

The Impact of Brand Nostalgia on Purchase Intention among Gen Y

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Abstract

In many cases, a brand's past positively influences a consumer's attitudes, preferences and ultimately brand choice. Nevertheless, the psychographic profile of Gen Y, viz. people born between the early 1980s and the turn of the millennium, raises the question whether personal and historical memories related to a brand as well as perceived brand oldness are important for this market segment as well. More so than their predecessors, this generation is characterized by materialism and a desire for technology and innovation. Therefore, this paper examines the impact of brand nostalgia on brand trust, brand authenticity and finally purchase intention among Gen Y. Three product segments (fruit gums, lingerie, and skin cream) and a nostalgic/non-nostalgic brand pair for each acted as a stimulus in a study with 330 randomly-selected college students as representatives for Gen Y. Results suggest that brand nostalgia significantly influences brand trust, brand authenticity as well as purchase intention. Furthermore, personal rather than historical experience plays a key role in Gen Y. Therefore, brand arguments should put forward nostalgia in a personalised setting for this target group.

Keywords: Brand authenticity, brand nostalgia, brand trust, Generation Y, purchase intention.

JEL classification: M31, C12.

1. Introduction

In recent years, brand nostalgia has come to the fore as a significant driver of consumer behaviour (Li et al., 2019). Empirical studies provide evidence that consumers respond positively to brands with a history (Brown et al., 2003; Orth and Gal, 2012). Nostalgic feelings connected with a brand elicit positive associations – the seeking of happiness – relating to the so-called “good old days” (Balmer, 2013). Because a feeling of nostalgia can provide an individual with a sense of certainty and security (Balmer, 2013), nostalgia can be a key factor in influencing consumer buying behaviour. More precisely, brand nostalgia seems to positively influence core consumer behaviour constructs such as brand trust, brand authenticity and finally, the purchasing intention itself (Kessous and Roux, 2010; Wiedmann et al., 2011). However, the relevance of brand nostalgia seems to vary between generations.

Research indicates that the generations that are referred to as Gen X and Seniors are more inclined towards nostalgic products than are their successors in Gen Y, who show a greater preference for recent options (Havlena and Holak, 1991; Lambert-Pandraud and Laurent, 2010). Gen Y represents a unique and influential consumer group whose behaviour is often discussed but not yet fully understood (Valentine and Powers, 2013).

There is no precise age limit or definition of who belongs to Gen Y. The age range varies considerably among scholars: Howe and Strauss (2000), for example, consider persons born between 1982 and 2005 to be members of Gen Y; Trent et al. (2003) define Gen Y as the cohort born between 1977 and 1994. The intersection between the definitions reveals that those born between the early 1980s and the turn of the millennium belong to Gen Y. This group represented 24% of the adult population in the European Union in 2013, ranging from 19% in Italy to 28% in Poland (Stokes, 2015). Hence, Gen Y is of increasing interest for companies.

After graduation from college, they have entered the work force, and their earning potential makes them important as a powerful consumer group (Taylor and Cosenza, 2002). By 2025, Millennials will comprise three-quarters of the global workforce (Twaronite, 2015).

Marketers believe that Gen Y is different in many ways from the previous generation. Their values and behaviour are considered to be distinguishable and unique to the cohort (Hyllegard et al., 2011). Gen Y is heavily influenced by technology and the internet (Bosch et al., 2019). More so than previous generations, they are characterised by a materialistic and consumer culture that is considered to be primarily a result of technological innovation. As they show a desire for technology and innovation, the question arises whether Gen Y is interested in non-recent brands, and receptive to the message that a brand is related to the past.

In our paper, we present the relevant literature with a focus on brand nostalgia and attitudinal reactions (brand authenticity and brand trust) as well as behavioural intention (purchase intention), and we derive respective hypotheses. In the next step, we discuss the research methodology and present the empirical findings. The paper concludes with implications, limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

2. Conceptual model and hypotheses development

2.1. Brand nostalgia

The term nostalgia originates from the Greek *nostos* (return) and *algos* (pain) and appears for the first time in the 17th century in medicine. It describes what we would today call homesickness, the painful longing to return home. Although nostalgia can evoke negative and ambivalent emotions, it is considered in most instances to express a positive orientation to the past (Holbrook and Schindler, 1991). That is, people tend to remember the past with fondness and a sense of yearning (Havlena and Holak, 1991). Holbrook and Schindler (1991, p.330) define nostalgia as a “preference (general liking, positive attitude, or favourable affect) towards 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)”.

