Nostalgia: An exploratory study of themes and emotions in the nostalgic experience

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[ to cite ]:

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A set of 164 experience descriptions provided by 62 individuals is used as the basis for an examination of common themes and subjects for nostalgic reflection. Family and home serve as potent stimuli for nostalgia, but a wide variety of other persons, objects, and events were also mentioned by the respondents. Objects and events (such as birthdays, holidays, and reunions) tend to evoke strong memories of the people associated with them. As has been suggested in previous studies, childhood and adolescence appear to be particularly fertile periods for nostalgic meditation. Memories of sights, smells, and tastes are recalled in the descriptions. Both personal and historical nostalgia were elicited and a range of emotional responses are evident in the descriptions.

Nostalgia is a painful yearning to return home. Chas recently attracted the attention of marketers and consumer researchers. Despite this popularity, relatively little work has been published in the consumer literature on the character of nostalgia and the emotional reactions typical of such experiences. Although attempts have been made to identify nostalgia-proneness (Holbrook 1991) and the use of nostalgia in marketing (Havlena and Holak 1991a), our understanding of nostalgia in a consumer behavior context remains limited. This paper presents some preliminary findings from a study designed to explore recurring themes and emotions in nostalgic experiences.

THE NOSTALGIC CONDITION

The word “nostalgia” is derived from two Greek roots: “nostos” meaning to “return to one’s native land” and “algos” referring to “pain, suffering, or grief” (Hofer 1688; Daniels 1985). Beginning with the writings of Johannes Hofer (1688), nostalgia has been associated with a myriad of physiological and psychological symptoms. Nostalgia as an emotion contains both pleasant and unpleasant components. This “bittersweet” quality of the emotion is a distinguishing characteristic of the nostalgic condition. In terms of time, it refers back to an earlier period in an individual’s life, possibly ranging from ten to seventy years, and draws on biased or selective recall of past experiences. Nostalgia may evoke memories of peaceful, pleasant times or of times of tension and turmoil. Until recently, most of the findings on nostalgia were based on anecdotal evidence or individual case histories rather than on larger-scale empirical studies. As Nawas and Plat (1965, p. 51) observe, “It is rather curious that a phenomenon as pressing, as ubiquitous, and as little understood as nostalgia has received only passing attention from psychologists; in the last quarter century no more than six empirical studies have appeared on the subject.” Havlena and Holak (1991a) present a brief review of some of the pertinent psychological and medical literature related to nostalgia.

NOSTALGIA AND BEHAVIOR

Most recent discussions of nostalgic emotion no longer limit the concept to simple homesickness. Given the increased mobility of individuals in today's society, they may be less likely to suffer the same feeling of displacement as in the past, when leaving a country, town, or particular house was a less common occurrence. Recent sociological writings on nostalgia focus on the adaptive and societal aspects of nostalgia rather than on its original medical basis. Davis (1979) presents a view of nostalgia as a mechanism that permits people to maintain their
identities in the face of major transitions that serve as discontinuities in the life cycle (e.g., the identity change from childhood to puberty, from adolescence to adulthood, from single to married life, from spouse to parent, etc.). Thus, the tendency to engage in nostalgic feelings varies over the course of the individual’s lifetime. “Nostalgia-proneness” has been hypothesized to peak as individuals move into middle age and during the “retirement” years. In addition, some past experiences and eras are more likely than others to evoke nostalgic feelings, with nostalgia being stronger for adolescence and early adulthood than for any other period. According to Davis (1979), nostalgic reflections must draw from one’s own personal history rather than from external sources such as books, stories, or other publications. A narrow definition of nostalgia suggests that an individual cannot experience true nostalgia for a period or event through which he or she has not lived. This idea of the relevant past is a controversial one, as some researchers have argued in favor of relaxing the personal experience condition in their definition of nostalgia (Havlena and Holak 1991a; Holbrook 1990). Certainly, in terms of the use of nostalgia-evoking stimuli, advertising and product management professionals take a broad perspective with respect to the time dimension of such stimuli. Empirical studies have only recently begun to address the types of past events or experiences most likely to evoke a nostalgic condition in the present. One purpose of this study is to investigate the themes and subjects associated with nostalgia.

