

## **The impact of nostalgic corporate storytelling on brand heritage: A multiple mediation model**

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### ***Abstract***

Given that previous studies have supported the idea that brand storytelling has a significant impact on consumer behaviour, brand stories are increasingly becoming a part of companies' marketing communications tools. The present study investigates the effect of nostalgic corporate storytelling on consumer responses to the brand. Its originality lies in the fact that it is the first attempt to explore nostalgic storytelling, and its effect on consumer responses. A survey was conducted with a sample of 233 respondents; the telling of a story for a fictitious brand was used. The main findings reveal that attitude toward this particular storytelling mediates the relationship between fantasies about past eras and brand attitude, brand attitude mediates the relationship between attitude toward storytelling and brand heritage, the relationship between fantasies about past eras and brand heritage is mediated by brand attitude, whereas the association between fantasies about past eras and brand heritage is sequentially mediated by attitude toward the storytelling and attitude toward the brand.

**Keywords:** storytelling, fantasies about past eras, consumers' attitudes, brand heritage

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Storytelling is one of the most effective methods of communication, given that stories can be more effortlessly recalled than statistics and facts (Lundqvist et al., 2013). At an individual level, people are presented with stories from the moment of birth. It is unrealistic to envision a period in history or a phase of human life that does not encompass stories (Boyd, 2009). Given that ‘human memory is story-based’ (Schank, 1999), marketers tell stories and create pictures in the buyers’ brains since they need people to focus on the message (Woodside, 2010).

In the business environment, communication through narratives has different characteristics compared to those based on arguments or persuasion. This differentiation is rather critical as it influences the effectiveness of corporate communication (Phillips and McQuarrie, 2010). There is the concept of narrative transportation according to which individuals are transported to a fantasy world when they are involved in a tale or story (Green and Brook, 2000). In particular, the narrative transportation theory stresses that corporate communication messages trigger consumers’ fantasies in such a way that they positively affect the consumer’s evaluation of the brand.

Narratives relate people’s life experience components with a causal relation, for example clarifying individual goals, estimating goal plans, and finally interpreting the outcomes (Pennington and Hastie, 1986). In the same context, Bruner (1990) argues that individuals create stories in order to manage their experiences, understand unusual facts and evaluate different occasions. As a result, corporate communication messages that make use of storytelling manage to establish a particular meaning for the brand, give information about how the brand can be used and finally engage consumers with the branded product (Escalas, 2004).

One of the most popular forms of marketing strategy is that of the nostalgic trend, which is widely used in the marketing mix. Brands like McDonald’s make use of nostalgic appeals to enhance consumers’ attitudes toward the brand and increase product purchases (Schultz 2012). A successful nostalgic commercial that uses storytelling in Greece is the "100 years" campaign of the E.J. PAPAPOULOS S.A. Biscuit & Food Products Manufacturing Company. This TV commercial employs narrative storytelling to present the history of the family company, beginning in Constantinople in 1922 and ending in 2022, when the company has achieved market leadership.

Nostalgia is an individual longing for the past, as has been said, “a yearning for yesterday” (Holbrook, 1993). Nostalgic thoughts are idealized memories from the past which combine a feeling of “bittersweet” association (Havlena and Holak, 1991), given that the past can stay away from the indefinite future (Baker and Kennedy, 1994).

In the marketing literature, a significant thread of research (e.g., see Marchegiani and Phau 2010; Muehling and Pascal 2011; Pascal *et al.*, 2002) suggests that nostalgia influences consumer responses positively, and as a result, it can be considered an effective tool that can be used for diverse audiences. Various symbols from past decades have been used in corporate communication strategies to invoke nostalgic feelings. However, even though nostalgia is globally used in the business sector, most of the academic research has been conducted in the US context, highlighting the need to investigate this concept in other cultural communication contexts (Craig and Douglas, 2012). The current research aspires to shed light on how nostalgic storytelling is used as a corporate communication component in the Greek cultural context. According to Hall’s high/low-context theory (1984), the USA is a low-context communication society, while Greece is a high-context communication society. Given that the majority of research on nostalgia has been conducted in low-context communication societies, the current study confirms that nostalgia is an effective corporate communications tool regardless of cultural context.

Nostalgia can be separated into two main forms, personal and vicarious nostalgia. Personal nostalgia has been extensively studied in the marketing literature, but there is limited academic research on vicarious nostalgia (Merchant and Rose, 2013). In addition, by studying the extant literature on corporate communications, a gap can be identified in academic research on how corporate nostalgic storytelling communications affect consumers’ attitudes and beliefs. Thus, the present study attempts first to expand the marketing literature on vicarious nostalgia and secondly to fill the void on how corporate nostalgic storytelling influences consumer responses by empirically testing the effect of fantasies about past eras (a vicarious nostalgia dimension) on consumer attitudes.

