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## ATTITUDES OF YOUNG CONSUMERS TOWARDS INTERNATIONAL NOSTALGIC BRANDS – THE COMPARATIVE STUDY

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**ABSTRACT.** Today we can observe the increase of nostalgic feelings related to environment instability. The brands associated with consumers' past become an important competitive advantage. The aim of this article is to evaluate the attitudes of young consumers from France and from Poland (representing Western and Eastern Europe accordingly) towards the international brands perceived as nostalgic, taking into account the division on generational and transgenerational brands. The results of own comparative empirical research conducted in 2017 and 2018 on a group of 200 young French and Polish consumers are presented. The study concerns 6 international nostalgic brands of generational and transgenerational character. The research was conducted using focused group interviews. The research results confirm that young consumers in France and in Poland have positive nostalgic attitudes towards brands known from childhood. The analysis of the research results proved also the consumers' attitudes internationalization. The nationality of respondents does not affect their attitudes.

**JEL Classification:** M31

**Keywords:** nostalgic brand, consumers' attitudes, qualitative research, France, Poland.

### Introduction

As environment instability increases, people tend to look for security and emotional support from the past (Stern, 1992), therefore, their nostalgic feelings would increase. The fact that a brand is associated with the past in consumers' heads becomes a strategic advantage (Hallegatte, 2015; Gavurova et al., 2018). Nostalgic products fulfil consumers' desire for belonging, and the actual consumption of nostalgic products restores the sense of belonging (Loveland et al., 2010). Nostalgia themes are present across many product categories such as clothing, cars and entertainment (Rutherford & Shaw, 2011).

The aim of this article is to evaluate the attitudes of young consumers from France and from Poland towards the international brands perceived as nostalgic, taking into account the division on generational and transgenerational brands. This research addresses the key important gaps in prior research. It is worth emphasizing that global research in the area of nostalgia in marketing concerns, above all, the impact of nostalgia on consumer behaviour in the context of demand for the products related to the past. Prior studies on nostalgic branding

have examined the impact of different categories of nostalgia on the attitudes and behaviours of consumers (e.g., Holbrook & Schindler, 1991; Holak & Havlena, 1992; Holbrook, 1993; Baker & Kennedy, 1994; Rousseau & Venter, 1999, 2000; Goudling, 2001; Holak et al., 2006; Holak et al., 2008; Loveland et al., 2010; Muehling et al., 2014; Kessous et al., 2015), the impact of nostalgia on the attitudes towards brands (e.g., Lacoeyuilhe, 2000; Kessous & Roux, 2008, 2010) or the impact of nostalgia on consumers' behaviours for certain product categories (e.g., Rindfleisch et al., 2000; Holbrook & Schindler, 1991; Sierra & McQuitty, 2007; Lambert-Pandraud & Laurent, 2010). The results of the studies carried out in different research centres confirm the positive impact of nostalgia on consumer attitudes and behaviours, especially in the area of marketing communications. However, it should be noted that there is a clear gap in the comparative studies concerning the attitudes of consumers from different countries towards nostalgic brands. The young consumers from France and Poland were chosen because they represent two areas of Europe: Western and Eastern regions, with very different political, social and cultural backgrounds. The author's intention was also to answer the question whether there are noticeable differences in the attitudes of young people who were born in two different countries. It should be noticed that the surveyed young consumers from Poland were born after the important political and social changes in Polish political system but these changes could have still affected their behaviour.

## 1. Literature review

The word nostalgia is derived from Greek. Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, nostalgia was perceived as a psychological problem related to homesickness and a desire to return home that cannot be fulfilled, which results in melancholy, depression, and loneliness (Rutherford & Shaw, 2011).