Davis (1979) distinguishes among three orders or levels of nostalgic experience. First order or simple nostalgia is associated with the simple, unquestioning belief that “things were better in the past.” Second order or reflexive nostalgia involves a critical analysis of the past rather than sentimentalization of it. Finally, in third order or interpreted nostalgia, the individual analyzes the nostalgic experience itself.

Research in the consumer literature focusing directly on nostalgia has only recently begun to appear. Havlena and Holak (1991a) present a review of some of the pertinent literature and samples of nostalgic appeals and products in the marketplace. Holbrook (1990) describes a Nostalgia Index designed to measure nostalgia-proneness and predict affective reactions to nostalgic stimuli at the individual consumer level. This instrument was tested in the context of a broad range of consumer product categories. Acceptable levels of reliability and predictive validity were achieved. Holbrook and Schindler (1991) describe another application of the Nostalgia Index to predict affective reactions to actors and actresses. In a paper based on a subset of the same experience descriptions used in this paper, Havlena and Holak (1991b) analyze nostalgia-evoking events using a time structure and allocation perspective (Feldman and Hornik 1981). They found that activities in the past that serve as subjects for nostalgic emotions at some later point in time are most often leisure activities, both those that are inherently satisfying and those that are satisfying due to an individual’s association with other people while pursuing the activity. The current study represents an attempt to examine the nostalgic experience directly and to develop an understanding of the components of the experience.

METHOD

The data used for this study consist of a set of 164 descriptions of nostalgic experiences collected from a sample of 62 individuals. Data collection was accomplished using a written questionnaire format. After being presented with a brief definition of nostalgia as defined in the American Heritage Dictionary, the individuals were asked to provide written descriptions of three different experiences, related to objects, events, and people. Respondents were requested to describe these experiences in as much detail as possible, writing about both (1) their feelings and (2) the object(s), person(s), or event(s) that stir these feelings. This method is similar to that used by Havlena and Holbrook (1986) to examine the emotional content of consumption experiences.

Additional parts of the data collection instrument followed the varied ordering of the nostalgia experiences. They included: (1) 18 emotion scales describing how subjects rate their feelings, in general, (2) a twenty-item nostalgia index scale (Holbrook 1991), and eight classification questions dealing with year of birth, year of graduation from high school, year of graduation from college, sex, country of origin, marital status, ethnic background, and religious affiliation.

A snowball convenience sample of respondents was used, with a broad distribution of ages being the primary criterion for the selection of the sample. Geographic diversity, student vs. non-student populations, and general interest in the survey were also considered in selecting sample members. One-hundred and eighteen surveys accompanied by self-addressed, postage-paid return envelopes were mailed to geographically dispersed respondents, with an additional thirty-two surveys distributed to local respondents affiliated with student, church, and civic organizations. The respondents represent a range of age groups (from subjects in their 20s to those in their 70s), educational levels (from non-high school graduates to individuals with graduate degrees), and cultural and religious backgrounds. No compensation was offered for participation. A total of sixty-two (out of 150) questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 41%. An overview of the respondent population appears in Havlena and Holak (1991b).

RESULTS

In the following discussion, recurrent themes are examined in the context of persons, objects, and events. A number of examples from the experience descriptions are used to illustrate the range of topics and themes present in the narratives. Connections between the categories are noted as they apply in this qualitative assessment of the descriptions.

PEOPLE IN NOSTALGIC EXPERIENCES

The Family

As might be expected, family and friends appear as important elements in many of the experiences reported by the subjects. This is true not only for those experiences directly related to people, but also for experiences that were reported as involving objects or events. For example, one male respondent in his sixties experiences and remembers events in terms of his connection to other members of the family:

Events related to Holidays, Birthdays, Weddings, and other similar events tend to remind me of my childhood and the fun I would have at these events.

