

SELLING THE PAST: INVESTIGATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF NOSTALGIA  
CUES IN PRINT ADS TARGETING MILLENNIALS

by

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## INTRODUCTION

What do the hit television show Mad Men, the most popular baby names of the year such as Sophia and Ava, the resurgence of fashion trends such as peplum, lace, fringe, and large glasses, and the success of handmade and vintage online shops like Etsy have in common? Nostalgia. Throughout the recent recession and current economic recovery, United States consumers have embraced nostalgic entertainment, products, and even baby names in droves. Interest in film photography, custom stationary, and even swing dancing have partially revived industries and pastimes once thought dead. Furthermore, the trends seem to be especially popular among a generation that was born years after the products were originally popular and who therefore have no personal memories that could make the products attractive. To America's youth, these trends seem fresh and new, but to others they are an echo of historical eras long past.

The Wall Street Journal reported that "the difficult economy is prompting many entrepreneurs to try to revive old brands from the dead – or the near-dead." The article says the phenomena can be explained in part by the fact that "using an old brand or product gives entrepreneurs at least one important advantage over start-ups: [t]he amount they have to spend on marketing is often less than the cost of creating a new brand or concept" (Loten & Maltby, 2012). A similar situation has also been reported in China, with classic Chinese brands from the Mao era making comebacks. Interestingly, in the case of Forever bikes and Huili sneakers, the brand revivals have been led by young, fashionable Chinese who were likely too young to remember the brands in their heyday (Hung, 2012). The Wall Street Journal also reported that interest in vintage typewriters has grown with many buyers in their 20s and 30s, some of whom have been known to take their typewriter with them to coffee shops "to bang out the next great American

novel" (Russell, 2013). The New York Times reported that the number of brand anniversary campaigns in 2012 were "beginning to bunch up," with brands such as Motel 6, Life Savers, Bacardi rum, Cartier, GMC Trucks, Kraft macaroni and cheese, the New York Mets, Oreo Cookies, and Glenfiddich Scotch whisky all running special anniversary campaigns. The trend, "inspired by the economy," has been called comfort marketing, which seeks to tap into "water-colored memories of the past" to prompt sales in the present (Elliott, 2012).

This phenomenon brings up many interesting questions. Why is this trend occurring at this particular point in American history? Why is it so popular with America's young adults (born 1980-1995) also known as the Millennial generation or Gen Y? What exactly is nostalgia and are there various types? Are there certain cues that trigger nostalgic reflection? Are consumers more likely to purchase products with these nostalgia triggers? How can marketers effectively tap into these trends to connect with young consumers? How is nostalgia communicated in advertising?

Nostalgia research is a broad field with many facets, but it was not seriously studied until the mid to late twentieth century. In the area of marketing, nostalgia has many applications ranging from retro-style products to advertisements. It is necessary therefore to gain a general understanding of the concept and its role in marketing before studying a specific application. This paper will begin by discussing the importance of studying the use of nostalgia in marketing, present a literature review describing highlights of research on the topic as well as some research on the generation most visibly embracing nostalgic trends, and present primary research designed to answer questions regarding the effectiveness of historical nostalgia cues in print advertising. It

will conclude with a discussion of the limitations of the research presented and suggest future research questions.

### RESEARCH QUESTION

The specific question this paper attempts to answer is “How effective are color and font when used as historical nostalgia cues in print advertisements targeting Millennials?” Previous research has dealt with the effectiveness of nostalgic messages in print advertisements, and discovered that the use of nostalgia in advertising results in more positive feelings and more favorable attitudes toward both the ad and brand than non-nostalgic ads (Muehling & Pascal, 2011). These results were achieved solely by text (verbal cues) without altering the design of the advertisement. The study authors did not test to see if other “triggers” or cues are equally effective at producing feelings of nostalgia and favorable attitudes toward the ad and brand, even though research has shown that visual elements intensify viewers’ emotions (Chowdhury, Olsen, & Pracejus, 2008).

This is significant, as not all print ads have space for lengthy text designed to evoke feelings of nostalgia. Many print ads rely on capturing the viewers’ attention in a few brief seconds, and elements such as color and font play a significant role in encouraging the consumer to stop and read the advertiser’s message. Understanding the role that visual cues play in evoking feelings of nostalgia is helpful to advertisers seeking to use this powerful emotion to connect with consumers on a deeply personal level.

Furthermore, because much of the fascination with vintage entertainment and products seems to be associated with the Millennial generation, it is important to understand how members of this generation react to various nostalgic cues other than text. As the second largest American generation, after the Baby Boomers, Millennials

wield a tremendous amount of purchasing power and their preferences are likely to leave a significant impact on advertising styles for years to come.

Finally, prior research has focused more on the distinction between the feelings associated with personal nostalgia (nostalgia for a past time or event personally experienced) and historical nostalgia (nostalgia for a past time or event that occurred before one's birth). Given the fact that people tend to be most nostalgic for things that were popular in their late teens and early twenties (Holbrook & Schindler, 1989), it makes sense that Millennials are not old enough to experience personal nostalgia in a significant way. Many Millennials are currently in those formative years that will shape their tastes and preferences for the rest of their lives. Therefore, one can argue that Millennials are more likely to identify with historical nostalgia rather than personal nostalgia given their current stage of life, and that historical nostalgia will therefore be more effective at reaching them. This idea seems to be confirmed by Millennials' fascination with vintage and retro-themed products and styles, things for which they have no personal nostalgia but do have a certain level of historical nostalgia.

