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A REVIEW

of the doctoral dissertation written by the doctoral candidate Kamil Lubiński
"POSITIONING OF A NOSTALGIC BRAND IN THE TOY INDUSTRY IN THE CONTEXT OF
CONSUMERS' MOTIVATIONS AND SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY"
supervised by professor Magdalena Grębosz-Krawczyk

This is a review of the doctoral dissertation written by doctoral candidate Kamil Lubiński under the supervision of professor Magdalena Grębosz-Krawczyk. The dissertation is titled "POSITIONING OF A NOSTALGIC BRAND IN THE TOY INDUSTRY IN THE CONTEXT OF CONSUMERS' MOTIVATIONS AND SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY." According to the provisions of the "Higher Education and Science Act of 20th July 2018" (Journal of Laws 2018), a doctoral dissertation is required to demonstrate the candidate's overall theoretical knowledge in a scientific discipline (or disciplines). Furthermore, it should showcase the candidate's scientific autonomy, defined as the ability to formulate an original scientific problem and propose a solution to it. Thus, in the evaluation of the submitted doctoral dissertation, I used the following criteria:

- Relevance and originality of the research problem;

- Accuracy and comprehensiveness of the research goals and hypotheses;

- Precision and sophistication of the theoretical discussion;

- Correctness of the research design and data analysis;

- Appropriate structure of the dissertation and language quality.

RELEVANCE AND ORIGINALITY OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The paper falls within the realms of marketing communication, brand management and consumer behavior. The author has chosen an exceptionally important and timely research problem, seeking to determine the impact of nostalgia on consumer responses to brands in the toy industry. This area of research is highly relevant for several reasons.

Firstly, nostalgia has emerged as a powerful marketing tool in recent years. With the advancements in technology and rapid societal changes, consumers often seek comfort and familiarity in products and experiences that evoke nostalgic sentiments. Understanding the implications of leveraging nostalgia in branding strategies, particularly within the toy industry, can provide valuable insights for marketers aiming to establish a strong emotional bond with their target audience.

Secondly, the toy industry represents a dynamic and competitive sector of the market. Successfully positioning a nostalgic brand in this vibrant landscape requires a comprehensive understanding of consumers' motivations (i.e., of both adults and children) and their interactions with brands. The dissertation aims to shed some light in this area too.

Thirdly, studying the positioning of a nostalgic brand is particularly relevant in today's consumer-driven era, where brand loyalty and emotional connections play pivotal roles in purchase decisions. The research findings offered in this dissertation can help deliver valuable insights into consumers' nostalgia and creating valuable brand experiences.

Furthermore, the timeliness of the topic addressed by the doctoral candidate is underscored by the fact that the meta-analysis on nostalgia in advertising has been conducted only recently, i.e., in 2023 (Ying Cheng, Xiaodi Yan, 2023, *Effects of nostalgic messages on ad persuasiveness: a meta-analysis*, "International Journal of Advertising", DOI: 10.1080/02650487.2022.2064593), highlighting the relative novelty and significance of this topic. Notably, the first review of nostalgia literature (comprising 205 papers) was published as

recently as in 2022 (Ekta Srivastava, Bharadhwaj Sivakumaran, Satish S. Maheswarappa, Justin Paul, 2022, *Nostalgia: A Review, Propositions, and Future Research Agenda*, "Journal of Advertising", DOI: 10.1080/00913367.2022.2101036).

The author provides a comprehensive conceptualization of nostalgia in marketing (see Chapter 1). He has conducted a thorough literature review and presented recent research findings on the relationship between nostalgia and consumer behavior (see Chapter 2). This has helped him in identifying some research gaps and formulating the research problem. However, it should be noted that while Table 1.4 (page 47) is highly informative, it appears to have overlooked several relevant studies. For instance, a meta-analysis conducted by Cheng and Yan (2023) examines a total of 31 studies from 23 papers, providing a more comprehensive analysis of the impact of nostalgia than the 12 papers presented in Table 1.4. It would be beneficial for this thesis to clarify why certain papers has been omitted in the review.

In sum, the author's empirical research aligns with some of the identified research gaps, contributing to the development of knowledge on nostalgia and its impact on consumer responses. Therefore, the dissertation presents an original solution to a well-defined scientific problem.

ACCURACY AND COMPREHENSIVENESS OF THE RESEARCH GOALS AND HYPOTHESES

The author proposed the following research goal (see Introduction, page 7): "the evaluation of the impact of nostalgia on brand positioning in the toy industry in the context of consumer motivations and social identity theory." However, the research design and results suggest that the author examined the impact of nostalgic cues on consumer responses and he considered potential moderating effects of age (i.e., generations X, Y, and Z). I assume this slight inconsistency is just an unintended oversight or a typo? Despite this concern, the detailed objectives presented in the doctoral dissertation demonstrate both accuracy and comprehensiveness. They have been formulated clearly, drawing upon relevant literature and research insights. The research questions encompass a wide range of factors and perspectives, contributing to a comprehensive examination of the topic.