A common corporate communication strategy that is based on a company’s past is the prominent promotion of its brand heritage (Beverland, 2006). It is argued that brand heritage can be considered a valuable brand trait (Aaker, 2004). However, the vast majority of relevant research has focused on a corporate level of analysis and at the same time underlines the need for further research at a customer level (Santos *et al.*, 2016). Thus, due to its focus on brand heritage with the use of an administered consumer survey, the present study attempts to investigate how fantasies about past eras are associated with brand heritage in a corporate nostalgic storytelling context.

In particular, the purpose of this study is to examine the indirect effect of fantasies about past eras on brand heritage. By doing so, two sequential mediating mechanisms were explored: attitude toward storytelling and attitude toward the brand (see Figure 1). In marketing and business literature, investigating indirect effects is critical because it allows researchers to present the entire mechanism by which a dependent variable (for example, fantasies about past eras) can successfully lead to a desired outcome (e.g. brand heritage) (Panicker and Sharma, 2020). The causal model, which illustrates both the direct and indirect effects of fantasies about past eras on brand heritage, is tested and supported in a sample of 233 Greek respondents. Hence, the present paper suggests an overall causal model of fantasies about past eras (a vicarious nostalgia dimension) on brand heritage through attitude toward storytelling and brand attitude and not just the main effects between these variables. As a result, the current study contributes to the ongoing discussion about the role of nostalgic corporate storytelling communication in consumers' attitudes and responses.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Nostalgia**

This Nostalgia is a recognized marketing strategy that has been used in the marketing sector since the early 1990s (Stern 1992; Baker and Kennedy 1994). Marketers use nostalgia in advertising in order to make consumers feel safe (Boyle, 2009) by utilizing emotional appeals to their supposedly lovely lived past.

Holak and Havlena (1998) describe nostalgia as a “positively valenced complex feeling, emotion or mood produced by reflection on things (objects, persons, ideas) associated with the past”. One of the most widely used definitions of nostalgia in the marketing discipline comes from Holbrook and Schindler (1991), which defines nostalgia as “a preference (general liking, positive attitude, or favourable affect) toward objects (people, places, or things) that were more common (popular, fashionable, or widely circulated) when one was younger (in early adulthood, in adolescence, in childhood, or even before birth)”.

It is easily understandable that the main trait of the nostalgia concept relies on the past. This desire for the past is related to various emotional responses and other memory recalls (Braun-LaTour, 2007). Prior studies have highlighted the influence of nostalgia on the confrontation of negative emotions (Wildschut *et al.*, 2006) and existential threats (Sedikides *et al.*, 2004), as well as in the rise of social support feelings and the decrease in loneliness (Zhou *et al.*, 2008).

Considering the concept of nostalgia, the extant literature identifies mainly two significant forms, vicarious or historical nostalgia and personal nostalgia. Personal nostalgia, which can be defined as a longing for past experiences a consumer has lived (Baker and Kennedy, 1994), is exclusively based on consumers' autobiographical memories (Neisser, 1988).

Vicarious or historical nostalgia refers to that form of nostalgia that derives from a period that the consumer never actually lived through (Baker and Kennedy, 1994) and as a result, is not contained in the consumer's living memory (Goulding, 2001). Vicarious nostalgia examines how a consumer may perceive experiences and associations from periods before he/she was born (Stern, 1992). Specifically, consumers may face vicarious nostalgia situations when they try to recreate a fact or an event in their minds from a bygone era. Stern (1992) argues that vicarious nostalgia takes place when consumers try to escape to past times that are viewed as optimum compared to the present. In particular, Holbrook and Schindler (1991) note that "It does seem plausible that one could identify nostalgically with people, places, or things from a bygone era that one has experienced only through books, films or other narratives".

### **2.2. Storytelling**

Storytelling is the most natural form of communication for humankind. According to Bruner (1990), there are two ways in which people think, the paradigmatic mode of thought and the narrative mode of thought. The first one uses a mathematical and formal system of explanation and description while the narrative mode attempts to interpret events and facts through self-relevant reflections.

Storytelling can be explained as “sharing knowledge or experience through a story and episode to deliver a complicated idea, concept, and causal relation” (Sole and Wilson, 1999). Receivers of storytelling can easily identify themselves with the story and manifest various emotions (Herskovitz and Crystal, 2010).

Nowadays, storytelling is widely used as a marketing tool (Pulizzi, 2012). In particular, the use of storytelling in narrative advertising fascinates the audience through the story and transports it to a narrative world (Escalas, 2004). Narrative advertising appeals to consumers' subjective feelings and permits them to create self-relevant scenarios and hypothetical self-simulations (Escalas, 2004) about the

storytelling. Vivid storytelling, addressed to consumers, provokes transportation and enhances the efficiency of persuasion (Petrova and Cialdini, 2005) by providing better elaboration capacities (Keller and Block, 1997), enhancing the trait of realism during the storytelling experience and facilitating fantasy stimulation (Escalas, 2004).