To answer this question, we will examine existing research on nostalgia, Millennials, and print advertising. In addition, we will present the results of an experiment designed to test reactions to various color and font combinations in a print ad. The experiment explores questions such as consumers' attitude toward the ad and brand, as well as their likelihood of purchasing the product or telling a friend about it.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **History of the Term and Research**

The word nostalgia is derived from two Greek roots, *nostos* and *algos*, which mean to "return to one's native land" and "pain, suffering, or grief" (Holak & Havlena,

1992; Sedikides, Wildschut, & Baden, 2004). The term was coined by the Swiss physician Johannes Hofner in 1688, and referred to a medical or neurological disease similar to extreme homesickness. It wasn't until the mid to late twentieth century that the term lost its medical connotation and came to mean "a sentimental longing for the past" (Wildschut, Sedikides, Arndt, & Routledge, 2006) or a "positively valenced complex feeling, emotion, or mood produced by reflection on things (objects, persons, experiences, ideas) associated with the past" (Holak & Havlena, 1998). Nostalgia is also noted for being bittersweet, simultaneously calling forth both happy and sad emotions (Davis, 1979; Hirsch, 1992; Holak & Havlena, 1998; Wildschut et al., 2006). Also key to an understanding of nostalgia is the concept of an "idealized" past, one "seen through rose-colored glasses" (Muehling & Pascal, 2011). Nostalgia is not about accurately preserving memories of the past; it is about celebrating the specific aspects of the past we wish would continue while disregarding the negative aspects that accompanied them.

Davis pioneered modern research on nostalgia by examining the topic from a sociological perspective. He argued that there are three orders of nostalgia: first order (also called simple nostalgia), second order (reflexive), and third order (interpreted). Simple nostalgia, defined as individuals' perceptions that "things were better *then* than *now*" forms the backbone of marketing research on the topic (Davis, 1979).

### **Types of Nostalgia**

A key distinction in nostalgia literature is the difference between personal and historical nostalgia. According to Stern, personal nostalgia involves a "personally remembered past" while historical nostalgia involves a time before the person was born (1992). Baker and Kennedy introduced a third type of nostalgia – "collective nostalgia,"

which involves a shared longing for a past by “a culture, a generation, or a nation” (1994). Others have argued that personal and communal nostalgia are very closely related in marketing, since brands form connections with both individuals and larger communities or past events (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry Jr., 2003).

### **Nostalgia Proneness**

Through a series of studies, Holbrook and Schindler developed a “nostalgia proneness” scale, suggesting that some people are more prone to nostalgic emotions than others. Nostalgia proneness is independent of age, although later in life people tend to be most nostalgic for things that were popular in their late teens and early twenties. Possible explanations for this phenomenon include the fact that exposure to products such as music may be highest during this time of life (the mere exposure effect) and the fact that these products are linked to a stage of life with mostly positive emotions (Holbrook & Schindler, 1994). Holbrook and Schindler measured this effect for a variety of products, finding the peak nostalgia age for music, movie stars, fashion models, and classic cars (1989, 1994, 1996). This research suggests that when using nostalgia in marketing to Millennials, historical nostalgia will be more effective than personal nostalgia since Millennials have not yet reached an age when personal nostalgia becomes significant. Many Millennials are in that formative stage of nostalgia (late teens and early twenties) which will shape their taste in products for the rest of their lives, but do not feel intense personal nostalgia for products popular during their childhood.

### **Nostalgia Triggers and Effects**

Nostalgic reflections can be triggered through a variety of cues. In a study by Holak and Havlena (1992), music, movies, family members, and events were all identified as

possible nostalgia cues. Studies conducted to measure the effects of nostalgia in advertising were able to trigger significant levels of nostalgia in participants simply through the use of verbal cues (Muehling & Pascal, 2011, 2012; Muehling & Sprott, 2004). Interestingly, there is evidence that mere “exposure to retro brands does not elicit nostalgic and emotional associations” (Cattaneo & Guerini, 2012). Research from the field of psychology has shown that nostalgia is most frequently triggered by negative affect, suggesting that nostalgia is used to bolster one’s mood during times of uncertainty, sadness, or loneliness. Other significant triggers of nostalgia include social interaction and sensory input (Wildschut, Sedikides, Arndt, & Routledge, 2006).

Nostalgia has been shown to have a dramatic effect on consumers. Muehling and Pascal have shown that the use of personal nostalgia in advertising leads to significantly more self-directed thoughts (mostly positive in nature) than historical nostalgia or non-nostalgia ads. Furthermore, the use of nostalgia in advertising has been shown to result in more positive feelings and more favorable attitudes toward both the ad and brand than non-nostalgic ads (Muehling & Pascal, 2011). Nostalgia is also widely noted for providing a sense of security and stability during times of uncertainty, which is one reason why it is often used during recessions or times of war (Davis, 1979; Boyle, 2009). One possible explanation for this is the fact that nostalgia reinforces identity. As Belk notes, “We tend to be especially concerned with having a past when our current identity has been challenged” (1990). More recently, research has suggested that consuming nostalgic products satisfies an inherent need to belong and that these products are preferred in situations “in which the need to belong is an active goal” (Loveland, Smeesters, & Mandel, 2010).

Furthermore, the use of “autobiographical memory” as a means of evoking personal nostalgia in advertising has been shown to actually alter viewers’ memories, increasing their confidence that they experienced something that never actually took place. In one experiment, participants were shown an ad that suggested they experienced an impossible situation in their childhood – shaking hands with Bugs Bunny at Disney World. Relative to the control group, participants showed an increase in confidence that they had actually experienced this in their past (Braun, Ellis, & Loftus, 2002). Such research reinforces the power of nostalgia in marketing and explains why so many brands have made it an integral part of their strategy, yet suggests an ethical consideration that marketers must be careful not to abuse the power of nostalgia by distorting either personal or communal memories.

### **Nostalgia and Millennials**

The Millennial generation, often referred to as Gen Y, has been defined using a wide range of birth years, usually starting in the late 1970s or mid 1980s and ending in the mid 1990s or 2000. For the purposes of this study, Millennials are classified as those born between 1980 and 1995, a generation of roughly 80 million people (CBS News, 2009). While little formal academic research has been completed on the Millennial generation, much has been written about them and some research data does exist.

Pew Research describes Millennials as the most educated generation in American history and as extremely tech savvy. In fact, when asked what defines their generation nearly 25% of Millennials said technology, which is the highest percentage of any age group. Of more relevance to this particular study is what Pew data revealed about Millennials’ relationships with previous generations. Interestingly, this generation gets

along well with their parents, more so than Millennials' parents remember agreeing with their own parents at the same age. Furthermore, they have a lot of respect for older generations, saying that their elders have better morals and work ethics, and are more likely than previous generations to say that it is the responsibility of adult children to care for elderly parents (Pew Research Center, 2010). Other researchers have noted that "they admire their parents but trust their grandparents even more" (Williams & Page, 2011). This ties them more closely to the past than previous generations at the same age. Furthermore, Millennials tend to get along well with others and while they are the most ethnically diverse generation in US history, they are also one of the most tolerant. Despite the fact that many Millennials are unemployed, they are more optimistic about their economic future than their elders, and are more likely to say that businesses do a good job of balancing profits and social good (Pew Research Center, 2010).