It is always a pleasant experience for me to experience these events today because I am the patriarch of my family and I attempt to make these events as pleasant as I possibly can for my wife, children, and grandchildren.

I hope that I can leave all my family members with the same pleasant recollections that I have about these events so that they can, in turn, pass these experiences on to their children.

A wide range of family members are mentioned as being integral to nostalgic experiences. Certainly, immediate family members (i.e., parents, siblings, and children) appear throughout. Grandparents, particularly grandmothers, are potent subjects for the respondents. Even more distant relatives, such as aunts, uncles, and cousins are focuses for several of the experiences. As one might expect, several respondents have specific recollection of their deceased relatives, often with the “bittersweet” emotion inherent in nostalgia. The accompanying recognition, typical of first-order nostalgic reflection, that “the good old days” are gone forever and can never be recreated is quite clearly recognized. Explicit mention is made of the fact that these subjects are no longer alive. Expression of sadness for times and experiences which can no longer be shared or missed opportunities to express devotion and/or respect are apparent in the responses. Such sentiments are evident in the following narrative authored by a female in her sixties:
My thoughts of my mother (who has been dead for five years) have left me with more feelings of nostalgia than anyone I have known. There are times when something occurs or when I see something, I think to myself "wait until I tell Mom" and am saddened and have such an empty feeling knowing that I can't share it with her. She loved life and never took any aspect of it for granted and is probably why -- whether it's a wedding, a new baby, the ocean, a flower, a beautiful day -- my thoughts are always with her and how she would have enjoyed them.

Beyond Family

In addition to relatives, a range of personages in the lives of respondents appear repeatedly in nostalgic experiences. Classmates and friends from previous educational phases including college, high school, and even elementary school days are mentioned in the narratives. The following narrative authored by a woman in her mid-forties illustrates this theme:

My friend Martha who now lives in Vermont always stirs feelings of warmth & contentment. We were friends from Junior High School on. We don't see each other very often or even write to each other much because of the busyness of our individual lives. However, when we see each other, the years fall away and we feel as young & carefree as when we first became friends. We remember mutual friends and the places we went, our homes and all the joy of school activities. We are not all fortunate enough to have friends that last a lifetime. I feel truly blessed to have such a person in my life.

Individuals of some responsibility and influence during respondents' school years (e.g., teachers and athletic coaches) are indelible in the nostalgic roles they played as illustrated in the recollections of a male approaching thirty:

This past summer a good friend of mine was married. He currently plays for the New York Yankees and was quite a baseball player in high school. I was really looking forward to the wedding because many of my ex-teammates would be in attendance. But it was my American Legion coaches that I was looking forward to seeing the most. Especially Mr. K_____. I talked with him for hours and it was strange because I really think about those days a lot and Mr. K_____. always seems to be at the beginning of the thought. To this day when I drive by some of the fields I played on when Mr. K_____. was coaching me it instantly brings back line memories of my childhood and companionship with people that have made me what I am today.

This reflection back to adolescence is quite common. If, as has been suggested, nostalgia often involves transitional periods, it seems reasonable to expect that individuals that have played a major role in one's development, such as the coach referenced above, would serve as subjects for nostalgia.

Friends who have become part of one's life since schooling, co-workers, ex-boyfriends, ex-girlfriends, and ex-spouses, and even former neighbors are named with varying frequency in the responses generated by the respondents. Even more fleeting acquaintances appear to be subjects for nostalgia. The following narrative authored by a man in his mid-thirties illustrates the range of individuals in nostalgic experiences:

I recently had dinner with the people who made up the staff of a business I was employed by some years ago. Since we were all from the same town we all knew each other well, some of the older women had been my baby-sitters when I was an infant. We were so close we all looked out for each other, it was often said that "one of them would lie and the rest would swear to it." We reminisced and laughed for hours, old gripes about work came back as well as funny experiences. Some of us have moved on to other jobs, some retired and some remain in the same job they had years ago, but for a few hours the same "old gang" was back together.