Brand storytelling constitutes a significant part of brand icon strategies (Woodside *et al.*, 2008). Delgadillo and Escalas (2004) support the idea that storytelling is an efficient strategy for attracting new customers, as well as retaining the existing ones. Finally, storytelling enhances product identity, affects price perceptions and product image, and finally distinguishes a product from other competitors (Mora and Moscarola, 2010).

### **2.3. Brand Heritage**

Brand heritage represents a value proposition to consumers. Given the present crowded marketplace, brand heritage influences consumer decisions by providing a reliable offering (Menkes, 2010). The heritage of a brand promotes sustainability and longevity as a promise to the interested parties that the principal values and performance of the brand are genuine and not fake (Urde, 2003). Moreover, brand heritage enhances brand equity by connecting past performance to the present brand conditions (Beverland, 2006).

Brand heritage is defined as “a dimension of a brand’s identity found in its track record, longevity, core values, use of symbols and particularly in an organizational belief that its history is important” (Urde *et al.*, 2007).

Hudson and Balmer (2013) proposed a four-dimension framework for the brand heritage concept. The four dimensions are structural heritage, implied heritage, reconstructed heritage and mythical heritage. Structural heritage pertains to past time facts that were preconditions for the future of the brand. Implied heritage emerges when the current status of a brand refers to the past. Reconstructed heritage pertains to consumers’ memories of a brand made earlier in their lifetimes. Finally, mythical heritage pertains to imaginary and historical brand traits which help consumers to escape into fictitious scenarios.

Aaker (2004) argues that heritage is a significant factor in building corporate and product brands, while George (2004) points out that evoking heritage positively drives brand strength. Likewise, brand heritage creates brand associations (Aaker, 2004) that potentially diminish perceived risk, permit a brand to charge a premium price (Stewart-Allen, 2002) and it strengthens brand equity and brand personality (Keller and Richey, 2006).

### **2.4. The role of Nostalgia in Marketing and its linkages to Storytelling and Brand Heritage**

This subsection describes the role of nostalgia in marketing, and its relationship with storytelling and brand heritage, to provide evidence about the relationships between the central concepts of the current study.

Nostalgia as a marketing tool has been exponentially used in recent years (Yoon and Doodoo, 2021). In marketing practice, nostalgia is a valuable strategy that enhances major brand-related outcomes (Heinberg *et al.*, 2020). Prior research in marketing communications also suggests that storytelling is an appropriate form of marketing message that uses nostalgia as a persuasive tool. (Kessous *et al.*, 2015). Hence, the connection between nostalgia and storytelling in the marketing context has been justified. On the other hand, the relationship between nostalgia and brand heritage is evident in the marketing literature, given that nostalgic brands are characterized as enduringly salient, accompanied by their own long history and heritage (Ford *et al.*, 2018; Heinberg *et al.*, 2020; Loveland *et al.*, 2010). Brands seeking to enhance their brand heritage can utilize nostalgia in their marketing communication strategies.

Considering the relationship between nostalgia, storytelling, and brand heritage, nostalgia enables marketing managers to build brand stories that can significantly enhance brand longevity (the element of brand heritage) and strengthen brand trust (Klara, 2018; Yoon and Doodoo, 2021). This idea explains the connection among all the concepts of the present study and describes why their combination in a brand campaign could prove rather effective. We continue with the research hypotheses section and the development of our conceptual model.

## **3. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

### **3.1. The mediating role of attitude toward storytelling in the relationship between fantasies about past eras and brand attitude**

According to the Dual Mediation Hypothesis (MacKenzie *et al.*, 1986), attitude toward advertising can be considered a mediator in the relationship between ad stimulus and brand attitude. In particular, attitude toward advertising influences brand attitude both directly and indirectly through brand cognition. Based on this model, it can be stated that the relationship between fantasies about past eras and brand

attitude is mediated by the attitude toward storytelling. Fantasies about past eras, a vicarious nostalgia dimension, can be considered as an ad stimulus. Advertisements can use the concept of fantasies about past eras, such as how consumers imagined living in the past period depicted in the ad, as a powerful stimulus that evokes the emotion of nostalgia (Merchant and Rose, 2013). On the other hand, storytelling about a brand can be considered an advertising form. Storytelling is an important component of narrative advertising that captivates consumers and audiences. (Escalas, 2004).