Divard and Robert-Demontrond (1997) distinguish personal (or: bonded) nostalgia from historical (or: vicarious) nostalgia (see also Merchant and Rose, 2013; Shields and Johnson, 2016). Personal nostalgia expresses a longing for the lived past. Historical references evoke nostalgia for a period outside an individual's living memory that was never directly experienced by that individual (Baker and Kennedy, 1994; Merchant and Rose 2013).

Brands serve as a reference object to arouse nostalgic feelings (Kessous and Roux, 2010). Paralleling the two previously mentioned facets of individual nostalgia, brand nostalgia refers to a consumer's personal experience and/or the historical context of the brand (Kessous, 2015). Hence, brand nostalgia can be defined as “positively valenced past feelings produced by an individual when a perceived old brand has the ability of recalling him positive past memories, lived or learned.” (Bartier, 2013, p.1). Besides positive emotions, brand nostalgia also triggers cognitive consequences including trust, and purchase intention (Rose et al., 2016).

There is a consensus that brand nostalgia positively influences other brand-related attitudes as well as purchase intention. The latter relationship has been acknowledged by diverse researchers in different contexts and for different product categories. Sierra and McQuitty (2007) demonstrate for 15 product categories of daily use that nostalgia has a positive impact on the intention to purchase. Leigh et al. (2006) as well as Wiedmann et al. (2011) reach similar conclusions with regard to automotive brands. Nostalgic brands achieve superior results in comparison to non-nostalgic comparatives in terms of the intention to purchase and to give as gifts for the product categories of candies, breakfast, maintenance, games/toys, clothing/shoes, and vehicles (Kessous and Roux, 2010).

These findings seem to be disputable for Gen Y. Previous research indicates their preference is for more recent brands (e.g. Lambert-Pandraud and Laurent, 2010). Hence, the causality between a brand being perceived as nostalgic and the (higher) purchase intention might not be given or only to a lesser extent for Millennials. In order to test this relationship, we postulate the following hypothesis H_I: Brand nostalgia positively affects the intention to purchase a brand among members of Gen Y.

2.2. Brand authenticity

The concept of authenticity has gained attention in the marketing discipline in recent years as consumers demand increasing authenticity in the products that they buy and the services that they use (Brown et al., 2003; Grayson and Martinec, 2004). This is seen as a reaction to the growing number of serious crises such as the financial crisis as well as progressive globalisation (Bruhn et al., 2012; Portal et al., 2019). Faust and Householder (2009, p.47) describe an authentic brand as “a brand that’s clear about what it is and what it stands for. It’s a brand that is built from the inside out versus one that panders to the latest trend, fad, or customer segment.”

In order to attain an authentic brand image, communication-based, cultural and company-based requirements can be identified. The communication-based preconditions comprise nostalgia as well as clarity, brand commercialisation, and the similarity of the brand’s personality with the consumer’s self (Fritz et al., 2013).

Other authors confirm the link between brand nostalgia and the perception of a brand as authentic (Brown et al., 2003; Kessous and Roux, 2013) on one hand and the brand authenticity dimensions continuity and reliability (Peterson, 2005) on the other hand. Rose et al. (2016) reveal that brands obtain their authenticity from sticking to their tradition, and recommend the purposeful use of the past as a marker for legitimacy and authenticity. These findings lead to the hypothesis H_{II}: Brand nostalgia positively affects the perceived authenticity of a brand among members of Gen Y.

2.3. Brand trust

With the shift from a transactional- to a relationship-oriented marketing approach, the concept of trust has gained in importance. Today, trust is considered to be a decisive competitive advantage. Brand trust can be seen as the consumer’s confidence that the brand, product or company is reliable and competent (Herbst et al., 2012).

Previous research has uncovered the positive impact of brand nostalgia on brand trust. Nostalgia confers credibility, security and stability, and it thereby enhances the emotional bond of consumers towards a brand (Kessous and Roux, 2013). Leigh et al. (2006) researched brand nostalgia using the example of the automotive brand MG. The respondents perceived MG as a nostalgic brand that is characterised by longevity, continuity and authenticity, which in turn creates trust and credibility. Consumers are more likely to trust a brand with a genuine history, and they perceive lower purchase risk with regard to such brands (Wiedmann et al., 2011). Consequently, we postulate the hypothesis H_{III}: Brand nostalgia positively affects trust in a brand among members of Gen Y.

