

Nostalgia as a practice? Rereading the research on nostalgia in the field of marketing

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Abstract

Nostalgia is a powerful marketing resource and has been introducing new forms and dynamics in the contemporary scene that challenge its classic interpretations. Considering that the understanding of the phenomenon of consumption has been revised, it is worth asking whether the current explanations of nostalgia adequately elucidate the phenomenon in the context of consumption. This study proposes new possibilities for investigating the phenomenon of nostalgia in the field of marketing from the perspective of the Practice Theories. The work presents two contributions: by revisiting the literature on nostalgia in the field, it conceptually organizes research into two approaches, sentimental and cultural; by discussing these approaches in light of Practice Theory, we reflect on possibilities for reinterpreting nostalgia research from sociomaterial perspective.

Keywords: Nostalgia. Practice Theories. Consumer Culture Theory.

Nostalgia como prática? Relendo a pesquisa sobre nostalgia no campo do Marketing

Resumo

A nostalgia é um poderoso recurso de Marketing e vem apresentando novas formas e dinâmicas no cenário contemporâneo que desafiam suas interpretações clássicas. Considerando que o próprio entendimento do fenômeno do consumo vem sendo revisto, cabe questionar se as explicações atuais sobre nostalgia explicam adequadamente o fenômeno no contexto do consumo. Assim, o objetivo deste trabalho é refletir e propor novas possibilidades de investigação do fenômeno da nostalgia no campo do Marketing a partir das Teorias da Prática. O artigo apresenta duas contribuições principais: ao revisitar a literatura sobre nostalgia no campo, organiza conceitualmente as pesquisas em duas abordagens, a sentimentalista e a cultural. Por fim, o texto também reflete sobre possibilidades de releitura da pesquisa sobre nostalgia a partir das Teorias da Prática.

Palavras-chave: Nostalgia. Teorias da Prática. Consumer Culture Theory.

¿Nostalgia como práctica? Releyendo la investigación sobre la nostalgia en el campo del Marketing

Resumen

La nostalgia es un poderoso recurso de Marketing y ha ido introduciendo nuevas formas y dinámicas en la escena contemporánea que desafían sus interpretaciones clásicas. Teniendo en cuenta que se ha cuestionado la comprensión del fenómeno del consumo, cabe preguntarse si las explicaciones actuales sobre nostalgia explican adecuadamente el fenómeno en el contexto del consumo. Así, el objetivo de este trabajo es reflexionar y proponer nuevas posibilidades para investigar el fenómeno de la nostalgia en el campo del Marketing desde las teorías de la práctica. El artículo presenta dos aportes principales: al revisar la literatura sobre la nostalgia en el campo, organiza conceptualmente la investigación en dos enfoques, el sentimental y el cultural. Finalmente, el trabajo también reflexiona sobre las posibilidades de reinterpretar la investigación de la nostalgia desde las teorías de la práctica.

Palabras clave: Nostalgia. Teorías de la práctica. Teoría de la cultura del consumidor.

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INTRODUCTION

For decades, nostalgia has been a powerful marketing resource, capable of drawing attention, engagement and the desire for new products. In movies, cars, music, fashion, events and tourist destinations, in the design of home appliances and in the hashtags #throwbackthursday that multiply on social networks, among many other products and services, the past becomes present as an important market device. The nostalgic wave that was interpreted in the early 2000s as a fleeting effect of the turn of the millennium continues to be strong and “consumers’ preoccupation with the past is showing no sign of slowing down” (Brown, 2018, p. 10). A 2019 report from the Spanish newspaper El País entitled “The business of nostalgia” warned in its call: “The vinyl came back. Arcades also. Retro is a hit at the box office, and the phone and video game companies re-launch their symbolic models” (Enano, 2019). The word “nostalgia” itself seems to have become an attractive brand in different consumer contexts. On YouTube, the Nostalgia Channel (*Canal Nostalgia*), which features videos mainly about popular cultural products in past decades, such as films, TV shows, games etc., has 13.1 million subscribers. Pop singer Dua Lipa’s most recent album, called Future Nostalgia, is in the top 50 on Billboard (Billboard, 2020). Even a paint color was named “green-nostalgia” by an important Brazilian paint brand (Suvinil, 2020). Examples like these illustrate not only the strength of nostalgia as a contemporary phenomenon in Marketing, but also that it seems to be taking new forms and expressions in the consumption scenario.

The concept of nostalgia originated in the 17th century in the field of medicine and derives from the Greek words *nostos* (“back home”) and *algos* (“longing” or “pain”) to designate a disease caused by the individual’s distance from their native land (Hamilton, Edwards, Hammil, Wagner & Wilson, 2014). In the field of Marketing, the theme of nostalgia has been present since the 1990s. Issues related to the influence of nostalgia on consumer preferences (Holbrook & Schindler, 1996), types of responses to nostalgic advertising stimuli (Stern, 1992) and how nostalgia creates a sense of consumer identity (Belk, 1990, 1991) were among the initial interests of researchers in consumer behavior and culture and consumption regarding the phenomenon.