OBJECTS IN NOSTALGIC EXPERIENCES

As we have attempted to demonstrate, key people are consistently the focus of nostalgic experiences -- from immediate and more distant family members, both living and deceased, to classmates and school chums, friends, co-workers, and romantic partners. Often, specific objects or things serve as the stimulus for nostalgic reminiscences of people. Although the author of the following narrative is less attached to objects than most others, the sentiments about objects as a stimulus to nostalgia are expressed very explicitly. It is important to note the analysis beyond first-order nostalgia in this response; the introspection suggests third-order nostalgia.

This one is really taking some pondering . . . objects? objects? Material, replaceable objects? I am really having a tough time with this one because objects come & go, can be replaced, forgotten, even heirloom jewelry or my wonderful cottage by the lake are only possessions for the moment.

I look at photographs of my paintings with a touch of nostalgia, but if my house burnt down and they with it -- so what. The "objects" are not what is important. What is important are people, and memories which is basically what objects do is evoke thoughts of people and memories.

No one object evokes much nostalgia for me. Several times in my life due to self created circumstances, I gave up all my possessions (objects) to start again. Each time I have accumulated many new objects which represent(ed) my life at that moment. All interchangeable, all replaceable, all objects -- no big deal.

Tangible items such as antiques, clothing, jewelry, toys, books, and cars (particularly one's first car) are consistent themes. The following experience authored by a man approaching forty years of age illustrates this connection:

Piano in my father's home has been passed down from my maternal grandmother. As a child roaming in her house, I often hid under the piano . . . I cannot recall the last time the piano was played. Yet, as I recall, in my childhood it was seldom silent. These thoughts typically spark memories of my grandmother (who died when I was 5) and of her household.

Even more intangible stimuli (e.g., music/songs/recordings and movies) trigger nostalgic thoughts. A male respondent in his mid-forties illustrates the impact of a television series on his nostalgic thoughts in the following passage:

While watching the Civil War PBS series, I was reminded of summer vacations with my father touring the battlefields. My father has been deceased for over 10 years and I don't often think of him. Recalling summer vacations reminded me of his child-like curiosity or inquisitiveness.

A very interesting aspect of nostalgia and its "relevant past" is presented in the following narrative authored by a woman in her forties who, while carefully noting objects shown in a movie, experiences nostalgia for a time period in which she, herself, has not lived:

I often like objects of age. Not all old pieces, but many. A delicate cameo broach, a piece of furniture of a rich
and activities. The recollection of even ornaments, triggers nostalgic sentiments for people. As one
personal (e.g., birthdays, graduations, vacations, military
furnishings and food, as well as the object (a book) which sparked the recollection in the following
passage authored by a woman in her early twenties:

Pictures in general make me nostalgic, even when they are not related to my life. I always enjoy looking at
photographs, whether they are mine, my family's or anybody's. I like to imagine the people in the pictures, their
environment, their feelings. When I show other people my pictures, I sometimes get a sad feeling that there is
little purpose in doing so because they probably cannot relate to them, cannot see the feelings involved at
those moments. In other words, photographs represent, to me at least, a variety of feelings. Some may be fun,
happy, others may be soothing, sad . . . but they all carry hidden emotions and they all meant something to
the person who took them.

The respondent's description indicates the range of emotions that these photographs elicit from her -- happiness, sadness, peacefulness, elation -- due to the memories they trigger. However, she also notes the sadness they may evoke, independent of the subject matter of the photos, as a result of the personal nature of these memories and emotions and the recognition that they can never really be shared, even with close friends.