3. Results and findings

3.1. Research approach and sample characteristics

The survey resulted in 330 responses from members of Gen Y. The sample was randomly drawn from a population of college students at several state as well as private universities. The main study was conducted through an online research. The questionnaire link was distributed digitally amongst different study years and programs with a focus on post graduate programs

in order to reach the target group in the best possible way. Although the use of a student sample is justified in past research (Mishra, 2018), it still limits to some extent the generalizability of the results. A total of 33% of the respondents belonged to the age group 20-25 years old, 64% were between 26 and 30 years and 3% were between 31 and 35 years old [The age distribution in the sample deviates from the age distribution of students at German universities. In the 2018/19 academic year, around 38% were between 20 and 25 and between 26 and 30 years of age respectively, and the proportion of 31 to 35-year-olds was just under 9% (Bundesministerium für Forschung und Bildung, n.y.). However, the aim of the study is not to mirror the age distribution of German students, but to depict Gen Y in a way that is representative of their age. A dominance of the age group of 25 to 30 year-olds is obvious, since it is this cohort that represents the age-related core of Gen Y (see section 1)]. Even though the latter age group is comparatively poorly represented, the sample thus represents Gen Y well overall. The female respondents (61%) outweigh the male respondents (39%). In their study, Bakewell and Mitchell (2003) observe a blurring of gender stereotypes among members of Gen Y with regard to buying behaviour. Therefore, the bias towards a more female sample appears acceptable. The answers were collected through an online questionnaire.

In preliminary in-depth discussions with 26 consumers, three product categories (fruit gums, lingerie, and skin cream) with two well-known brands each – one nostalgic (Haribo, Schiesser, Nivea) and one non-nostalgic (Katjes, Victoria's Secret, Bebe) brand – from a list of eight product categories (cars, coffeehouses, fruit gums, lemonade, lingerie, skin cream, sportswear, and washing powder) and a selection of nostalgic and non-nostalgic brands per product category were chosen as stimuli for the quantitative survey. The brands were selected on the basis of a working definition of brand nostalgia. To avoid bias through direct comparisons, the brands in the questionnaire alternated so that each respondent evaluated either the nostalgic or the non-nostalgic brand of a product category. Furthermore, the comprehensibility, clarity and specificity of the statements that are presented in the subsequent sections were discussed as antecedent of the main study. The statements were measured on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (= strongly disagree) to 7 (= strongly agree).

3.2. Operationalisation of brand nostalgia

Statements to measure the three dimensions of brand nostalgia (personal memories, perceived brand oldness, and historical memories) were introduced by Bartier (2013) (see Table 1). Since a scale with 14 items was perceived as rather lengthy, consumers and experts were asked about its clarity and specificity. Especially the indicators reflecting personal memories were seen as redundant. In in-depth discussions the key words “positive feelings”, “happy times” and the idiomatic phrase “good old days” were identified as topics to be covered. Based on this finding, statements PM4, PM5, and PM 6 were excluded from the initial list. A similar level of redundancy was attributed to the items reflecting perceived brand oldness. Item BO1 and BO2 were judged to represent this aspect in the crispest way, and hence kept in the list. As doubts were raised regarding the comprehensibility of item HM3, historical memories was operationalised with statements HM1 and HM2.

Table 1. Factor loadings of items reflecting brand nostalgia (exploratory factor analysis)

Component	Item	Indicators of brand nostalgia	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Personal memories (PM)	PM1	The brand calls up positive feelings related to the past	.897	.209	.189
	PM2	This brand reminds me of warm and happy times with my family	.876	.216	.194
	PM3	This brand reminds me of the good old days	.816	.297	.271
	PM4	This brand reminds me of pleasant memories with my family			
	PM5	This brand reminds me of the good times I had as a child			
	PM6	This brand reminds me of happy times I have experienced			
Perceived brand oldness (BO)	BO1	This brand is an old brand	.195	.898	.164
	BO2	This brand is a traditional brand	.301	.874	.094
	BO3	This brand has been around for a long time			

	BO4	This brand has existed for a long time			
	BO5	This brand has been around for years			
Historical memories (HM)	HM1	This brand reminds me of positive memories that are not tied to my own past	.113	.197	.856
	HM2	This brand makes me think of a time I would like to have experienced	.353	.040	.750
	HM3	This brand makes me think of a real-life or fictional character I would like to have known			
Sum of squared loadings (rotated)			2.503	1.790	1.478

Note: The highest factor loading per item is highlighted. An empty cell indicates that the item was not included in the factor analysis.