The Pew Research findings seem to validate observations made by others. In a 2011 piece from *The New York Times*, William Deresiewicz noted that unlike previous generations of youth culture, Millennials don't seem to be rebelling against, rejecting, or dissenting anything (2011). David Brooks noted a similar situation after talking with students and faculty at Princeton in 2001, writing that the students "[are] not trying to buck the system; they're trying to climb it...[they] are also extremely respectful of authority, treating their professors as one might treat a CEO or a division head at a company meeting." Furthermore, Millennials are incredibly group-oriented, studying in groups and apologizing before expressing a dissenting opinion. They tend to dress nicely and care about their appearance. But perhaps most striking of all was Brooks' observation about Millennials orientation toward the past: "...this generation is for the most part not

fighting to emancipate itself from the past. The most sophisticated people in preceding generations were formed by their struggle to break free from something. The most sophisticated people in this one aren't" (Brooks, 2001).

This attitude toward the past may help explain the explosion in retro products and advertising targeted not at Baby Boomers, but at Millennials. One report predicts that "the connection they [Millennials] have with their parents fuels their demand for nostalgia, retro and remakes...Old is definitely new again with this generation" (Blackburn, 2012). Furthermore, Millennials prefer ads that evoke strong sensory responses (experiential ads) to those with rational sales pitches (McCrea, 2011), which is yet another characteristic of nostalgic advertisements. From Mad Men, to fashion trends, to vintage style photography, to the popularity of "Big Band" style musicians like Michael Buble and the resurgence of swing dancing, Millennials have embraced historically nostalgic products.

### **Print Advertising**

In addition to understanding the literature on nostalgia and Millennials, it is also important to understand basic theoretical concepts in print advertising. Advertising professionals have found that the picture in a print ad captures more than twice the attention as the headline, and the strong visual element eventually draws people's attention to the body copy, making visuals better "at getting and keeping attention." Furthermore, people tend to remember messages "as visual fragments," and remember ads with a strong visual impression more than ones with mostly text. Finally, visual elements communicate instantly, which is ideal for convincing people to stop and read the message (Wells, Burnett, & Moriarty, 2003).

Photographs and illustrations play an important role in the visual element of print ads. Photographs have an authenticity and realism that illustrations lack, but can be treated in a way to enhance the artistic quality of the photograph and highlight historic qualities, useful for evoking nostalgia. Illustrations are typically perceived as more fanciful, not well suited for realism or highlighting historic qualities (Wells, Burnett, & Moriarty, 2003). Therefore, this study will use photographs rather than illustrations to determine the impact of nostalgia in print advertising.

Color is another important visual element of print ads. Color helps to attract attention, provide realism, and establish moods. Black-and-white photographs on the other hand, can signify a historical time, especially when used in contrast with other color visual elements. Colors are also associated with particular emotions, with warm colors such as red, yellow, and orange representing happiness (Wells, Burnett, & Moriarty, 2003). It is interesting to note that many of the “vintage” color treatments of photos use colors with warm undertones (e.g. Sepia). Therefore, this study will test both black-and-white and other color variations that mimic retro-style photographs.

Typography, or the font used in an ad, is another important visual element. Although it is often reduced to a functional role, font also plays an aesthetic role and can “contribute to the impact and mood of the message (Wells, Burnett, & Moriarty, 2003)” Typography has gained increasing attention in the Information Age, as brands have quickly discovered that distinctive fonts can break through the clutter of competing advertisements (Lee & Johnson, 2005). Some fonts appear more modern or even futuristic, while others are associated with the past. Therefore, this study will test a variety of vintage-style fonts.

## METHODS AND RESULTS

### **Hypotheses**

Based on the results of prior research and the information presented regarding the Millennial generation's tastes and preferences, I predict the following statements to be upheld:

*Hypothesis 1:* General Nostalgia is influenced by a) Color b) Font c) Interaction between Color and Font.

*Hypothesis 2:* Historical Nostalgia is influenced by a) Color b) Font c) Interaction between Color and Font.

*Hypothesis 3:* Nostalgia Proneness is influenced by a) Color b) Font c) Interaction between Color and Font

*Hypothesis 4:* Attitude toward the ad is influenced by a) Color b) Font c) Interaction between Color and Font

*Hypothesis 5:* Attitude toward the product is influenced by a) Color b) Font c) Interaction between Color and Font

*Hypothesis 6:* Attitude toward the brand is influenced by a) Color b) Font c) Interaction between Color and Font

*Hypothesis 7:* Likelihood of recommending the product is influenced by a) Color b) Font c) Interaction between Color and Font

*Hypothesis 8:* Positive Affect is influenced by a) Color b) Font c) Interaction between Color and Font

*Hypothesis 9:* Negative Affect is influenced by a) Color b) Font c) Interaction between Color and Font

## Pre-test Methods

In order to determine which image, fonts, and color variations to use in the experiment, a pre-test was conducted online with 27 undergraduate students in the Neeley School of Business at Texas Christian University. Students were first asked to view three images representing different life events including Christmas, Birthdays, and Graduation and rate each on its timelessness (see Appendix for images). The goal was to identify a scenario that is not closely associated with either the past or the present, and therefore can be manipulated in the ad to be modern or vintage accordingly. Students rated each image on a scale of 1-5 with 1 indicating “Dated,” 5 indicating “Timeless,” and the midpoint 3 indicating “Neither Dated Nor Timeless.” Next, students were randomly presented with one of the three images edited with 6 different color variations selected for their similarity to old styles of photo editing, including Bright Color, Black and White, Cross Process (yellow tint similar to many vintage photos), Grainy, “Old Photo” (resembles a faded photo), and Sepia (see Appendix for color variations). Students were asked to rate each color variation on a scale of 1-7 with 1 indicating “not at all nostalgic” and 7 indicating “extremely nostalgic.” Each image was rated by 9 students, and an average was calculated for each of the 6 color variations with each color variation receiving 27 ratings spread over the three image types. Finally, students were presented with 6 different vintage-style fonts (see Appendix for fonts) and asked to rate each on a scale of 1-7 with 1 indicating “not at all nostalgic” and 7 indicating “extremely nostalgic.”