Indeed, one thread of research (Marchegiani and Phau, 2011; Muehling, 2011) supports the idea that vicarious nostalgia affects consumer attitudes. Likewise, it has been found that nostalgic ad stimuli in print advertising influence attitudes toward advertising in a more favourable way, compared to non-nostalgic print advertisements (Muehling and Sprott, 2004). Moreover, there is a strong positive correlation between ad-evoked nostalgia and attitude toward the ad (Pascal *et al.*, 2002).

Furthermore, the marketing literature (Edell and Burke, 1987) supports the claim that emotions and positive advertising feelings enhance the positive attitude toward a brand. In this vein, nostalgia can be conceptualized as a positive emotion, feeling or mood (Holak and Havlena, 1998). Moreover, Brown *et al.* (1998) in a meta-analysis study concluded that there is a consistently positive correlation between advertising emotions and attitude toward the brand.

Previous studies about ad stimulus, attitude toward the ad and brand attitude, found that mediational effects could be indicated among the above variables (see, e.g., Lutz *et al.*, 1983; Edell and Burke, 1987). In this vein, it appears that advertising-evoked nostalgia enhances the positive attitude toward the brand while, at the same time, attitude toward advertising mediates the relationship between nostalgic advertising and brand attitude (Pascal *et al.*, 2002). Based on the aforementioned analysis the following hypothesis is formulated:

*H1: The relationship between fantasies about past eras and brand attitude is mediated by attitude toward storytelling.*

### **3.2. The mediating role of brand attitude in the relationship between attitude toward storytelling and brand heritage.**

In elaborating on the narrative transportation theory, recent research (Van Laer *et al.*, 2014) supports the notion that the concept of narrative transportation may lead individuals to enter the world evoked by a story. In a study about how a firm-originated story affects consumers' brand experience, Lundqvist *et al.* (2013) conducted in-depth interviews whose results demonstrated that participants exposed to the firm story exhibited a more positive attitude toward the brand compared to the participants who were not exposed to the story.

Storytelling, one of the main forms of narrative advertising, succeeds in persuading consumers by telling a story about a product or related product experiences with the use of emotional and other affective appeals (Phillips and McQuarrie, 2010). Brand stories that help consumers to create self-brand connections, by utilizing self-identity goals (Escalas and Bettman, 2000), have a favourable effect on brand attitudes (Escalas, 2004).

Within the same context, captivating experiences, like engaging in storytelling advertising, influence consumers' behaviours and attitudes positively (Demangeot and Broderick, 2006). Narrative advertising gives consumers sufficient cognitive capacity, which leads to favourable results as regards the formation of beliefs and attitudes toward advertising and the brand, compared to argumentative advertising (Chang, 2009).

Similarly, it appears that narrative advertising leads to greater positive emotions and attitudes toward the brand compared to argument advertising, when both types of advertising contain the same product information (Escalas, 2004). When narrative advertising uses storytelling, consumers, who are transformed into highly transported viewers of the story, generate fewer counterarguments and critical evaluations, and manifest greater positive responses, such as attitude toward the brand (Chang, 2009).

On the other hand, it has been found that emotions positively influence perceptions of brand heritage (Merchant and Rose, 2013). Brand heritage is one of the major traits of brand identity, while at the same time heritage incorporates the concept of feelings and affective reactions to a brand (Leigh *et al.*, 2006). Arnold (1960), an emotion theorist, strongly supports the suggestion that affective reactions are considered as perceived states about a subject and not as subject qualities.

Batra and Ray (1986) were among the first researchers to argue that affective reactions significantly contribute to the concept of attitude toward advertising, while Stayman and Aaker (1988) indicated that in some cases these affective reactions significantly influence brand attitude too.

In the same context, Edell and Burke (1987) concluded that feelings combined with semantic judgment scales contribute uniquely to attitude toward advertising and brand attitude. Furthermore, in a follow-up study, the authors corroborated their results by demonstrating the robustness of the hypothesis that feelings influence the concepts of attitude toward advertising and brand attitude with the use of a

particular advertisement seen, different measurement delay periods and multiple viewings of the advertisement (Burke and Edell, 1989). Hence, taking into account the aforementioned analysis we propose the following hypothesis:

*H2: The relationship between attitude toward storytelling and brand heritage is mediated by brand attitude.*

### 3.3. The mediating role of brand attitude in the relationship between fantasies about past eras and brand heritage.

Vicarious nostalgia positively influences brand attitude (Marchegiani and Phau, 2011). In an experimental design study that compared consumers' responses to nostalgic and non-nostalgic messages, Ju *et al.* (2016) concluded that past-focused (nostalgic) content led to more favourable attitudes toward the brand compared to present-focused content. Other empirical evidence (e.g., Baker and Kennedy, 1994; Muehling and Sprott, 2004) also supports the claim that nostalgic messages can lead to more positive brand attitudes.