Usually in response to the elicitation about "objects" which evoke nostalgia, respondents conveyed another major theme in nostalgic experiences -- that of "home." This theme is certainly commensurate with the classic definition of nostalgia -- "a painful yearning to return home." In this case has broad boundaries; it might literally represent fulfilling family obligations in the morning, the
past, "the old neighborhood," or even a city in which one has resided. Once again, memories of home are often linked to the people associated with it. This theme is depicted in the following passage authored by a woman in her early sixties:

"The event is "returning to the town where I grew up." Whenever I "go home" I drive around town, remembering
my wonderful childhood and friends. I have an elderly neighbor who knew me when I was born. She is one of
my links to the past."

In keeping with the familiar holiday tune, "grandmother's house" is a potent nostalgic memory. The reader is urged to note the details about furnishings and food, as well as the object (a book) which sparked the recollection in the following passage authored by a man in his early forties:

I was reading from a book that had belonged to my grandmother and slipped into a reverie about her home and
the old neighborhood. I was thinking about waking up the block and going to the old bakery. The book
reminded me of sitting in my grandparent's parlor reading. The parlor was light and airy, with a couple of very
comfortable chairs. Grandfather would be putting in his workshop and grandmother would be about the
house, either in the kitchen or sitting in the front parlor. There would always be napoleon, hot pastries, or black and white cookies. Mom and my sister would be there and dad would come get us after he finished work.

EVENTS IN NOSTALGIC EXPERIENCES

Not only are objects important stimuli for nostalgic experiences involving people, but objects can trigger the recollection of an event. People also serve as stimuli for reminiscences about key events as depicted in the first narrative presented in this paper; these events may be personal (e.g., birthdays, graduations, vacations, military service, weddings, reunions, etc.) or they may be more collective in nature with personal and societal elements (e.g., an historical event, major sports event, etc.). A recurrent theme reflected in the experiences concerns holidays as events.

Holidays

Frequently, reminiscences about family or extended family members arise in the context of holiday celebrations, a consistent theme in the responses generated. As one might expect, the celebration of Christmas, including specific memories of family gatherings, greeting cards, and even ornaments, triggers nostalgic sentiments for people. The following narrative authored by a man in his mid-forties is a detailed recollection of Christmas including family, friends, music, and even explicit sensations related to the weather:

In high school I took it upon myself to learn the 5-string banjo and formed a folk group which developed a
reputation of some note. In addition to sharing musical interests, the other two members of the trio and I were
also very close friends. The Christmas of my junior year, after fulfilling family obligations in the morning, the
three of us got together and spent the rest of Christmas day travelling around town to carol friends, each other's
families and some of the high school faculty (a cappella due to the temperature of the day). I remember this
being a particularly happy time being with close friends and sharing what I guess would be termed a "special
time." The crispness of the day -- bright, cold weather -- crunching snow and an occasional cup of beer from
some more liberal/indulging parents helped form an incredible memory of "Christmas Past."

What came as somewhat of a surprise was the extent to which Independence Day evokes a nostalgic response in terms of family gatherings and activities. The following narrative by a woman in her mid-forties is indicative of Fourth of July memories:

Fireworks displays and parades, usually on 4th of July always makes me long for the days as I was growing up
& all of my brothers & sisters, their spouses & children were all together for family picnics & attended the
parades & fireworks displays. We decorated trikes & bikes, waved flags & sang patriotic songs. We were all so
proud of our freedom & heritage which my father encouraged in each of us.
I felt so privileged to be a member of such a special family. We still all would like to be together, but
the distance & our own families including grandchildren keep us from all gathering for those events as we used to
do.