## Pre-Test Results

The image with the highest average rating is Christmas, meaning students believe the image to be the most timeless. The mean for the Christmas image is significantly higher than the midpoint. The least timeless picture (Birthday) is however not significantly lower than the mean. When testing to see if there is a significant difference between the Christmas and Birthday images, the test fails at an alpha of .05 but passes at an alpha of .10 (see Table 1). Christmas was therefore selected for the image used in the experiment.

The results for color variations are less clear. When testing for significance from the mean for categories of color, no category is significantly higher than the mean, even at an alpha of .10 (see Table 1). Based on the survey results, it is likely that respondents misunderstood the scale and reversed the order. In the end, the two extremes in terms of mean rating were selected for testing in the full experiment – Bright Color and Sepia. The difference between the two extremes is statistically significant. Sepia and Grainy actually tie for the lowest mean rating, but Sepia has a tighter variance and standard deviation and is therefore considered more reliable. Although the normal unedited version of the image was not tested for nostalgia, it was also included in the final experiment to provide a modern contrast to the vintage color variations since even the lowest rated color (Sepia) is still not significantly below the mean, which would indicate contemporariness.

The results for the fonts are also not clear-cut. None of the fonts is rated significantly higher than the mean, even at an alpha of .10. Again, the survey results indicated that respondents may have misunderstood the scale and reversed the order. Of the 6 fonts, Seaside has the highest mean rating and is therefore considered most

nostalgic. Bazar and Riesling have the lowest means and are therefore considered the least nostalgic (Bazar: mean = 3.26, F Statistic = -2.39, P Value = 2.06. Riesling: mean = 3.26, F Statistic = -2.23, P Value = 2.06). The difference between the two extremes is significant. Therefore, Seaside was selected for the final experiment to represent the nostalgic font and Riesling was selected for the final experiment as the modern font, after asking three more respondents to indicate whether they viewed Bazar or Riesling as more modern to break the tie.

<b><i>Pre-Test Results</i></b>	<b><i>Image</i></b>	<b><i>Colors</i></b>		<b><i>Fonts</i></b>	
	<b>Christmas</b>	<b>Bright</b>	<b>Sepia</b>	<b>Seaside</b>	<b>Riesling</b>
<b>Mean</b>	4.11	4.59	3.19	4.48	3.26
<b>Variance</b>	1.87	3.56	3.23	3.80	2.97
<b>Std. Deviation</b>	1.37	1.89	1.80	1.95	1.72
<b>F Statistic</b>	4.22	1.63	-2.35	1.28	-2.23
<b>P Value (alpha = 0.05)</b>	2.06	2.06	2.06	2.06	2.06

Table 1: Pre-Test Results

## Experiment Method

The experiment was conducted in the form of a survey administered online during the spring of 2013. The majority of respondents are undergraduate students at Texas Christian University, although some are students at other schools or recent college graduates. All respondents used in analysis were 18 years of age or older and are classified as being part of the Millennial generation. 130 total people participated in the study but four responses had to be thrown out because the respondents are not classified as being part of the Millennial generation. Therefore, the data analysis is based on the responses of 126 individuals. 59% of respondents are female and 41% are male, which is similar to the overall student population at TCU. 85% of respondents are between 18 and

22 years of age, meaning that the sample population is concentrated on the younger end of the Millennial generation. 90% of respondents said they are U.S. citizens, with the other 10% comprised of international students.

Six ads were created using the color variations and fonts determined through the pre-test. The combinations used were Bright Color/Seaside Font, Bright Color/Riesling Font, Sepia Color/Seaside Font, Sepia Color/Riesling Font, Normal Color/Seaside Font, and Normal Color/Riesling Font. The main image of the ad was the Christmas image rated by pre-test respondents as being the most timeless. Previous research had determined that digital cameras work well as products in nostalgia experimental print ads, and that the fictitious brand name “Foton” was considered the most neutral out of 42 fictitious brand names in a pretest conducted on the researchers’ sample population (Muehling & Pascal, 2011). Therefore, a digital camera with the brand name “Foton” was selected for this experiment. The basic design and message of the print ad remained constant throughout all six variations, with manipulations only to the color of the main image and the font. The overall structure of the experiment and of the questions asked was similar to Muehling and Pascal’s experiments, in order to better compare the effects of text versus font/color in evoking historical nostalgia.

Respondents were randomly presented with one of the six ads, with each ad receiving between 19 and 24 views. After carefully viewing the ad, respondents were asked to record their initial thoughts and reactions to the ad. The responses were used to gauge overall positive and negative reactions, as well to identify aspects of the ad that were confusing to respondents. Next, they were asked to rate the quality of the Foton camera, their attitude toward the Foton camera, their attitude toward the Foton brand, and

how much they like the Foton brand using 7-point Likert scales anchored by Bad/Good, Unfavorable/Favorable, and “Dislike it Very Much”/”Like it Very Much.” The responses were averaged to determine overall attitude toward the product and overall attitude toward the brand.

Respondents were then shown the same ad for the last time and asked to rate the ad’s quality, their attitude toward the ad, and the feelings produced by the ad using 7-point Likert scales anchored by Bad/Good, Unfavorable/Favorable, Negative/Positive, and Unpleasant/Pleasant. The responses were averaged to determine the overall attitude toward the ad itself.

At this point, respondents no longer were able to view the ad. They began to answer a series of multiple choice questions designed to determine their evaluation of the product, purchase intention, and likelihood of recommendation such as “How do you rate the Foton camera?,” “How likely are you to purchase the Foton camera?,” and “How likely are you to tell a friend about the Foton camera?”