Today in the literature, nostalgia is associated with a primarily positive affect or emotion that is triggered by an individual's reflections of the past (Holak & Havlena, 1998; Holbrook & Schindler, 1991). It was Davis who in 1979 changed the perception of nostalgia. He postulated that nostalgia is a "positively toned evocation of a lived past in the context of some negative feeling toward the present or impending circumstance" (Davis, 1979, p.18). He makes reference to the source of the positive emotion evoked by the past and explained that "the nostalgic feeling is infused with imputations of past beauty, pleasure, joy, satisfaction, goodness, happiness, love, and the like, in sum, any or several of the positive effects of being" (Davis, 1979, p.18). Davis (1979) postulated also that nostalgia usually occurs in the context of fear, discontent, anxiety, and uncertainty, and it aims at alleviating negative feelings. Holbrook and Schindler (1991, p.330) described nostalgia as a time-based preference, more specifically, as "a preference (general liking, positive attitude, or favourable effect) toward objects (people, places, or things) that were common (popular, fashionable, or widely circulated) when one was younger (in early adulthood, in adolescence, in childhood, or even before birth)". An analysis of the modern definitions of nostalgia reveals that despite their semantic differences, fundamentally they mostly deal with pleasant feelings about or longing for some object from the past (Rutherford & Shaw, 2011). Central to nostalgia is the idea of authenticity (Turner, 1987) as consumers find a sense of authenticity via nostalgic objects and experiences and then use it to construct and confirm identity (Leigh et al., 2006).

Beyond redefining nostalgia as a longing for the past, Davis (1979) distinguished three levels of nostalgia:

- "simple nostalgia" – related to the belief that things were better in the past,
- "reflexive nostalgia" – that involves an appraisal of the past for historical accuracy rather than viewing the past sentimentally,

- “interpreted nostalgia” – when the individual considers the nostalgic experience in terms why he might be feeling nostalgic.

Nostalgia is often described in the context of the attitudes and behaviours of older consumers. However, Hallegatte (2015) stated that from 1990s onwards, the baby-boomers, a large and affluent market segment, started to buy products from the past, without shameful nostalgia, and were then followed by young people. The study of Youn and Jin (2017) demonstrates the power of nostalgic images of branded contents shared via Pinterest in strengthening emotional attachment with young consumers and generating more active engagement with the brand. These research results indicate that evoked nostalgia of the Pinterest board leads to not only favourable attitudes and higher purchase intention but also better brand relationship quality.

In this paper, the nostalgic brand is described as a brand associated with close or far, own or historical past (Grebosz-Krawczyk, 2018). Two categories of nostalgic brands can be distinguished: generational and transgenerational brands. The generational nostalgic brands are based on a real nostalgia which is related to their own direct and personal memories; they have the individual or collective character. The transgenerational nostalgic brands are based on a real nostalgia or simulated nostalgia; they are referred indirectly to the individual experiences or memories of other people, as well as to the collective experiences and memories in case of historical nostalgia; they have the individual or collective character (Grebosz-Krawczyk, 2018).

## 2. Methodological approach

The aim of this research is to identify and assess French and Polish young consumers attitudes towards international nostalgic brands, taking into account the division on generational and transgenerational brands. The scientific problem was developed through the research question:

**Q:** What are the similarities and differences in the attitudes of young French and Polish consumers towards international nostalgic brands?

The following hypothesis was also formulated:

**H:** Young French and Polish consumers respond positively to nostalgic brands, regardless of their category.

In order to answer the research question and test this hypothesis, qualitative empirical research was conducted to evaluate the attitudes of young consumers from France and from Poland towards the international brands perceived as nostalgic.

The research process was composed of seven stages (*Figure 1*). The first stage was designed to identify international nostalgic brands among young consumers (18-24 years). The author of the project in collaboration with Professor of Marketing from the University in France, conducted a study on a group of 200 consumers in France in March 2015, and on a group of 200 consumers in Poland in April 2015, using the indirect method of gathering information, based on the survey technique. Respondents answered the open-ended question: “Please indicate the brand associated positively with your past”. The brands the most frequently cited by Polish and French consumers were identified. These brands were the basis for the creation of the list of 6 international nostalgic brands used in this research. The tools for the implementation of qualitative research were chosen and prepared. The next stage of this research concerned identification and evaluation of attitudes of young French and Polish consumers towards international nostalgic brands. The qualitative study among 100 French and 100 young Polish respondents was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2017 and the first quarter of 2018. The study included six international, generational and transgenerational nostalgic brands, selected during the first stage. During the realization of research concerning the attitudes of young consumers from France and Poland, the focus groups were created. The

direct qualitative methods, such as group interviews and projective methods were used. During the realization of this stage of research, the active and passive observation was also applied. A group of young consumers (18-24 years old) was chosen deliberately because these groups of respondents (French and Polish) had access to similar international brands during their childhood and adolescence. Finally, the last stages included assessment and comparison of attitudes of Polish and French young consumers towards the nostalgic (generational and transgenerational) brand and formulation of the conclusions concerning their attitudes.