Celebrations of Easter, Thanksgiving, and New Year’s Eve were mentioned as well. The following experience authored by a women in her thirties provides explicit detail about the observance of the Paschal holiday, particularly rituals, both religious and habitual (e.g., the annual photograph and primping), special foods, and even aromas:

The celebration of Easter in my father’s hometown was quite an event. It always seemed a little larger than life. There was a mystique of the midnight service that only my older cousins were allowed to attend. I remember, every year, having “coffee” (99% milk & 1% coffee) and poppyseed cake for breakfast as everyone took turns waiting for the one bathroom to vacate. There was always a lot of primping -- a new dress, a new purse, gloves and of course a new hat (which was always a source of numerous fights between my mother & me). We would take the annual picture next to the family homestead and my father always carried the Easter basket brimming with meats, cheeses, special bread and beautifully decorated eggs. After church, when the baskets were blessed outside on the sunny hill, it seemed like the entire town had come out for the occasion. New and bigger hats were everywhere -- what a fashion show. To this day, I remember the colors, sounds, and smells of that annual event.

Personal Events

As mentioned previously, in addition to holidays, personal events are a major theme in the experiences gathered from the respondents. A very explicit birthday recollection, replete with details of family members, activities, and even a reference to food, is found in the following experience written by a man in his mid-sixties:

It was a tradition in our family that on our tenth birthday, my father would take us on a two-day trip to New York City.

For me it was my first visit to the big City. I stayed in a hotel for the first time -- went up into the Statue of Liberty -- rode the ferry, the subway -- visited Newark airport and saw a new plane that had sleeping accommodations for the new cross-country flights -- saw a movie at Radio City -- ate in an Automat -- many treats as a boy from a small town was exposed to the big city. But most of all, I had my Dad all to myself for those two days without the interference of my older brother or younger sister.

In our data, subjects not only discuss birthday celebrations as subjects of nostalgia, but the event of giving birth was also offered as a nostalgic experience, as in the following narrative by a woman in her mid-twenties:

The birth of my son: Nine months seem like an unbelievably long time. But I knew that he’d be born when he was “ready”! I couldn’t wait to see him sleep in his crib, or hear the sounds of a baby’s cry. Of course, he was two weeks late, and it seemed like agony. He finally arrived on Aug. 28 after 36 house of labor. But he was well worth it . . . and I wouldn’t trade him for the world!

The following description authored by a woman in her sixties depicts an event and nostalgic sentiments for days gone by including close personal relationships:

A few months ago I went to a reception to celebrate the wedding anniversary of a sorority sister. It brought memories of my college days. They were pleasant memories of times spent in the sorority house with friends.

Class reunions, whether high school or college, are, by design, nostalgia-evoking events. The following experience authored by a male approaching forty depicts many of the classic sociological phenomenon associated with nostalgia -- heightened feelings of nostalgia as one approaches the transition to middle-age, reflection back to adolescence as a subject for nostalgia, and the resulting twenty-year interval between the original experience and the nostalgic consideration of it. The experience is replete with references to music, including the school alma mater (a theme which has come up in other descriptions), and photographs. In addition, the author engages in an analysis of his nostalgic feelings and their origins, representative of third-order nostalgia, in this narrative:

20-year high school reunion -- 50 of the 164 classmates attended in June 1990 . . . Event included rendition of alma mater, reproductions of high school photos, period music

. . . Plenty of reminiscing, catching up, etc. . . . Last reunion was 10-year event.

Reunion took place off school premises -- in an auditorium I had never before visited and not affiliated with school.

Interestingly, those classmates not there generated more feelings of nostalgia than those who attended (I had close high-school friends in both groups). For example, plenty of wondering who’s where and doing what . . . Much of this not verbalized at event.

Some possible explanations:

1. 20 years seems to be interesting threshold at which some classmates looked as they were remembered and others looked like total strangers . . . Generated questions of what those remembered but not present look like . . . Mystery. Those present need not be visualized.

2. Several classmates have passed away, leading to the topic of mortality . . . How are those not here -- healthy?

3. Why aren’t they here? Issues of self-image and accomplishments? Didn’t care? Or, see most everyone at reunion every week anyway. (Many locals were no-shows).