Next, respondents were asked a series of ad recall questions, beginning with a question designed to measure positive affect. This question is significant because it is used to determine if people have more positive feelings toward nostalgic ads.

Respondents were presented with a list of 13 emotions including 7 positive and 6 negative adapted from a scale developed by Burke and Edell (1989). The average of the positive feeling results is used to measure positive affect.

The next two questions focused on the general level of nostalgia the ad evokes and the level of historical nostalgia evoked by the ad, respectively. In each question, respondents were asked to rate how strongly they agreed with a series of statements, with

1 indicating “Strongly Disagree” and 7 indicating “Strongly Agree.” To measure general nostalgia, respondents evaluated statements such as “Viewing the Foton ad...reminds me of the past” or “helps me recall pleasant memories.” The scale was adapted from a prior study (Pascal, Sprott, & Muehling, 2002). To measure historical nostalgia, respondents evaluated statements such as “Viewing the Foton ad...makes me feel good about a previous time – a time before my birth” or “evokes good feelings about a time before I was born.” These items were also based on a scale used in prior studies (Muehling & Pascal, 2012). The responses to the statements were averaged to calculate overall levels of general and historical nostalgia.

Next, the experiment measured nostalgia proneness using a scale developed by previous researchers (Holbrook, 1993). The original scale had 20 statements, but in a similar study it was found that 8 specific statements were the only combination that yielded a maximum likelihood factor analysis that no longer rejected the null hypothesis of fit for the single factor model (Muehling & Pascal, 2012). Respondents were presented with these eight statements which included ideas such as “They don’t make ‘em like they used to,” “Things used to be better in the good old days” and inverse statements such as “Modern business constantly builds a better tomorrow.”

Finally, two questions from the pre-test regarding fonts and color variations were repeated to verify the results of the manipulation. Respondents were also asked for some simple demographic information such as age (to verify that they are indeed classified as Millennials), as well as gender and whether or not they were born in the United States since it is possible that those from other countries may not have the same associations with the past as the primary U.S. audience.

## Experiment Results

Hypotheses were tested using ANOVA analysis. Unless otherwise stated, all ANOVA analysis was conducted without using the intercept.

**Manipulation Checks:** In order to verify the results of the pre-test, participants in the experiment were asked the same questions used in the pre-test but with only the fonts and colors used in the experiment. The results of this manipulation check are in Table 2 and will be discussed in more detail in the limitations section.

	COLORS		FONTS	
	Bright	Sepia	Riesling	Seaside
<b>Mean</b>	4.10	4.54	3.79	3.73
<b>Variance</b>	2.82	3.02	3.02	3.13
<b>St. Deviation</b>	1.68	1.74	1.74	1.77
<b>F Statistic</b>	0.64	3.49	-1.38	-1.71
<b>P Value (.05)</b>	1.98	1.98	1.98	1.98
<b>Significant?</b>	No	Yes	No	No
<b>P Value (.10)</b>	1.66	1.66	1.66	1.66
<b>Significant?</b>	No	Yes	No	Yes
<b>2 Mean F Statistic</b>	-2.064187386		0.251579902	
<b>P Value (.05)</b>	+/- 1.96949839		+/- 1.96949839	
<b>Significant?</b>	Yes		No	

Table 2: Manipulation Check Experiment Results

**Hypotheses 1-3:** General Nostalgia, Historical Nostalgia, and Nostalgia Proneness are influenced by a) Color b) Font c) Interaction between Color and Font

**Hypotheses 1-3 Results:** Color and font were found not to have a significant effect on historical nostalgia levels (see Table 4). Furthermore, color and font do not have a significant effect even on general nostalgia levels (see Table 3). The results of the experiment showed that the sample population in this study proved not to be very nostalgia-prone, with a mean of 3.68 just under the scale midpoint of 4. Because

nostalgia proneness was found to be marginally affected in a negative direction (i.e. less nostalgic) by color and the interaction of color and font (see Table 5), regression analysis was conducted to determine whether the failure to evoke significant levels of historical and general nostalgia could be attributed to a lower level of nostalgia proneness. The results of the regression analysis revealed that historical and general nostalgia are not significantly influenced by an individual's nostalgia proneness, meaning that the results can be attributed to the effect of font and color variables rather than outside influence such as nostalgia proneness (see Tables 6 & 7).

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects Dependent Variable: General Nostalgia					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>Model</b>	2312.30 <sup>a</sup>	6	385.38	141.43	0
<b>Font</b>	1.24	1	1.24	0.46	0.50
<b>Color</b>	4.91	2	2.46	0.90	0.41
<b>Font * Color</b>	0.48	2	0.24	0.09	0.91
<b>Error</b>	326.998	120	2.73		
<b>Total</b>	2639.30	126			
<b>a. R Squared = .876 (Adjusted R Squared = .870)</b>					

Table 3: General Nostalgia Levels Without Intercept

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects Dependent Variable: Historical Nostalgia					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>Model</b>	495.97 <sup>a</sup>	6	82.66	45.56	0
<b>Font</b>	0.11	1	0.11	0.06	0.81
<b>Color</b>	5.08	2	2.54	1.40	0.25
<b>Font * Color</b>	5.69	2	2.84	1.57	0.21
<b>Error</b>	217.72	120	1.81		
<b>Total</b>	713.69	126			
<b>a. R Squared = .695 (Adjusted R Squared = .680)</b>					

Table 4: Historical Nostalgia Levels Without Intercept

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects Dependent Variable: Nostalgia Proneness					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>Model</b>	1702.70 <sup>a</sup>	6	283.78	390.10	0
<b>Font</b>	1.06	1	1.06	1.46	0.23
<b>Color</b>	2.93	2	1.47	2.02	0.14
<b>Font * Color</b>	3.71	2	1.86	2.56	0.08
<b>Error</b>	87.10	120	0.73		
<b>Total</b>	1789.10	126			
<b>a. R Squared = .951 (Adjusted R Squared = .949)</b>					

Table 5: Nostalgia Proneness Without Intercept

Regression: Nostalgia Proneness = Predictor, Historical Nostalgia = Dependent Variable					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>Regression</b>	0.2	1	0.18	0.1	0.76
<b>Residual</b>	228	124	1.84		
<b>Total</b>	229	125			

