgraphical memories and brand communication: a semiotic ananlysis,â€• has been published in Marketing ZFP: Journal of Research and Management.Follow Market Research World on Twitter or join in the conversation with our LinkedIn Group