Moreover, previous studies (e.g., Goulding, 2001; Stern 1992) have shown that nostalgic feelings also contribute to more positive attitudes toward the brand. Zhou *et al.* (2013), in studying the level of consumers' insecurity in retro brands that make use of appeals to the past, concluded that the more insecure consumers feel, the greater positive attitude toward the retro brand they manifest. This may happen because insecure experiences in the consumer's current life are reversely associated with their past "safe" life (Baker and Kennedy 1994).

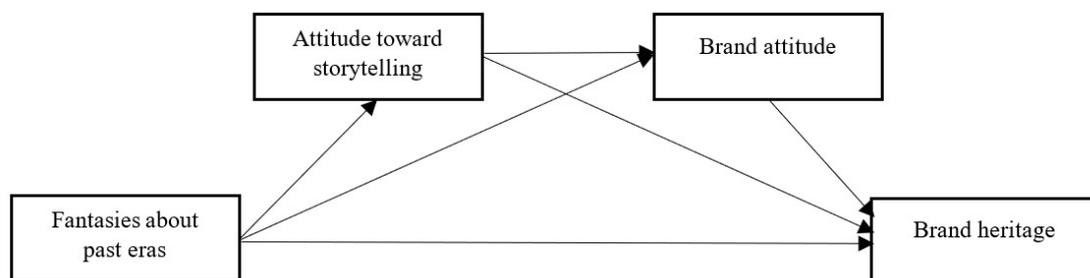
Based on the study by Merchant and Rose (2013) there is a mediation effect of emotions in the relationship between fantasies about past eras and brand heritage. Taking into account the previous analysis, which considers attitudes as affective reactions (e.g. Burke and Edell, 1989; Edell and Burke, 1987; Stayman and Aaker, 1988), we propose the following hypothesis:

*H3: The relationship between fantasies about past eras and brand heritage is mediated by brand attitude.*

Finally, based on the whole of the above analysis of the present research hypothesis section, it is theorized that fantasies about past eras are positively related to brand attitude through attitude toward the storytelling (Hypothesis 1) and that brand attitude serves as a mediator in the relationship between attitude toward storytelling and brand heritage (Hypothesis 2). Combining the above hypotheses with the proposition that there is a mediation effect of emotions in the relationship between fantasies about past eras and brand heritage (Merchant and Rose, 2013), and considering that attitudes can be theorized as affective reactions (e.g., Burke and Edell, 1989; Edell and Burke, 1987; Stayman and Aaker, 1988), we propose a three-path mediation model. Hence the following hypothesis is advanced:

*H4: The relationship between fantasies about past eras and brand heritage is sequentially mediated by attitude toward storytelling and brand attitude.*

**Figure 1. The conceptual Model of the Study**



## **4. METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1. Procedure**

To test the above hypotheses, an online survey was conducted. First, participants read a story about a fictitious coffee brand. Coffee was selected because it is a product that, when consumed, elicits positive emotions in consumers, such as nostalgia (Bhumiratana et al., 2019; Labbe et al., 2015). The story was constructed by the researchers, based on the narrative structure theory. Feldman *et al.* (1990) argue that four elements are necessary to develop a narrative structure. First, narrative contains actions undertaken to pursue objectives, maintained in sequential order. Secondly, the events and situations are aligned because there is a causal sequence from the beginning to the middle and the end of events. These first two elements correspond to the chronology and causality components. In other words, temporal dimensions (order) portray the associations between the factors of the story (causality). The third and fourth elements deal less with the story structure and more with the focus of the narrative. The third required element is that the narratives have to conform to the general rule, which is the objective explanation of the events. Finally, a narrative has the voice of the narrator's perspective. The present story satisfied all the above necessary elements of the narrative structure.

Participants were instructed to answer the structured questionnaire, after having read the story. Google Forms were used for the construction of the online survey. Participants were recruited with the use of the snowball sampling method via the social networking site Facebook, which is the most popular social networking site. Overall, 233 participants completed the survey.

### **4.2. Sample**

Considering the demographic characteristics of the sample, the mean age of participants is 34 years old (SD= 10.49) where 31.7% are between 18 and 24 years old, 20.2% are between 25 and 33 years old and 48.1% are between 34 and 50 years old. As regards the participants' genders, 54.1% are female and 45.9% are male. Finally, as regards the participants' educational level, 1.3% have the highest qualification in primary school, 2.6% in secondary school, 33% in high school, 37% have a bachelor's degree, 21% have a master's degree and finally 5.1% hold a PhD.