The hypotheses are constructed properly and have been somehow derived from the literature. They are accompanied by appropriate operationalization. The general theoretical justification for the hypotheses can be found in Chapters 1-2, while the hypotheses themselves, along with corresponding research questions, are presented in Chapter 4. Therefore, the author

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demonstrates good knowledge of the basic methodological standards in management sciences. On a side note, I would like to applaud the author for not including detailed hypotheses in the Introduction. The practice of pasting detailed hypotheses in the Introduction is awkward and it compromises the readability of scholarly work.

There are certain questions and (minor) concerns that I would like to raise at this point:

- It is unclear why hypotheses 1-3 are missing in the theoretical model on page 142. Aren't H1-2 too obvious?

- Due to the large number of predictors, the model becomes too complex (especially considering the mixture of individual, brand-related, and message-related variables) and very difficult (if not too risky) to test. The model incorporates a multitude of variables with diverse origins, making it challenging to find a single denominator that (theoretically) unifies the model.

- No interactions were hypothesized or considered for testing. Why is that?

- The variable "age" (generations) is not included in the model, despite being clearly taken into account in the analyses. Why is this the case?

Despite these concerns, the author exhibits a solid understanding of the fundamental methodological standards in the fields of management sciences and consumer behavior.

PRECISION AND SOPHISTICATION OF THE THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

The accuracy and sophistication of the theoretical discussion in the dissertation are notable. The author demonstrates a deep understanding of how the academic discourse should be led by employing various theoretical frameworks to explain consumer responses to nostalgic brands. Specifically, the inclusion of Social Identity Theory, concepts of consumer motivation, and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs showcases the author's adeptness in integrating diverse perspectives to enrich the theoretical foundation of the study.

By incorporating Social Identity Theory, the author recognizes the role of group identity and affiliation in shaping consumer behavior towards nostalgic brands. This framework provides a valuable lens through which to analyze the influence of social connections and collective identities on consumer responses.

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Furthermore, the utilization of concepts related to consumer motivation and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs enhances the theoretical framework. By exploring the underlying psychological drivers that contribute to consumer responses, the author delves into the deeper motivations that govern consumer decision-making in the context of nostalgic brands.

Additionally, the inclusion of concepts related to tribalism demonstrates the author's thorough exploration of the literature. Tribalism, with its focus on group loyalty and tribal affiliation, complements the discussion on Social Identity Theory and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of consumer responses to nostalgic brands within the broader sociocultural context.

Overall, the author's accurate and adequate integration of these theoretical concepts signifies his comprehension of the phenomenon under study and showcases his ability to draw upon relevant literature to strengthen the theoretical framework of the dissertation.

CORRECTNESS OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS

I applaud the author for the extensive empirical effort invested in this study. The research design incorporates both qualitative and quantitative data collection, which is inherently time-consuming and demands rigorous effort.

The author conducted six focus group sessions to explore consumers' perceptions, attitudes, and purchase intentions towards nostalgic brands. Each session involved the participation of 8 to 18 individuals. Given this relatively high number of participants in some sessions, it would be beneficial to clarify how the author controlled for potential peer pressure within these larger groups? Furthermore, a survey was administered to a sample of 535 participants (it remains a bit unclear how the participants were recruited for the study?). Both studies show that the doctoral candidate demonstrates a good understanding of qualitative and quantitative research methodology by appropriately planning, organizing and launching the study.

In general, the data analysis was conducted rather properly. First, some exploratory analyses were conducted to inspect consumers' responses across various demographic groups. Next, the author employed Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test hypothesized relationships between variables. Considering the research design, research questions and hypotheses, the chosen method of data analysis is correct. However, there are certain questions and suggestions that I would like to raise here:

- In Table 4.11 (page 156), it is unclear why the items are presented separately? This approach is unusual and may hinder the statistical analysis. It would be more appropriate to present the mean value (and SD) of the construct and test the effect of gender. Additionally, it is important to avoid using phrases such as "at a glance" in scientific research. The author should have run the statistical analyses with gender and the mean level of nostalgia as variables in the model and it would enable the examination of potential gender differences. The same applies to Tables 4.12-16 where – I assume – the author tried to examine the effects of age and gender?