The brand nostalgia index (BNI) was quantified in two steps. An exploratory factor analysis was run as a first step. Applying the principal component method, requesting to extract three factors and rotating the initial solution with Varimax rotation led to the results summarised in Table 1. All items loaded on the factor they were expected to load on. Taken together, the three factors explained 82.5% of the total variance. Appropriateness of this model was reconfirmed by the goodness-of-fit values of a confirmatory factor analysis: comparative fit index (CFI) = .98; Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = .96; incremental fit index (IFI) = .98; standardised root mean square residual (SRMR) = .04; and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .08. In a second step, the BNI was calculated as the sum of the three factor scores weighted by the relative sums of squared loadings. That is, personal memories contributed 43.4%, perceived brand oldness 31.0% and historical memories 25.6% to the index value. BNI ranged from -.90 to 1.38 (M = .00, SD = .59), did not follow a normal distribution ($p < .01$), was skewed to the right (skewness = .31) and its tail was lighter than the one of a normal distribution (kurtosis = -.98).

3.3. Establishing of contrasting groups

To investigate the impact of brand nostalgia on brand authenticity, brand trust, and the purchase intention the sample was broken down into contrasting groups. Distribution of BNI suggested selecting the index values of -.50 and .50 as cut points between groups characterised by a low, a medium, and a high BNI respectively. Table 2 illustrates how the brands considered in the study were allocated across the three groups. All in all, the quantitative findings support the categorisation in nostalgic and non-nostalgic brands from the preliminary study. The relation between the binary variable nostalgic vs. non-nostalgic brand and the BNI category was statistically significant ($\chi^2(2, N = 241) = 36.58; p < .01$).

Table 2. Distribution of brands considered across BNI categories

BNI category	Nostalgic brands	Non-nostalgic brands	Haribo	Katjes	Nivea	Bebe	Schiesser	Victoria's Secret
Low	11 (9%)	48 (41%)	1 (2%)	14 (35%)	2 (4%)	12 (31%)	8 (26%)	22 (55%)
Medium	67 (54%)	52 (44%)	20 (46%)	18 (45%)	27 (56%)	20 (53%)	20 (64%)	14 (35%)
High	45 (37%)	18 (15%)	23 (52%)	8 (20%)	19 (40%)	6 (16%)	3 (10%)	4 (10%)
Sum	123	118	44	40	48	38	31	40

On top, there is a connection between the BNI category and the variable brand ($\chi^2(10, N = 241) = 62.88; p < .01$). For two product categories (skin cream and fruit gums) the picture fits perfectly to the expectation: brands pre-classified as nostalgic achieve an above-average share in the category “high BNI“, brands pre-classified as non-nostalgic are overrepresented in the cluster labelled “low BNI“. In contrast, lingerie does not fit into the picture. About two thirds of the respondents locate brand nostalgia of Schiesser on a medium level, and 2.7-times as many consumers associate this more than 140-years-old brand with a low level of brand nostalgia. Figure 1 illustrates the main reason for the relatively low BNI attributed to Schiesser. Respondents associate neither personal nor historical memories with this brand. The mean of the five statements reflecting the two mentioned components of brand nostalgia is lower than for the five remaining brands. In contrast, Schiesser is perceived as a relatively old brand.