Table 6: Regression for Nostalgia Proneness &amp; Historical Nostalgia

<b>Regression: Nostalgia Proneness = Predictor, General Nostalgia = Dependent Variable</b>					
<b>Model</b>	<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
<b>Regression</b>	0	1	0.03	0.01	0.91
<b>Residual</b>	334	124	2.69		
<b>Total</b>	334	125			

Table 7: Regression for Nostalgia Proneness & General Nostalgia

**Hypothesis 4:** Attitude toward the ad is influenced by a) Color b) Font c) Interaction between Color and Font

**Hypothesis 4 Results:** Attitude toward advertisements is affected by color at the .05 alpha level, although two of the three color variation means are in the negative direction (Sepia and Bright). There is a statistically significant difference between the only positively rated color variation (Normal) and the lowest rated color variation (Sepia), but there is not a significant difference between Normal and Bright or Bright and Sepia. Font does not have a significant effect on attitude toward ads in either a positive or negative direction. The interaction between color and font does not have a significant effect on attitudes either. Therefore, color does influence Millennials' perception of advertisements and the "vintage" style color variations actually are considered to be negative. The Normal color variation produced the most positive attitudes.

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects					
Dependent Variable: Attitude Toward Ad					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>Model</b>	1948.85 <sup>a</sup>	6	324.81	152.24	0
<b>Font</b>	0.004	1	0.004	0.002	0.98
<b>Color</b>	13.02	2	6.51	3.05	0.05
<b>Font * Color</b>	2.57	2	1.28	0.60	0.55
<b>Error</b>	256.03	120	2.13		
<b>Total</b>	2204.88	126			
<b>a. R Squared = .884 (Adjusted R Squared = .878)</b>					

Table 8: Attitude Toward Ad Without Intercept

**Hypothesis 5:** Attitude toward the product is influenced by a) Color b) Font c) Interaction between Color and Font

**Hypothesis 5 Results:** Attitude toward the product is affected by color at an alpha of .05.

All three color variations are positively rated with Normal, the “modern” variation, having the highest mean rating of 4.895. Therefore, nostalgic color variations do have a positive effect on Millennials’ attitudes toward products, although modern colors actually produce the most favorable impressions. Font does not have a significant impact on product attitudes, and neither does the interaction between color and font.

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects					
Dependent Variable: Attitude Toward Product					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>Model</b>	2433.24 <sup>a</sup>	6	405.54	190.46	0
<b>Font</b>	0.08	1	0.08	0.04	0.84
<b>Color</b>	14.73	2	7.37	3.46	0.04
<b>Font * Color</b>	3.95	2	1.98	0.93	0.40
<b>Error</b>	255.51	120	2.13		
<b>Total</b>	2688.75	126			
<b>a. R Squared = .905 (Adjusted R Squared = .900)</b>					

Table 9: Attitude Toward Product Without Intercept

**Hypothesis 6:** Attitude toward the brand is influenced by a) Color b) Font c) Interaction between Color and Font

**Hypothesis 6 Results:** Attitude toward the brand is marginally affected by color at an alpha of 0.10. Two out of the three color variations are rated positively, with Sepia being the only color whose mean is under the scale midpoint. Bright Color, the other “vintage” style color variation used in the study, has a mean just above the scale midpoint. Normal, the “modern” version used in study, has the highest mean at 4.46, and there is a statistically significant difference between the highest and lowest rated fonts. Therefore, modern colors actually produce the most favorable impressions. Font once again does not have a significant impact on brand attitude, and neither does the interaction between color and font.

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects Dependent Variable: Attitude Toward Brand					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>Model</b>	2138.72 <sup>a</sup>	6	356.45	195.51	0
<b>Font</b>	1.75	1	1.75	0.96	0.33
<b>Color</b>	7.26	2	3.63	1.99	0.14
<b>Font * Color</b>	0.19	2	0.10	0.05	0.95
<b>Error</b>	218.78	120	1.82		
<b>Total</b>	2357.50	126			
<b>a. R Squared = .907 (Adjusted R Squared = .903)</b>					

Table 10: Attitude Toward Brand Without Intercept

**Hypothesis 7:** Likelihood of recommending the product is influenced by a) Color b) Font c) Interaction between Color and Font

**Hypothesis 7 Results:** Likelihood of recommending the product or mentioning the product to a friend is marginally affected by both font and color at an alpha of 0.10. The means for all colors and fonts are below the scale midpoint, meaning that the overall effect is negative. There is not an interactive effect for font and color however.

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects Dependent Variable: Likelihood of Recommendation					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>Model</b>	1044.44 <sup>a</sup>	6	174.07	82.06	0
<b>Font</b>	7.32	1	7.32	3.45	0.07
<b>Color</b>	14.35	2	7.17	3.38	0.04
<b>Font * Color</b>	0.58	2	0.29	0.14	0.87
<b>Error</b>	254.56	120	2.12		
<b>Total</b>	1299	126			
<b>a. R Squared = .804 (Adjusted R Squared = .794)</b>					

Table 11: Likelihood of Recommendation Without Intercept

**Hypotheses 8 & 9:** Positive and Negative Affect are influenced by a) Color b) Font c)

Interaction between Color and Font

**Hypotheses 8 & 9 Results:** Positive affect is marginally influenced by color, although in a negative direction. Both Sepia and Bright Color have means that are less than the scale midpoint. Font once again did not influence positive affect and neither does the interaction between font and color. Not surprisingly then, negative affect is influenced by color both with and without the intercept, with the means for all color variations well below the midpoints. Font and the interaction between font and color do not influence negative affect.