- When presenting models or running statistical analyses, it would be beneficial to specify the dependent variables (DVs) and independent variables (IVs), as this clarity is essential for evaluating the results. For example, in Table 4.31 on page 172, where two degrees of freedom are presented, it is unclear which IV was used, especially considering the fact that age is a continuous variable. While it can be inferred that three generations were considered, this assumption creates confusion for the reader, and it is not ideal to rely on guesswork. Additionally, saying that "the older the customer, the more likely he will purchase a toy based on hedonic reaction" (page 172-173) is an overstatement. To draw accurate conclusions, post hoc tests should be conducted to make pairwise comparisons between the three groups.

- It is important to remember that in social sciences, we work with a disconfirmation paradigm whereby we "fail to support" the null hypothesis rather than prove anything. It is not possible to confirm anything with absolute certainty. Therefore, claims such as "the choice experiment confirmed" or "seeking to confirm significant differences" should be rather avoided. Rather, we aim to test hypotheses and evaluate the probability. It is recommended that the author refrains from using language that suggests absolute confirmation of research outcomes, as seen on page 138 or 113.

- Furthermore, the term "experiment" is used a bit nonchalantly in this dissertation. An experiment typically involves high control, including proper manipulation of independent variables, eliminating confounding factors, and incorporating a control group for comparison purposes. The task assigned to participants by the author of this dissertation falls short of the definition of an experiment, and the results cannot be generalized in any way. For instance, potential confounds such as peer pressure (as brands were evaluated collectively rather than individually, right?) and participants' educational backgrounds (as they all seemed to have some university background) were

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not addressed. It is also unclear how the IV was manipulated and how the DV was captured.

Importantly, while there are some considerations regarding the interpretation of results and the use of language to describe the findings, the author displays a solid grasp of statistical analysis. In general, the research design and data analyses are correct, and the insights obtained from individual in-depth interviews as well as from the survey are interesting and open up various areas for further exploration.

APPROPRIATE STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION AND LANGUAGE QUALITY

The thesis is very well structured. First two chapters are theory-driven, while chapters three and four present research results that are linked to the discussed theory. I applaud the proportional arrangement of the chapters. The doctoral candidate appropriately outlines the methodological foundations that guided his research, and provides necessary information regarding the employed research methods, techniques, and tools, thus facilitating potential replication by researchers in the future. More specifically:

- Introduction: The author provides a comprehensive introduction to the thesis, outlining the foundational premises behind the research. The importance of the chosen topic is well-presented, along with the rationale for selecting nostalgia in branding as the central phenomenon for investigation. The author identifies research gaps in the existing literature and presents the main and detailed objectives of the thesis. Additionally, there is a brief overview of the research design employed in the studies.

- Chapter 1: This chapter delves into the conceptualization of nostalgia, offering a historical perspective on the evolving understanding and derivation of this concept. The author provides a thorough exploration of different historical epochs, providing valuable context and enhancing our comprehension of nostalgia.

- Chapter 2: The second chapter presents a comprehensive review of theoretical concepts that contribute to explaining the impact of nostalgia in branding.

- Chapters 3 and 4: These chapters showcase the empirical findings derived from both qualitative and quantitative research conducted by the author.

- The thesis concludes with a summary of the findings, accompanied by an extensive reference list comprising over 300 papers, books, and dissertations. Additionally, the appendices include stimuli utilized in the studies and measurement scales.

Overall, the doctoral dissertation demonstrates a well-structured and comprehensive exploration of the chosen topic. The author effectively presents the background, objectives, and theoretical foundations of the research, while successfully integrating empirical findings. The inclusion of a diverse range of sources strengthens the scholarly contribution of the thesis.

The thesis is also well-written. The dissertation exhibits a commendable level of editorial accuracy. It has been diligently prepared with regard to language usage. The doctoral candidate demonstrates a proficient understanding of the prevailing terminology in the field of social sciences. Furthermore, the doctoral candidate adeptly employs relevant scholarly sources, skillfully selecting credible and reputable sources of scientific information (such as high-profile marketing and consumer behavior journals).

CONCLUSION

In sum, the thesis titled "POSITIONING OF A NOSTALGIC BRAND IN THE TOY INDUSTRY IN THE CONTEXT OF CONSUMERS' MOTIVATIONS AND SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY" meets the requirements formulated in the "Higher Education and Science Act of 20th July 2018" (Journal of Laws 2018) for scholarly work and doctoral dissertations. Therefore, I would like to submit a recommendation to the Degree Council in the discipline of Management and Quality Studies at the Lodz University of Technology (Rada ds. Stopni Naukowych Wydziału Organizacji i Zarządzania Politechniki Łódzkiej) for the acceptance of this doctoral dissertation and its approval for public defense.

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