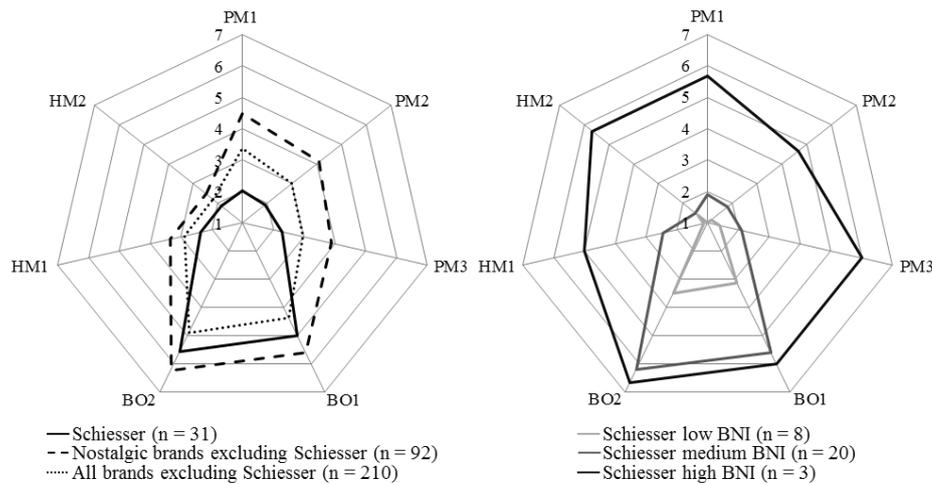


Figure 1. Evaluation of statements reflecting brand nostalgia for selected brands

3.4. The impact of socio-demographics on brand nostalgia

As Table 3 illustrates, the gender of a respondent does not have a statistically significant impact on the evaluation of brand nostalgia ($\chi^2(2, N = 236) = 1.92$; $p = .38$). This conclusion is confirmed by a comparison of the mean for the BNI for males to the BNI for females. Although the mean for males ($M = -.04$; $SD = .60$) is slightly lower than the one for females ($M = .03$; $SD = .59$) this difference might be explained by a random influence ($t(234) = -.78$; $p = .44$). Furthermore, neither age ($\chi^2(2, N = 238) = 2.35$; $p = .31$) nor educational achievement ($\chi^2(4, N = 239) = 7.43$; $p = .12$) does influence the perceived brand nostalgia statistically significantly.

Table 3. Distribution of respondents across the BNI categories depending on gender, age, and educational achievement (in no. of respondents)

Variable	Characteristic	Low BNI	Medium BNI	High BNI
Gender	Male	23	38	18
	Female	34	78	45
Age	20 to 25	17	45	26
	26 to 30	42	71	37
Educational achievement	Vocational baccalaureate diploma	3	16	10
	Baccalaureate	12	36	16
	University degree	44	65	37

3.5. The impact of brand nostalgia on brand authenticity, brand trust and purchase intention

To evaluate the impact of brand nostalgia on brand authenticity, a brand authenticity index (BAI) was established using an approach similar to the one applied for calculating the BNI. The principal component method summarised the four reflective indicators of brand authenticity (see Table 4) as introduced by Schallehn (2012) based on the Eigenvalue criterion in one factor explaining 71.9% of the total variance. BAI ranged from -2.84 to 1.35 ($M = .00$, $SD = 1.00$), did not follow a normal distribution ($p < .01$), was skewed to the left (skewness = $-.80$) and more peaked than a Gaussian distribution (kurtosis = $.12$). Cases characterised by a low BNI achieved a BAI-value of $-.62$ ($SD = 1.09$). This index value is not only considerably lower than the BAI of $.51$ ($SD = .69$) for brands rated as highly nostalgic, it is also lower than the respective index value of $-.16$ ($SD = 1.00$) for the group with a medium BNI. As a one-way between subjects ANOVA discloses, the impact of the BNI category on the BAI is statistically significant ($F(2, 204) = 19.76$; $p < .01$; $\eta^2 = .162$). Post hoc analyses using the Scheffé post hoc criterion indicate that all three groups differ from each other statistically significantly. Brands

with a high BNI are perceived as more authentic than brands with a low ($p < .01$) as well as brands with a medium ($p < .01$) BNI. In addition, a brand that evokes a low level of nostalgia is perceived as less authentic than a brand that evokes a medium level of nostalgia ($p < .05$).