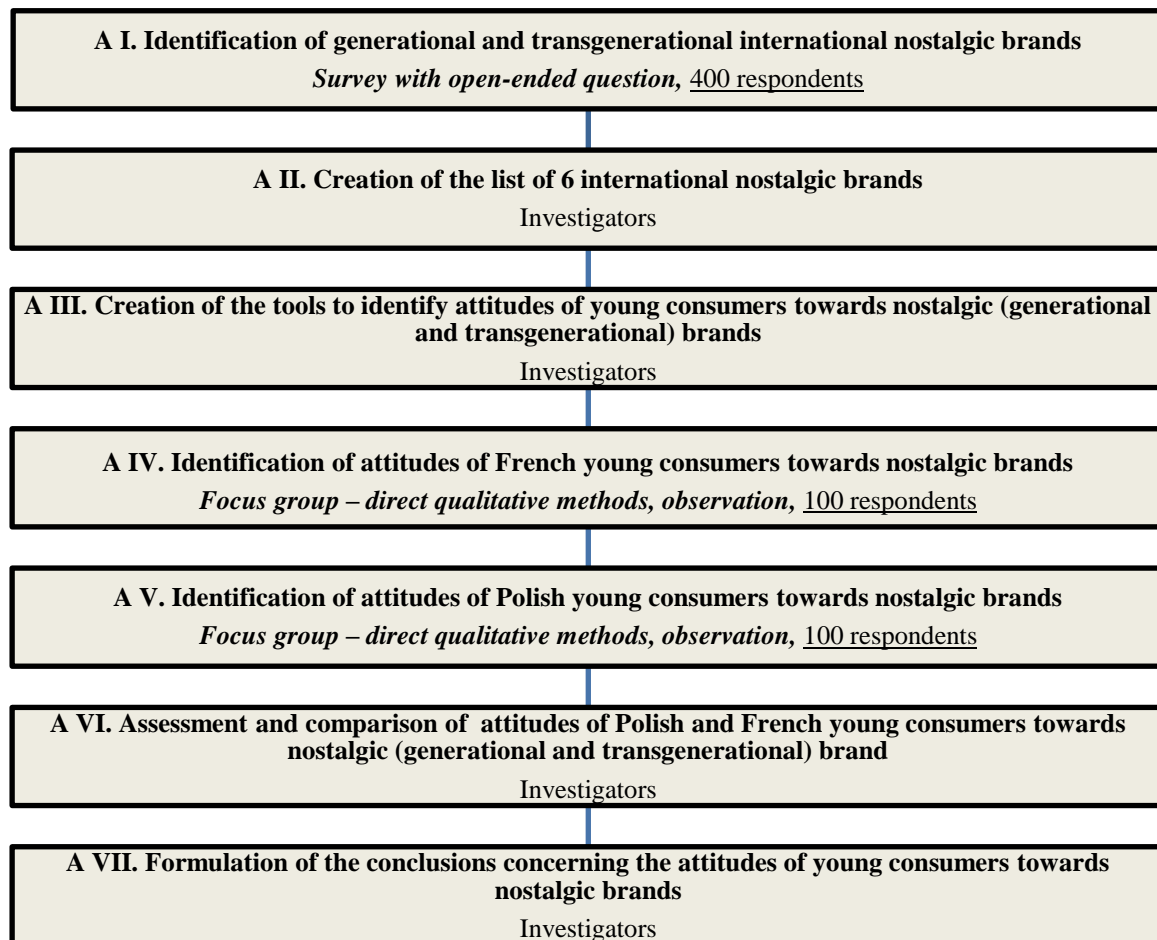


Figure 1. Research procedure – Attitudes of Polish and French young consumers towards nostalgic brands