Major historical events may have both personal and collective elements according to sociologists (Davis 1979). The following description, which includes references to music and a movie and was authored by a woman approaching forty, illustrates both nostalgic elements:

Now here is one that surely you’ve not read yet (I write tongue in cheek) Woodstock. How predictable for my generation to look at that single event with nostalgia.
Intergenerational nostalgia (Davis 1979) refers to memories of the past created through personal interactions with others who have lived through earlier periods and events. These memories are a combination of tales of the unexperienced past and the experiences of hearing these reminiscences. With the advent of motion pictures, television, sound recording, and radio, depictions of past events need no longer rely on verbal descriptions and can be much more vivid, imparting a sense of actual participation in an event or era. This phenomenon is clearly illustrated in the following experience authored by a man in his twenties about the same historical event, Woodstock. Again, music is a key theme in the nostalgic experience, as well as the classic filtering (looking at the past through rose-colored glasses) which occurs when one reminiscences:

Woodstock makes me nostalgic although I was barely born when it was happening (I was born in 1964). I've seen videos of it, and a lot of it makes me happy. I wasn't there since I'm not really into oppressive crowds, being rained on, being stoned/high, etc., and so on. But, when I hear the music that came from that time period, it makes me nostalgic for an idealized past (that wasn't really ideal). I think of a time period when people stepped out of the tight social structure, broke some (narrowly conceived) rules, and made history. The music of Jim Hendrix, Eric Clapton, Janis Joplin, Stevie Winwood, Country Joe and the Fish, Arlo Guthrie, and so many others, makes me "nostalgic" for a past which, not so much represents a reality I would have liked had I been there, but which I can experience vicariously by taking the best of what happened then and incorporating it into my reality now.

DISCUSSION

The findings presented in this paper relate to common themes and emotions in the set of experiences. Subjects such as holidays, religious observances, family, popular music, and school-related experiences tend to occur repeatedly in the set of experience descriptions. Both personal nostalgia, for events or objects from the author's own past, and historical (or intergenerational) nostalgia, for events or objects outside the realm of the respondent's direct experience, are represented in the descriptions. Tangible objects and intangible presentations (in the form of music or film) are depicted as key nostalgia stimuli. Even food and aromas are given considerable attention within the narratives. Although first-order nostalgia occurs most commonly, second and third-order nostalgic sentiments are represented in several experiences.

Greater understanding of nostalgia, the stimuli which evoke it, nostalgia-proneness on the part of individuals, as well as the emotions encompassed in nostalgic experiences would be beneficial to consumer researchers and practitioners. As noted in Havlena and Holak (1991a), there has recently been increased attention to nostalgic themes in advertising strategies and product management. In some sense, nostalgia connects individuals, objects, and events across time and place. Themes and emotions noted here are relevant to communication providers or facilitators (e.g., telecommunications, greeting cards) which allow individuals to share life experiences at a particular point in time. In addition, the findings discussed here are of particular relevance to products and industries providing time storage or a sharing across time periods (e.g., photographic products, greeting cards, memorabilia, etc.).

As a continuation of this research stream, a project is underway which will shed light on the specific emotions attached to nostalgic experiences using experience descriptions collected from U.S. respondents. Additional research is underway to investigate the universality of nostalgia through cross-cultural data collection. Another fruitful research stream involves the further exploration of the sensory modalities involved in the nostalgic experience (e.g., touching objects, tasting food, smelling aromas, hearing music, seeing visual stimuli).

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Is the nostalgia disease now pervasive, causing all sorts of physical and mental health problems? Or was Hofer (and many scholars and practitioners since) wrong to conceptualize nostalgia as an illness? For nearly the last decade my colleagues and I have been striving to answer these and other unanswered questions about nostalgia. The specific experience used in the control condition varies from study to study. In some studies, for example, control participants are asked to write about an ordinary experience from the last week. In addition, different studies have employed entirely different methods for inducing nostalgia. Participants in the loneliness condition reported being significantly more nostalgic than participants in the control condition.