### **4.3. Measures**

In the present study, fantasies about past eras were measured by means of a 9-item, 7-point Likert scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .905$ ) adapted by Merchant and Rose (2013) (e.g. I imagined that I was living in the era in which the story unfolds). Attitude toward storytelling was measured by means of a 6-item, 7-point Likert scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .816$ ) developed by Baker and Kennedy (1994) (e.g. I really like this story). Attitude toward the brand was measured by means of a 4-item, 7-point Likert scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .901$ ) developed by Geuens and De Pelsmacker (1998) (e.g. I think this is a good brand). Finally, brand heritage was measured by means of a 12-item, 7-point Likert scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .962$ ) adapted by Merchant and Rose (2013) (e.g. It is a brand that has survived in both difficult and good times).

### **4.4. Control Variables**

As in prior studies, demographics and especially gender, age and educational level were used as control variables (Nwanzu and Babalola, 2020). A few of the bivariate correlations between these control variables and the outcomes were statistically significant (Table 1). To deepen the analysis, Kendall rank correlation coefficients (Kendal's  $\tau$ ) were calculated (see Appendix). In order to provide more compelling results, statistical analyses, with and without the inclusion of control variables, were first conducted. The results revealed no statistically significant difference. As a result, control variables could be and were excluded from the analyses (Becker, 2005).

## **5. RESULTS**

Means, standard deviations and correlations for all variables are presented in Table 1. In order to examine the multiple mediation model, a bootstrapping analysis was conducted (1000 bootstrap samples with 95% confidence intervals), based on the SPSS macro PROCESS suggested by Preacher and Hayes (2004). Prior studies (Pattusamy and Jacob, 2017; Riskos et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2008) have also used this method of analysis in order to construct a three-path mediation model. If 95% of the bias-corrected confidence intervals for the estimates of the mediation effect do not include zero, it suggests that the indirect effect is statistically significant at the 0.05 level (Shrout and Bolger, 2002). The present technique addresses some weaknesses of the Sobel test and, more significantly, allows researchers to incorporate multiple mediators. The macro PROCESS follows a path analytic framework, considering that it is a regression-based approach, and as a result resembles the mediation analysis approach proposed by

Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes (2007) or Edwards and Lambert (2007). Path coefficients are estimated with the use of OLS regression, while indirect effects can be tested by constructing each variable around the assumed indirect effects that are proposed.

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations**

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Gender	.54	.50						
2. Age	33.77	10.5	-.05					
3. Educational level	3.89	0.97	.15*	-.07				
4. Fantasies about past eras	3.92	1.30	.05	.21**	-.09			
5. Attitude toward storytelling	5.08	1.05	.02	.11	-.02	.38**		
6. Brand attitude	4.9	1.02	.02	.115	-.28**	.31**	.38**	
7. Brand heritage	4.65	1.04	-.03	-.04	-.30**	.27**	.23**	.67**

\* $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$

Coding of control variables: Gender (male=0, female=1), age (17-24=1, 25-33=2, 34-50=3) educational level (Primary School=1, Secondary School=2, High School=3, Bachelor's degree=4, Master's degree=5 PhD=6)

The results (Table 2) demonstrated that fantasies about past eras are related to attitude toward storytelling ( $\beta=.30$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Moreover, attitude toward storytelling demonstrated a positive effect on brand attitude ( $\beta=.37$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Accordingly, the bias-corrected confidence intervals of the indirect effect did not include zero (between .04 and .14). Hence, hypothesis 1 is supported, proposing that the relationship between fantasies about past eras and brand attitude is mediated by attitude toward storytelling.

**Table 2. Path Coefficients and indirect effects for mediation models**

	Path Coefficients			Conditional Indirect Effect	Bootstrap 95% Confidence	
	Attitude toward Storytelling	Brand Attitude	Brand Heritage (BH)		Lower	Upper
Fantasies about Past Eras (FPE)	.30 (.20)	.25 (.05)	.05 (.04)			
Attitude toward Storytelling (SATT)		.37 (.06)				
Brand Attitude (BA)			.70(.05)			
FPE → SATT → BA				<b>.09</b> (.02)	.04	.14
SATT → BA → BH				<b>.26</b> (.05)	.17	.36
FPE → BA → BH				<b>.16</b> (.04)	.09	.23
FPE → SATT → BA → BH				<b>.06</b> (.02)	.03	.10

Significant path coefficients are in bold

Standard error in parentheses.

Hypothesis 2 states that brand attitude mediates the relationship between attitude toward storytelling and brand heritage. Brand attitude demonstrated a positive effect on brand heritage ( $\beta=.70$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Moreover, the bias-corrected confidence intervals of the indirect effect did not include zero (between .17 and .36). As a result, hypothesis 2 is supported.

According to hypothesis 3, brand attitude mediates the relationship between fantasies about past eras and brand heritage. The results demonstrated a positive direct effect of fantasies about past eras on brand attitude ( $\beta=.25$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Likewise, the bias-corrected confidence intervals of the indirect effect did not include zero (between .09 and .23). Hence hypothesis 3 is supported.