Source: *own data*

Qualitative methods help the researcher in comprehending a phenomenon that quantitative methods cannot provide (Bartunek & Seo, 2002). Qualitative methods were used in this project to answer the questions on which, using quantitative methods, the researcher cannot get answers, e.g. regarding motivation, attitudes or behaviours of the respondents. While in psychology and sociology attitudes are most often examined in a quantitative way, in marketing, attitudes are examined both in a quantitative and qualitative manner. Qualitative research primarily serves the initial recognition of attitudes. In opinion of Kotler and Armstrong (2014) focus group interviews have become - along with the observational research - one of the major qualitative marketing research tools for gaining fresh insights into consumer thoughts and feelings. In the case of focus group interviews, the researcher can use word-frequency analysis along with multivariate methods and data mining to analyse collected information (Schmidt, 2010).

The focused group interviews were conducted in the case of French and Polish respondents. The choice of this technique made it possible to organize longer discussions in a group of 6-10 people (26 groups; 14 in Poland and 12 in France). Gender balance was maintained in each group. The discussion was led by a moderator (researcher), whose role was to skilfully animate the meeting in a way that allowed participants to fully express themselves on given topics, using the phenomenon of group's dynamics. In each case, discussion was conducted in the national language (French and Polish) to avoid the language problems (language barrier, fear of expressions, problems with expressing feelings and ideas, fear of language errors). Conducting group interviews also made it possible to observe the participants. Besides the qualitative examination, the word-frequency analysis was also applied based on the word clouds' technique.

### **3. Conducting research and results**

The chosen research results are presented in this section. It should be noted that due to editorial limitations, only some aspects of the studied issues have been presented.

#### ***3.1. International nostalgic brands***

Among the brands mentioned by respondents the most frequently in the first stage of research, 6 international nostalgic brands were selected. They represent:

- generational nostalgic brands (Kinder, Nintendo, Milky Way),
- transgenerational nostalgic brands (Coca-Cola, Levi's, Lego).

These brands represent three categories of products: food, toys and clothes. The conclusions formulated for different brands are presented in the next sections.

#### ***3.2. Lego and Nintendo***

Several similarities were identified in the case of brands representing the category of toys products: Nintendo (classified as a nostalgic generational brand) and Lego (classified as a nostalgic transgenerational brand). Males were definitely more active during the study concerning these two brands, which can be explained by their specificity. The discussion was long, more creative and intense for the Nintendo brand in case of French consumers and for the Lego brand in case of Polish participants. This is due to the availability and popularity of these brands in specific countries during childhood and early youth of the participants.

Memories of respondents concerning the Nintendo and Lego brand provoked the recalling of stories from childhood of subsequent respondents. There was a discussion going on, and during the interview, there was often a sentence beginning with "And do you remember ...", which underlined the nostalgic attitudes of the respondents. Three basic topics of discussion were clearly outlined in the case of both brands:

- the available versions of Nintendo games/Lego set,
- the emotions at the time of receiving the product,
- the memories of participants and experiences related to the use of Nintendo/Lego products, also together with friends.

Examples of the word clouds' analysis concerning Lego brand for French and Polish respondents are presented on *Figure 2*. Polish respondents more often mentioned the words parents and mom. It can be related to the important cost of purchase of Lego for some Polish families. The most often cited words by both groups were: set, block and fun. French participants more often used word friends.