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects					
Dependent Variable: Positive Affect					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>Model</b>	1623.25 <sup>a</sup>	6	270.54	129.55	0
<b>Font</b>	1.33	1	1.33	0.64	0.43
<b>Color</b>	11.91	2	5.95	2.85	0.07
<b>Font * Color</b>	3.08	2	1.54	0.74	0.48
<b>Error</b>	250.59	120	2.09		
<b>Total</b>	1873.84	126			

**a. R Squared = .866 (Adjusted R Squared = .860)**

Table 12: Positive Affect Without Intercept

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects Dependent Variable: Negative Affect					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>Model</b>	870.55 <sup>a</sup>	6	145.09	116.07	0
<b>Font</b>	0.71	1	0.71	0.56	0.45
<b>Color</b>	11.89	2	5.94	4.75	0.01
<b>Font * Color</b>	0.59	2	0.30	0.24	0.79
<b>Error</b>	150.01	120	1.25		
<b>Total</b>	1020.56	126			
<b>a. R Squared = .853 (Adjusted R Squared = .846)</b>					

Table 13: Negative Affect Without Intercept

*Hypotheses Results Summary*

Hypothesis Number	Dependent Variable	Color	Font	Interactive
<b>1</b>	General Nostalgia	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
<b>2</b>	Historical Nostalgia	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
<b>3</b>	Nostalgia Proneness	Yes – Mostly Negative	Not Significant	Yes –Mostly Negative
<b>4</b>	Attitude Toward Ad	Yes – Vintage Negative	Not Significant	Not Significant
<b>5</b>	Attitude Toward Product	Yes – Positive, but Modern Preferred	Not Significant	Not Significant
<b>6</b>	Attitude Toward Brand	Yes – Mostly Positive but Modern Preferred	Not Significant	Not Significant
<b>7</b>	Likelihood of Recommending Product	Yes – Negative	Yes – Negative	Not Significant
<b>8</b>	Positive Affect	Yes – Negative	Not Significant	Not Significant
<b>9</b>	Negative Affect	Yes	Not Significant	Not Significant

Table 14: Hypotheses Results Summary

## DISCUSSION

### **General Discussion**

The results of the experiment show that using color and font as visual cues to trigger general and historical nostalgia can be difficult to achieve. Unlike prior studies, which used verbal cues to evoke feelings of nostalgia, the current experiment did not achieve statistically significant differences in nostalgia levels. It is possible that different fonts or colors could produce the desired results, or that other visual elements are more effective at triggering nostalgia. Another possibility is that mixing multiple elements to create an overall “vintage” effect would produce the desired results. Nevertheless, this study has shown that the effects of font and color are much more subtle, and that advertisers wishing to tap into feelings of historical nostalgia can most easily accomplish this by using verbal cues.

Furthermore, the study shows that color does indeed influence Millennials’ perceptions more than font does. None of the dependent variables is significantly influenced by font, although most variables have at least a slight color effect. Font is an even more subtle cue than color, and those who are not familiar with vintage style fonts may not understand the deeper meaning advertisers are trying to communicate. Additionally, many respondents complained that the fonts were difficult to read, which is due in part to problems with scaling and file compression in the online survey system. The fonts that pre-test respondents identified as being nostalgic when presented with a single, large-font sized word did not always translate well to lines of text in the actual ad. In terms of color, respondents preferred Normal (the modern, unaltered color variation) to more vintage style color variations in most cases. Quality once again played a role here,

with some complaining about the poor quality of the Sepia filter applied to the photos. Some respondents viewed the Sepia filter as a cheap Instagram-like imitation, suggesting perhaps that the very popularity of such filters may be degrading their image.

Additionally, this study reinforced the idea that visual cues do play an important role in people's perceptions of products, brands, and advertisements. As stated previously, the more modern visual cues were received better by Millennials. Therefore, advertisers hoping to connect with this generation may be best served by using a modern aesthetic.

Finally, it is interesting that the sample population scored below the mean in nostalgia proneness, which is opposite of what was predicted. Although Millennials may be interested in vintage products and styles and are not rebelling against the past, they seem to be well grounded in the present. This suggests that the fascination with all things vintage is not indicative of higher than normal levels of nostalgia proneness, but rather a lack of awareness that such products are indeed nostalgic. To Millennials being exposed to the styles and tastes of the past for the first time, such things may actually be perceived as trendy and modern rather than nostalgic.

### **Limitations**

This study had several notable limitations that may have influenced the results. First, pre-test results indicate that respondents may have misunderstood and reversed the scale when rating fonts and colors as nostalgic. This idea is supported by the fact that in the pre-test, Bright Color was rated as the most nostalgic (mean = 4.59) and Sepia was rated the least nostalgic (mean = 3.19). However, when respondents in the experiment were asked an identical question (but including only Sepia and Bright Color rather than

all six initial color variations) they rated Sepia as being more nostalgic (mean = 4.54) than Bright Color (mean = 4.09). In fact, while Sepia is significantly higher than the mean, Bright Color is not. As in the pre-test, there is a statistically significant difference at an alpha of .05 between the two color variations. For the fonts, pre-test results rated Seaside as the most nostalgic (mean = 4.48) and Riesling as the least nostalgic (mean = 3.26), but experiment results for an identical question yield a mean of 3.73 for Seaside and 3.76 for Riesling. At an alpha of .10, Seaside is actually significantly below the mean meaning respondents viewed it as not being nostalgic. The result for Riesling is not significant, and the difference between the two means obtained in the experiment is not significant either. Since neither font was rated by experiment respondents as nostalgic, this could possibly explain why font influenced perceptions very little.

Second, the pre-test neglected to include “modern” variations and focused only on vintage styles, which meant there was little evidence available to support decisions regarding modern versus vintage elements when creating the advertisements for the experiment. Had time allowed, it would have been best to continue pre-testing fonts and colors, rather than just six of each, until more effective modern and vintage styles could be identified. The sample size of the pre-test also caused problems in the results, as evidenced by the difference in means for fonts and colors rated in both the pre-test and the experiment.

Third, the quality of the ads proved to be a major concern to respondents. Comments indicated that many felt the ad was not well constructed and complained about the quality of the fonts (readability issues) as well as the quality of the Sepia filter. When testing visual elements in a print advertisement, researchers should consider seeking the

help of a professional in constructing the ads and carefully evaluate whether fonts and colors selected from pre-tests translate well into actual ads.