Table 4. Evaluation of statements reflecting brand authenticity depending on brand nostalgia index

Item	Indicators of brand authenticity	Low BNI	Medium BNI	High BNI
BA1	This brand does not pretend something but is always itself	M = 4.15 SD = 1.76	M = 4.81 SD = 1.71	M = 5.75 SD = 1.22
BA2	This brand knows precisely what it stands for and does not promise anything not fitting to its brand personality	M = 4.50 SD = 1.85	M = 4.93 SD = 1.58	M = 5.75 SD = 1.16
BA3	This brand is characterised by a specific philosophy determining its brand promise	M = 3.55 SD = 1.87	M = 4.73 SD = 1.70	M = 6.03 SD = 1.17
BA4	The brand does not curry favour with its target group but demonstrates self-confidence	M = 4.09 SD = 2.18	M = 4.72 SD = 1.84	M = 5.63 SD = 1.46

The three BNI categories differ not only in terms of the BAI, but also in terms of all four reflective brand authenticity indicators (BA1: $F(2, 218) = 14.35$; $p < .01$; $\eta^2 = .116$; BA2: $F(2, 221) = 9.93$; $p < .01$; $\eta^2 = .082$; BA3: $F(2, 218) = 32.81$; $p < .01$; $\eta^2 = .231$; BA4: $F(2, 217) = 10.08$; $p < .01$; $\eta^2 = .085$). As a post hoc analyses (Scheffé method) indicate, a majority of the differences are statistically significant. The categories low and medium brand nostalgia are exceptions, as in the case of three out of the four variables, the differences can be explained by chance alone (BA1: $p = .06$; BA2: $p = .27$; BA4: $p = .14$). In summary, there is strong empirical evidence that brand nostalgia positively impacts brand authenticity (H_{II}).

A similar result can be observed with regard to brand trust. The measuring of brand trust traces back to Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) and Schallehn (2012) (see Table 5). The brand trust index (BTI) represents the factor score (principal component method) summarising the three variables. Based on Eigenvalue, one factor explaining 89.6% of the variance was extracted. The factor scores ranged from -2.04 to 1.32 ($M = .00$, $SD = 1.00$), did not follow a normal distribution ($p < .01$), were skewed to the left (skewness = $-.63$), and the tail was lighter than the one of a normal distribution (kurtosis = $-.55$). BTI took on a relatively low value of $-.71$ ($SD = .94$) in case brand nostalgia is perceived as low. In case BNI is rated as medium, BTI increases to a value of $-.13$ ($SD = 1.04$), and for brands evaluated as highly nostalgic to $.50$ ($SD = .74$). As a one-way between subjects ANOVA discloses, the impact of the BNI category on the BTI is statistically significant ($F(2, 207) = 21.41$; $p < .01$; $\eta^2 = .171$). Post hoc analyses using the Scheffé post hoc criterion indicate that the three groups differ from each other statistically significantly. Respondents trust brands with a high BNI to a higher extent than brands with a low ($p < .01$) or a medium ($p < .01$) BNI. At the same time, brands with a medium BNI are perceived as more trustworthy than brands with a low BNI ($p < .01$).

Moreover, the BNI category impacts all three indicators that reflect brand trust (BT1: $F(2, 225) = 15.75$; $p < .01$; $\eta^2 = .123$; BT2: $F(2, 224) = 21.08$; $p < .01$; $\eta^2 = .158$; BT3: $F(2, 213) = 18.63$; $p < .01$; $\eta^2 = .149$). As post hoc analyses (Scheffé method) indicate, all but one difference are statistically significant. For BT1, the difference between the categories low and medium brand nostalgia can be explained by a random influence ($p = .05$). Consequently, there is a strong empirical evidence that brand nostalgia has a positive impact on brand trust (H_{III}).

Table 5. Evaluation of statements reflecting brand trust depending on brand nostalgia index

Item	Indicators of brand trust	Low BNI	Medium BNI	High BNI
BT1	I rely thereupon that the brand fulfils its brand promise also in the future	M = 3.78 SD = 1.88	M = 4.52 SD = 1.88	M = 5.62 SD = 1.46
BT2	I trust in the brand	M = 3.60 SD = 1.91	M = 4.60 SD = 1.94	M = 5.76 SD = 1.29
BT3	I feel comfortable about relying comprehensively on the brand	M = 3.02 SD = 1.80	M = 4.17 SD = 1.93	M = 5.16 SD = 1.63

Finally, the impact of brand nostalgia on purchase intention was assessed. In line with a common approach, purchase intention was measured by a direct question on a 7-point Likert scale (Rippé et al., 2016). In cases where brand nostalgia was evaluated as low, respondents rated the statement “I would purchase that brand” with on average 3.86 (SD = 2.19), whereas brands with a medium BNI achieved a value of 5.37 (SD = 1.85), those with a high BNI a value of 6.27 (SD = 1.53) on a 7-point Likert scale. According to a one-way between subjects ANOVA, the BNI category impacts the purchase likelihood statistically significantly ($F(2, 233) = 25.84$; $p < .01$; $\eta^2 = .182$). Moreover, a post hoc analysis (Scheffé method) indicates that all three differences are statistically significant ($ps < .01$). In conclusion, being perceived as nostalgic incorporates a competitive advantage in comparison to rivaling brands missing this perception (Ford et al., 2018); a brand capable of invoking nostalgic cues addresses a much bigger market than a brand missing out on this opportunity (H_1).