Finally, hypothesis 4 suggests that attitude toward storytelling and brand attitude sequentially mediate the relationship between fantasies about past eras and brand heritage. The present results corroborated the multiple mediation model since the bias-corrected confidence intervals did not include zero (between .03 and 0.10). Thus hypothesis 4 is supported.

## 6. DISCUSSION

The current research investigated the indirect effect of fantasies about past eras on brand heritage. A sample of 233 respondents participated in an online survey. The results demonstrated the validity of a causal model that illustrated both direct and indirect effects of fantasies about past eras on brand heritage through attitude toward storytelling and brand attitude. In particular, the overall causal model revealed that the relationship between fantasies about past eras and brand attitude is positively mediated by attitude toward storytelling. Moreover, brand attitude positively mediates the relationship between attitude toward storytelling and brand heritage. Likewise, the relationship between fantasies about past eras and brand heritage is positively mediated by brand attitude. Finally, the relationship between fantasies about past eras and brand heritage is sequentially mediated by attitude toward the storytelling and attitude toward the brand.

### **6.1. Theoretical Contribution**

The present study contributes to the literature on marketing in the following fundamental ways. First, through the use of a mediation analysis (the macro PROCESS tool) the study provides further evidence that vicarious nostalgia, and particularly fantasies about past eras, positively influence brand heritage. In that way it extends prior research stating that there is an indirect relationship between fantasies about past eras and brand heritage (Merchant and Rose, 2013). Specifically, the present work develops a new causal model that illustrates both positive direct and indirect effects of fantasies about past eras on brand heritage. Hence, fantasies about past eras are positively associated with attitude toward storytelling. Attitude toward storytelling positively affects attitude toward the brand and, in turn, brand attitude positively influences brand heritage.

Considering the importance of brand heritage in building corporate and product brands (Aaker 2004) little is known about the factors that positively influence brand heritage. Most of the studies investigate the impact of brand heritage on a corporate level of analysis. Thus, the current study offers new insights into this stream of research by investigating how brand heritage is perceived from a consumer point of view. Our results, in particular, demonstrate that there is a positive indirect effect of attitude toward storytelling on brand heritage through brand attitude, while at the same time the relationship between fantasies about past eras and brand heritage is positively mediated by brand attitude.

The present work also contributes to the literature about nostalgia from a marketing point of view. The less examined form of nostalgia, that of vicarious nostalgia and particularly the dimension of fantasies about past eras (Merchant and Rose, 2013), is put under investigation, whereas the bulk of research has investigated the form of personal nostalgia. Moreover, according to the literature, when consumers perceive a brand as nostalgic, they convert their memories into tangible objects (Kessous and Roux, 2008). Our study takes this line of research a step further by providing support for the relationship between the perception of a brand as nostalgic and the conversion of memories into tangible objects by illustrating the direct and indirect positive effects of fantasies about past eras on brand heritage. Hence, our results revealed that fantasies about past eras positively influence brand heritage through brand attitude. Furthermore, as far as the effectiveness of nostalgia as a marketing tool is concerned, Chase and Shaw (1989) argue that consumers do not need to have lived through a specific past period in order to feel nostalgic about it. Given that the present study makes use of vicarious nostalgia, it supplements the prior research by revealing that fantasies about past eras can indeed influence brand heritage positively.

Finally, the current study extends the literature about storytelling theory in two ways. First, the study by Lundqvist *et al.* (2013) concluded that participants exposed to a firm-originated story exhibited more positive attitude toward the brand. In this vein, the present study concludes that nostalgic storytelling about a brand, as a form of corporate communication tool, positively influences brand attitude. As a result, the present study combines the concepts of storytelling and nostalgia in a form of corporate communication that positively affects brand attitude. Secondly, the idea that brand storytelling constitutes a significant part of brand icon strategy is supported (Woodside *et al.*, 2008), while at the same time it can be considered an effective strategy for attracting new customers, as well as retaining existing ones (Delgadillo and Escalas, 2004). Our results extend this thread of research by showing that there is a positive indirect effect of attitude toward storytelling on brand heritage through brand attitude. Specifically, the concept of brand strategy can be illustrated in the concept of brand heritage given that brand heritage represents a value proposition for the customers.

### **6.2. Managerial Implications**

Our study presents a sequential mediation model that illustrates how nostalgic storytelling can gradually lead to brand heritage through attitude towards storytelling and brand attitude. Based on this model, practitioners can build strategies for cultivating brand heritage based on two powerful tools, storytelling and the concept of nostalgia. Storytelling is a low-cost, effective communication tool (Lundqvist *et al.*, 2013) and as a result, can be used by all types of companies however high or low their

communication budget. On the other hand, companies with heritage, like family companies, which very often follow different firm strategies compared to other types of companies (Ung et al., 2018), can make use of nostalgic appeals to build their brand communications. Within the Greek context, E.J. PAPAPOULOS S.A. Biscuit & Food Products Manufacturing Company is a successful case study company that used nostalgic storytelling for advertising and branding.