Fourth, respondents were confused about the connection between the photograph of the Christmas scene and the Foton camera. Many thought the photo was product demonstration of the quality of Foton camera photos and thought perhaps that the camera took vintage-style photos. As previous research has suggested, consumers like retro-style advertising, packaging, and design as long as the product itself meets modern quality and functionality standards (Cattaneo & Guerini, 2012). Some respondents may have responded negatively because they disliked the quality of the photo's color filter and therefore believed that the camera itself was of poor quality. This problem could potentially be eliminated by including a list of product features in the ad, in order to clearly establish the product as meeting modern standards. The product features list was not included in this experiment because it was believed to distract from the main focus of the experiment – the colors and fonts.

Fifth, the sample population used in both the experiment and pre-test followed convenience sampling techniques, and therefore is not representative of the Millennial generation as a whole. Furthermore, while every effort was made to ensure that at least twenty respondents viewed each ad (the minimum number needed for valid statistical tests), three of the advertisements received less than twenty responses. This is due to the fact that the online survey system, which randomly sorted respondents into six groups, did not eliminate partial responses. It is also due to the fact that several responses had to be thrown out due to ineligibility.

Finally, many of the results are very close and border on non-statistical significance. Again, better and increased pre-testing would have allowed the researcher to identify fonts and colors with more pronounced differences, which may lead to clearer results in the final experiment. Testing a larger sample pool might also have produced more distinct differences in results.

### **Future Research Opportunities**

The field of nostalgia marketing and advertising presents many opportunities for future research. Based on the results of this study, several questions still need to be answered. For example, are other fonts and color variations more effective at evoking nostalgia than the ones used in this experiment? Are other visual cues necessary in creating a nostalgic advertisement (such as layout and style of presentation)? Do visual cues strengthen verbal cues as suggested by prior research, and would an ad that combines the two produce be more effective at evoking nostalgia than an ad that uses just one category? Do Millennials realize that the retro products they have embraced are in fact associated with a time in the past, or do they view the products and styles as modern?

There are many other areas of future research not directly suggested by this study but which present opportunities for marketers. What types of cues are most effective for other mediums of advertising, such as television, radio, and digital? Are certain industries or product categories able to use nostalgia marketing more effectively than others? Does the age of the company influence its use of nostalgia in marketing? Successful campaigns from Smuckers, Coca-Cola, and the many anniversary campaigns discussed earlier suggest that there is indeed a connection. How does nostalgia marketing influence the public's view of history? What eras from the past are most commonly used in historical

nostalgia marketing, and when does an era become too “ancient” to effectively produce feelings of nostalgia? For example, ad campaigns referencing the 1960s or even the 1940s are fairly common, but the pre-1900s are rarely mentioned. How is that cut-off point determined?

### IMPLICATIONS

Marketing professionals and companies seeking to connect with Millennials benefit from the knowledge gained from this study in several ways. First, solely using color and font to evoke feelings of nostalgia may not produce the desired results. Until further research is conducted, it is best to assume that verbal cues are the most effective at evoking nostalgia. If visual cues are used, they should be carefully tested to ensure that Millennials do not in fact view these cues negatively. For example, despite the popularity of Instagram and its vintage style photo filters, many experiment participants noted the similarity of the Sepia photo to Instagram’s filters and said it looked cheap. Vintage style fonts may not scale well in actual ads, and should be carefully tested before using.

Second, this study reinforced prior research suggesting that while consumers like retro marketing, the product itself must meet modern standards. If using historical nostalgia in a print ad, marketers should be careful to ensure that the product itself is presented as having current features and functionality. Otherwise, consumers may mistakenly assume that the product itself is out of date.

Finally, marketers should consider whether Millennials recognize retro styles for what they are, or whether such styles are viewed as modern. The answer should influence the extent to which historical ties are emphasized. Among certain target groups, historical ties may be more effective at generating interest than for others. Companies should consider conducting market research to determine the preferences of their audience.

## CONCLUSION

Nostalgia marketing is an important tool that marketers will continue to use for years to come. With the recent resurgence in popularity of retro styles and products, it is more important than ever to understand the trend and how to use it effectively. As the Millennial generation moves into adulthood, they will quickly become one of the most important consumer groups and their preferences will shape advertising styles for years to come.

This study has shown that using visual cues to evoke feelings of historical nostalgia in print ads is not as effective as predicted at connecting with Millennials. While color variations do produce marginal results, font has very little influence on consumer perceptions. Millennials were shown to be not very nostalgia prone, and in general responded negatively to vintage style colors and fonts. Various reasons for these results were explored, as well as the significant limitations of the study. More research in this area would help to clarify the causes for the effects seen, and could help marketers better plan nostalgic advertisements. Nevertheless, the feel-good advertising of days gone by will continue to play an important role in our national consciousness.

## APPENDIX

### **Images Tested in Pre-Test**



**Picture 1: Birthday Image**



**Picture 2: Christmas Image**



**Picture 3: Graduation Image**

### Fonts Tested in Pre-Test

Bazar	<b>Sample</b>
Matchbook	<i>Sample</i>
Parisian	<b>Sample</b>
Riesling	<b>Sample</b>
Rocket Script	<i>Sample</i>
Seaside	<b>SAMPLE</b>

### Color Variations in Pre-Test



Picture 4: Bright Color



Picture 5: Black and White



Picture 6: Cross Process



Picture 7: Grainy



Picture 8: Old Photo



Picture 9: Sepia

### Sample of Ads Used in Experiment

INTRODUCING THE NEW FOTON 3000S



For life's greatest  
moments. Foton IS  
there.

Picture 10: Bright Color Riesling Ad

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## ABSTRACT

This manuscript studies the effectiveness of two visual cues, color and font, in evoking historical nostalgia in print ads targeting Millennials. Prior studies have shown that the use of verbal nostalgia cues in advertising results in more positive feelings and more favorable attitudes toward both the ad and brand than non-nostalgic ads. Furthermore, qualitative research suggests that Millennials are inclined to prefer nostalgic products and advertisements.

Based on the results of an experiment with 126 Millennials, the researcher has determined that color and font are not effective at evoking historical or general nostalgia in print ads. Furthermore, while color has a slight influence on attitudes toward products, brands, and ads, font does not. The study also suggests that Millennials are not very nostalgia prone and actually prefer modern styles to vintage styles. Limitations of the study, the impact of the findings for marketers, and areas of future research are also discussed.