In an effort to renew its premises and its theorizing about the phenomenon of consumption, the field of studies in culture and consumption, also known as Consumer Culture Theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2005), has been witnessing the emergence of new approaches that seek to advance the reflection on the relationships between subject-object and overcome the emphasis given to the consumer (human agent) in the consumption process. Diverse approaches like Assemblage Theory (Delanda, 2006), Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 1988), Practice Theory (Hui, Schatzki & Shove, 2017), among others, they have been adopted in order to better understand the role of materiality and relationships in the consumption process (Braga & Suarez, 2018). Given the timeliness and relevance of nostalgia for Marketing, as previously argued, and the new directions that the field has been tracing to understand the phenomenon of consumption, it is worth questioning: current research on nostalgia is able to adequately explain the phenomenon in its various manifestations? Considering that the understanding of the phenomenon of consumption has been questioned by the field, the most likely answer is no. As for the new ontologies and approaches brought to the field of consumption, are they being used to seek new explanations for the place of nostalgia in consumption or consumption in nostalgia? As will be presented, the literature indicates that the answer to this question is also *no*.

Thus, the objective of this study is to reflect and propose new possibilities for investigating the phenomenon of nostalgia in the field of Marketing from the Practice Theory (Hui et al., 2017; Shove, Pantzar & Watson, 2012). For this purpose, the study revisits the literature on nostalgia in the field of consumer behavior, in order to understand how it is conceptualized and investigated, to then reflect on concepts from the Practice Theory that can add up or confront the premises of current investigations on nostalgia.

In addition to contributing to studies on the topic by conceptually organizing current research into two theoretical approaches, the sentimentalist and cultural, the study also proposes possible reinterpretations of nostalgia through examples that illustrate possibilities of applying the premises and concepts of the Practice Theory for the study of the phenomenon in the field of consumer behavior. For the elaboration of these contributions, the study presents, after this introduction, the origins and evolution of the concept of nostalgia, in the second section. In the third section, two conceptual perspectives on nostalgia adopted in the field of Marketing are proposed and discussed: the sentimentalist and the cultural. The fourth section critically analyzes the two perspectives of study of nostalgia prevalent in the field, discussing their limitations and contributions. The fifth section presents the basic conceptual framework of Practice Theory. The sixth section proposes and discusses possibilities for reinterpreting nostalgia through the Practice Theory lenses. Finally, the implications, limitations of the study and reflections to assist researchers in future work on nostalgia are presented.

On the origins and evolution of the concept of nostalgia

The first overview on the nature of nostalgia took place in the field of medicine, and the first known scientific report on the subject appears in the medical dissertation by Johannes Hofer, published in 1688 (Boym, 2001). In her dissertation, the Swiss doctor describes nostalgia as a disease typical of sailors and soldiers who traveled to distant lands. Among its main symptoms would be nausea, loss of appetite, changes in the lungs, brain inflammation, cardiac arrest, fever, doldrums and propensity for suicide (Anspach, 1934). In this way, the first studies on nostalgia defined the individual's spatial displacement as the central characteristic of this "disease".

The failure of medicine to cure the disease of nostalgia aroused, in the industrial age, the view of Social Sciences, which began to witness an epidemic of nostalgia at the level of society, promoting the construction of museums, the restoration of monuments and traditions and the birth of a romantic art that sought to rescue a past idealized as pure and slowed down. This growing movement to institutionalize nostalgia (Garrido & Davidson, 2019) came to be predominantly interpreted in the field of Social Sciences, already in the first half of the 20th century, as a typically conservative sentiment and discourse emerging from the notion of irrecoverability from a glorious past destroyed by modernity. This association led the theme to be treated as something purely anti-progressive and alienating, thus arousing more criticism than the researchers' curiosity (Boym, 2001; Gehler, 2017; Pickering & Keightley, 2006).

In the field of Psychology, the negative connotation built around nostalgia as a "disease of the mind" prevailed until the middle of the 20th century. New interpretations were provided by sociologist Fred Davis in the second half of the 20th century when describing nostalgia as a "bittersweet" feeling, which has both negative and positive consequences for the individual (Routledge, 2016). However, still in the contemporary scenario, in the field of Psychology, the interpretation prevails that nostalgia is triggered by feelings of loneliness, depression, discontinuity and discontent with the present, perhaps due to the interpretations of Medicine and Social Sciences at the beginning of the century (Garrido & Davidson, 2019). As noted by Routledge (2016), the field of Psychology had, until the last decade, a tasteless volume of empirical research that sought to better understand the phenomenon of nostalgia and its consequences. The author notes that most current empirical studies on nostalgia come from studies of consumption and consumer behavior. This reinforces the academic importance of the theme for the Marketing area.