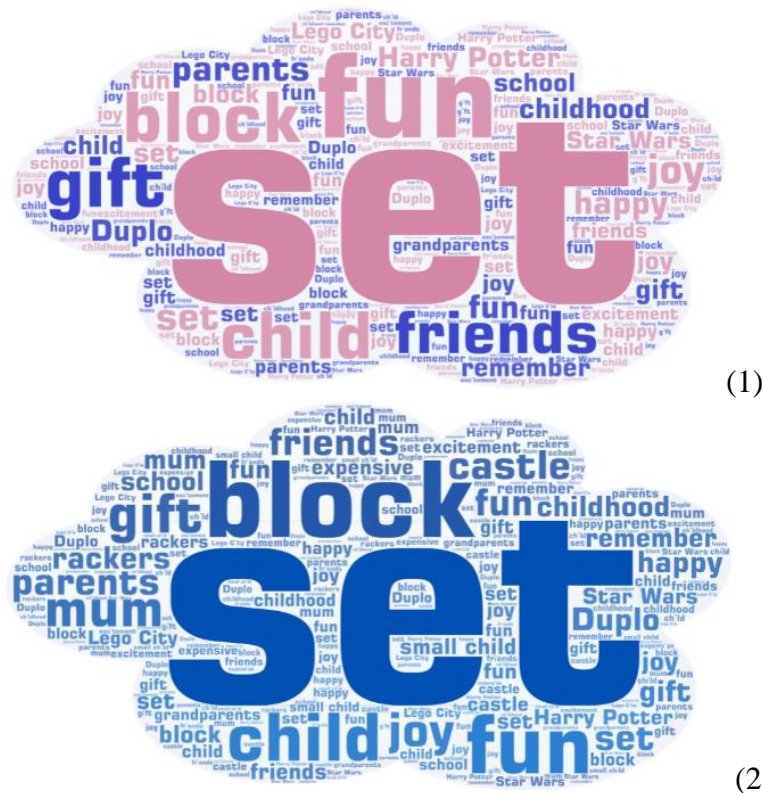


Figure 2. Word clouds for Lego brand – results of research among French (1) and Polish (2) respondents

Source: *own compilation*

The members of the focus groups definitely did not act in isolation but stimulated each other and inspired themselves to discuss. This increased the value of the obtained data. In this case, it was shown that nostalgic feelings have both individual and collective and are based on real nostalgia for both, generational and transgenerational brand. In these two cases, important differences in the attitudes of respondents from Poland and France were not noticed.

### 3.3. *Coca-Cola, Milky Way, Kinder*

Several similarities were identified in the case of brands representing the category of food products for nostalgic generational brands: Kinder and Milky Way. In case of nostalgic transgenerational brand Coca Cola, the attitudes were less nostalgic that in case of nostalgic generational brands representing food products. Both males and females were active during the study concerning these three brands.

Young respondents, both in France and Poland, referred the Coca-Cola brand to the basic values of this brand, such as joy, freedom and friendship. Three basic topics of discussion were clearly outlined in the case of this brand:

- the product' taste,
- the past slogans and promotional campaigns of Coca-Cola,
- the memories of participants and experiences related to the consumption of Coca-Cola products.

In the case of transgenerational nostalgic brand Coca-Cola, there were no direct personal nostalgic references in the respondents' discussions. However, it should be emphasized that the associations with the Coca-Cola brand were definitely positive and referred to the respondent's youth. Nostalgia represents clearly a collective character in this case.

Unlike the Coca-Cola brand, the attitudes towards the Milky-Way and Kinder representing generational nostalgic brands are clearly nostalgic.



Figure 3. Word clouds for Kinder brand – results of research among French (1) and Polish (2) respondents

Source: *own compilation*

Three basic topics of discussion were clearly outlined in the case of both brands:

- the emotions at the time of bringing these sweets by mothers or grandparents,
- the situations in which these branded products comforted or helped with illness,
- the memories of participants and experiences related to the consumption of Milky Way/Kinder products (connected with the plays in kindergarten and school).

Examples of the word clouds' analysis concerning Kinder brand for French and Polish respondents are presented on *Figure 3*. The most often mentioned words were similar for both groups (chocolate, sweet, fun). These brands evoke positive associations (it contributes to recovery, better mood, problem-solving or helping another person). It can, therefore, be assumed that in the situation of purchase, similar associations will appear in the consumer's mind, which will increase the willingness to buy a product by triggering positive emotions. Nostalgia represents definitely a personal character in these two cases. The members of the focus groups definitely did not act in isolation but stimulated each other and inspired themselves to discuss.

In these three cases, differences in the attitudes of respondents from Poland and France were not noticed.

### 3.4. Levi's

In case of nostalgic transgenerational brand Levi's representing clothes products, the attitudes of respondents were less nostalgic than in other cases. Females were definitely more

active during the study concerning this brand that can be explained by its specificity. Young respondents, both in Poland and France, referred to Levi's brand to their own experiences related with the first fascinations with trends, fashion and stylish clothes.