Results demonstrated that attitude towards storytelling is an important mediator of the model, which positively influences brand attitude and brand heritage. This result highlights the fact that brand communications practitioners should realize the significance of creating positive consumer attitudes toward their advertising campaigns. Storytelling and nostalgia can be used again as marketing tools for this reason.

Marketing practitioners can gain knowledge given that the current study offers new insights into how brand heritage is perceived from a consumer point of view. Most of the studies investigated brand heritage on a corporate level of analysis. This study indicates that brand heritage can be built through narratives that make use of past eras in which consumers have never lived. As a result, practitioners can use historical and glorious eras for marketing and branding purposes.

## **7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

Like any other study, the present research is not without limitations. The scales used were modified and applied in the Greek context. However, they have been developed in a Western culture (Western Europe and the USA). For that reason, careful attention was paid to them (translation/back-translation methodology) (Mullen, 1995) in order to take into account this cultural difference in the scales. Moreover, the research sample included only Greeks. Hence, a replication study through a cross-cultural survey could demonstrate similarities and differences between different cultures or could confirm the generalizability of the causal model in various cultural environments. Furthermore, the whole research was conducted online. Hence, future studies could include both offline and online research.

In the present study, an online survey was conducted in order to test the effectiveness of nostalgic storytelling and how this concept influences brand heritage. A future study could use an experimental methodology in order to examine possible differences between a nostalgic and a non-nostalgic storytelling corporate message.

Moreover, the present study examined a specific product category, that of a coffee brand. Future studies could examine and compare the effectiveness of nostalgic storytelling in different types of products or services. Additionally, the current research tested the effectiveness of nostalgic storytelling for a fictitious brand. Future research may examine the differences in corporate storytelling communication messages between authentic and non-authentic stories. According to the literature, people prefer real information compared to fictional information (Argo *et al.*, 2007).

Finally, the present study examined the influence of vicarious nostalgia on brand heritage. However, future research could assess the difference in effectiveness between vicarious and personal nostalgia as a means of communication. Moreover, investigating possible negative emotions triggered by nostalgia could be an interesting topic for future research.

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## APPENDIX

### Storytelling

The story of ‘Arabusta’ starts when Esperanca was born in Brazil in 1952. Brazil is the leading country for coffee production, because it has the ideal soil and climate for cultivation. She was just 20 years old when her mother died while working on coffee plantations to secure the livelihood for the family. You might think that this formed a difficult start for a young girl, but Esperanca has always been a special individual.

In the same year, the family sold their possessions and decided (with their father) to make a fresh start. They travelled to America and, with the little money they had, they opened a coffee shop in 1972. Esperanca possessed a natural talent in business and coffee. She gathered coffee from the best plantations and she used to transfer it in her luggage. She knew the two main varieties of coffee, which are the dominant ones in the world trade even up to today - Arabica and Robusta. Arabica is known for the strong aromatic flavour that it gives to the coffee drink and it is the largest in world production, holding the largest percentage in coffee production worldwide. On the other hand, the variety Robusta has twice as much caffeine as does Arabica along with a more neutral taste, but it is the smaller in percentage of world production. Esperanca’s combination of these two varieties with their different characteristics has resulted in a coffee of desirable flavour and unique aroma.

This is the secret and inspiration of the name ‘Arabusta’. Esperanca wanted to share her knowledge, because coffee is a valuable part of her make up, given her having grown up on coffee plantations. Her name also symbolizes hope. On the way she encountered difficulties, people and situations that created obstacles, but her vision was greater than the fears they created.

The operation of the first store remains a work of art and reflects expertise in selecting the coffee from the best plantations. The rest is history. Today her knowledge and love for coffee has moved on to the second generation, because Esperanca married and had grandchildren. Over the passage of time, the store network became extended to other regions of America, Europe and Asia. The values remain unchanged, even today, as well as the demand for raw coffee from the best farms, selecting the right variety, the evaluation of green beans, the measurements and the first roasting. Quality is an integral part of any customer-oriented philosophy. Quality makes a difference to us but also to you!\

### Kendall rank correlation coefficients (Kendal’s t)

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Gender						
2. Age	-.054					
3. Educational level	.144*	.005				
4. Fantasies about past eras	.046	.143**	-.051			
5. Attitude toward storytelling	.004	.141**	-.022	.240**		
6. Brand attitude	.009	.087	-.180**	.222**	.254**	
7. Brand heritage	-.035	-.102	-.231**	.223**	.145**	.508**

\* $p \leq .05$ . \*\* $p \leq .01$