4. Implications and suggestions for future research

This study confirms the hypothesised impact of brand nostalgia on brand authenticity, brand trust and purchase intention for Gen Y. This is especially interesting for marketers who might question the suitability of nostalgic cues for targeting this customer group. Hence, it can be recommended to further exploit brand nostalgia as a valuable brand asset. This insight is even more interesting as Gen Y seem to be less brand-loyal as Gen X was at the same age (Wolfe, 2004). Even though members of Gen Y are known to follow fads – an attitude typical for younger people (Valentine and Powers, 2013) – brands providing orientation through their past seem to be relevant to their consumption decision.

The original brand nostalgia construct was developed by Bartier (2013) based on an age-representative ($M = 38.78$ years) 889 non-student consumers panel. The Bartier (2013) study uncovered empirical evidence that all three triggers of brand nostalgia – lived autobiographical souvenirs (personal memories), learned cross-generational memories (historical memories) and perceived brand oldness – are relevant in evoking brand nostalgia, with historical memories exerting the second strongest influence. For Gen Y, the present study suggests that they perceive the three components of brand nostalgia differently than is the case in other generations. A factor analysis uncovered that personal memories clear most of the variance, followed by perceived oldness and lastly historical memories. The empirical findings raise the question of whether the longing for a period in which an individual did not live (historical memories) reflects nostalgia independent of personal memories within Gen Y. This result does not call into question the concept of brand nostalgia as such, but reinforces the assumption that this cohort is unique and that its perception and attitudes differ from its predecessors.

The brand Schiesser, being the oldest in our sample, received the lowest BNI of all nostalgic brands due to the fact that the respondents were unable to reconnect either personal or historical memories with this brand. In particular, the present analysis revealed that perceived brand oldness alone is not sufficient to raise nostalgic feelings among Millennials confirming the findings of previous studies which had a broader age scope (Shields and Johnson, 2016; Ford et al., 2018). Shields and Johnson (2016) highlight the importance of memorising one’s own experiences for brand nostalgia as an activation of positive autobiographic emotional memories. All this indicates the importance of marketing measures to infuse the brand image with positive signals reviving the past, e.g. through story telling in marketing communications about situations reminding the target group of their own lived past.

This in turn opens up an interesting field for research concerning what type of nostalgic cues can be raised with a brand and how respective communication measures should be designed to best address this target group. While different generations have always posed a challenge for marketers due to their unique characteristics, Gen Y has created a more difficult

marketing task because they are not as influenced by traditional media as previous generations (Valentine and Powers, 2013). Consequently, the challenge regarding how to trigger nostalgia among Millennials needs further consideration.

Although the present study examined three product segments and two brands per product category, supporting a certain degree of generalisability, further research that focuses on additional product segments and/or additional brands is desirable within the target group. Hence, future research could extend the scope of this study in three directions: (1) investigate other age groups, e.g., Gen Z, both alone and in comparison to Gen Y, (2) cover additional product segments and (3) include additional brands. Additionally, studying the impact of personality variables, e.g., the importance of values such as tradition orientation and innovation orientation, behaviour patterns such as variety seeking or the preferred life style among the younger consumer group, on the identified relationships would provide an interesting avenue for further research. Future research could also investigate the relationship between brand nostalgia and specific brand personality characteristics for the featured target group as well as brand strength. Furthermore, as the quantitative and especially the qualitative findings suggest, the possibility of there being a thin line between a nostalgic brand and a brand being perceived as old-fashioned could be investigated in more detail. As brand management occurs in a dynamic environment, brand re-positioning might be inevitable. The impact of such a re-positioning on the triad of brand nostalgia, brand trust and brand authenticity could be another fruitful research area.

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