Figure 4. Word clouds for Levi's brand – results of research among French (1) and Polish (2) respondents

Source: *own compilation*

Three basic topics of discussion were clearly outlined in the case of this brand:

- the first Levi's jeans,
- the past promotional campaigns of Levi's,
- the memories of participants and experiences related to the use of Levi's products.

Examples of the word clouds' analysis concerning Lego brand for French and Polish respondents is presented in *Figure 4*. Polish respondents more often mentioned the words money and expensive, as well as parents. It can be related to the important cost of purchase of Levi's jeans for some Polish families. The most often cited words by both groups were: jeans, fashion and trendy.

In the case of transgenerational nostalgic brand Levi's, nostalgia represents definitely a personal character. The associations with Levi's brand were definitely positive and referred to the respondent's youth, but also present time.

### 3.5. General assumptions

The research results show that generational or transgenerational character of the brand does not affect strongly the character of nostalgic feelings but has a significant impact on the intensity of nostalgic feelings. The transgenerational nostalgic brands provoke slightly more often collective memories that generational nostalgic brands. While the character of the brand affects significantly the intensity of the nostalgic feeling of the young consumers. The



generational nostalgic brands evoke much stronger nostalgic feelings than transgenerational nostalgic brands (*Table 1*). It can be explained by stronger relations with brands that are typical for the chosen period and specific for the chosen generation.

Table 1. The summary of the research results

Brand	Type of brand	The character of nostalgic feelings	The intensity of nostalgic feelings
Lego	TG	Personal and collective	High
Coca-Cola	TG	Collective	Medium
Levi's	TG	Personal	Medium
Kinder	G	Personal	High
Milky Way	G	Personal	High
Nintendo	G	Personal and collective	High

*TG-transgenerational brand, G-generational brand*

Source: own compilation

Answering a research question, it can be concluded that there are no differences in the attitudes of young French and Polish consumers towards international nostalgic brands. Nostalgia can provoke a positive attitude towards brands that are directly or indirectly related to the young consumer past regardless of nationality. There are no significant differences in the attitudes of young people even if they were born in two countries representing different parts of Europe. This may be due to the fact that the surveyed young consumers from Poland were born and grow in the capitalistic system (like their French colleagues) even if the political and social changes in Poland in the nineties of the last century could affect behaviour of their parents or families.

The hypothesis was confirmed. The realisation of qualitative research has confirmed that young consumers from France and Poland respond positively to nostalgic brands, regardless of their category.

## Conclusion

Research conducted using projection methods and a focused group interview proves that both young consumers from France and Poland show nostalgic attitudes towards the brands known from childhood. The analysis of research results proved also the consumers' attitudes internationalization. The use of qualitative research methods allowed for a better understanding of the phenomenon of nostalgia in brand management.

Today more and more consumers are looking for values of authenticity, security references, identity, emotion and re-enchantment, and consequently they want to return to the past, to memories, seeking a sense of security and stability. Consequently, more and more companies develop a strategy of nostalgic brands. The results of research conducted among experts (Grebosz-Krawczyk&Pointet, 2018) show that nostalgic brands are recommended for the following sectors: fashion, food, cosmetic (especially perfumes), luxury products, automotive industry, entertainment and decoration. In the experts' opinions, nostalgic brand strategy can be developed both by national and international companies. However, there are no official statistics on the number of companies using this strategy. Experts underlined that the development of nostalgic brands depends on the ambitions of the moment. The basic rule for launching the nostalgic brand is having a strong brand history.

It can be stated that this paper has resulted in two contributions. From a theoretical standpoint, it has provided a better understanding of the nostalgic feelings of young

consumers towards the brands known from their childhood. The author has presented a comparative study of the attitudes of French and Polish consumers. From a substantive standpoint, it has shown the potential of international nostalgic brands. Nostalgia can provoke a positive attitude towards brands also among young consumers. However, it is clearly visible that the national background does not affect their attitudes.

The conclusions in this study are presented with the caveat as to the limitations of the sample (only 200 respondents representing two countries; only 6 brands representing three categories of products). To provide a more comprehensive picture of the evaluation of the attitudes of young consumers towards international nostalgic brands, similar studies could be conducted in other countries for the same brands but also in chosen countries for different products categories.

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