Studies on nostalgia in the field of Marketing began, mainly, in the last decade of the 20th century, exploring its influence on consumer preferences (Holbrook, 1993), the types of nostalgic advertising responses (Stern, 1992) and the relationship between nostalgia and consumer identity construction (Belk, 1990, 1991). After the turn of the millennium, nostalgia continued to be promising as a research topic, inspiring studies on its use as a marketing strategy (Brown, Kozinets & Sherry, 2003), on the sources of nostalgia in the consumer experience (Goulding, 2001) and about its ability to articulate consumption to create utopian pasts (Maclaran & Brown, 2005). More recent studies explore issues such as building nostalgic markets (Brunk, Giesler & Hartmann, 2018) and the role of the market in changing nostalgia through continuity (Cross, 2017) and present several questions that demonstrate that nostalgia is a phenomenon of great relevance in the context of consumption and that it was not just a fad or sentimental wave triggered by the turn of the millennium (Brown, 2018).

Social Sciences also seem to have recently recognized the relevance of the phenomenon. Pickering and Keightley (2006) question classic interpretations that characterize nostalgia as a binary opposite of history and antithesis of utopia. For the authors, nostalgia is not just a search for ontological security in the past, but also a useful social guiding mechanism in the face of the present uncertainties, when used critically. This critical use of nostalgia would have as central concern the emergence of a new way of relating to the past in modern times. In the field of Social Psychology, Routledge (2016) created a research program to empirically investigate the positive and negative aspects of nostalgia and identified that it increases positive psychological states, such as mood, feelings of social connection, self-esteem, self-continuity and perceptions of meaning in life, in addition to acting as a regulatory mechanism for negative psychological states, such as anguish and loneliness. Such results, as the author notes, confront the prevailing view in the field of Psychology that nostalgia is a predominantly negative and alienating phenomenon. In the field of Anthropology, the growing interest in memory studies in the first decade of the millennium led to an increase in interest in nostalgia, this being conceptualized as a heterogeneous cultural practice, with forms, meanings and effects that change according to the context, in addition to occurring only in specific ontological temporalities (Angé & Berliner, 2015).

Finally, nostalgia has aroused the interest of several fields of knowledge, some of which are only now beginning to worry about systematically understanding the phenomenon and its consequences. The Marketing area, on the other hand, has been developing research on the relationship between nostalgia and consumption for about 30 years. Given the history of investigations on the topic in the field, an important reflection concerns the theoretical bases used by consumer behavior researchers to conceptualize nostalgia. The following topic addresses this issue.

Conceptual perspectives on nostalgia in the field of Marketing

Before proposing new possibilities for reinterpreting nostalgia from the premises and concepts of Practice Theories, an effort was made to identify how Marketing conceptualizes nostalgia, reflecting on recent and seminal studies in the field and identifying authors from other areas that directly or indirectly influence the formation of the premises used to conceptualize the phenomenon. Such a review of the literature, which intended only to track the concepts, authors and premises about nostalgia in consumer behavior studies, allowed to identify two conceptual perspectives on nostalgia existing in the field: 1) the sentimental perspective, more aligned with the seminal studies of the 1990s on the relationship between consumption and nostalgia, that conceptualizes it as a predominantly cognitive phenomenon; and 2) the cultural perspective, emerging from the turn of the millennium and that understands nostalgia as a cultural phenomenon, with contextual contours. Box 1 presents the main authors and premises of each of the perspectives, in addition to exemplifying themes studied in each of them.

Box 1
Synthetic table of sentimental and cultural perspectives

Category	Social Science Authors	Premises	Examples of research in the field of Marketing
Sentimentalist perspective	Fred Davis (1979) Colin Campbell (1987) Grant McCracken (1988)	1) Nostalgia is an individual or collective feeling of retrospective orientation, emerging from the confrontation between present and past. 2) Nostalgia is a universal cognitive response triggered by certain stimuli regardless of the context. 3) In the context of consumption, nostalgia results from the shift of meanings from perfection to an idealized past, and the objects act as material bridges for these idealized dimensions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effects of nostalgic advertising appeals (Khoshghadam, Kordrostami & Liu-Thompkins, 2019; Muehling, Spratt & Sultan, 2014). • Nostalgia as a psychological and social resource (Kessous, Roux & Chandon, 2015; Lasaleta, Sedikides & Vohs, 2014). • Effects on connection with brands (Davari, Iyer & Guzmán, 2017; Ford, Merchant, Bartier & Friedman, 2018). • Nostalgia and search for authenticity (Goulding & Derbaix, 2019). • Nostalgia and consumer preferences (Loveland, Smeesters & Mandel, 2010; Zhou, Wang, Zhang & Mou, 2013).
Cultural perspective	Svetlana Boym (2001) Fredric Jameson (1991)	1) Nostalgia is a cultural phenomenon sensitive to representations about time, simultaneously oriented towards the past, the present and the future. 2) Nostalgia presents itself in different ways according to the context, occurring only in certain ontological temporalities. 3) In the context of consumption, nostalgia not only has effects on consumption and markets, but it is also modified by them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nostalgia and changing cultural categories (Cross, 2017). • Nostalgia as a postmodern epochal phenomenon (Armstead & McKinney, 2019; Higson, 2014). • Emergence of markets and nostalgia in changing contexts (Brunk et al., 2018). • Nostalgia as criticism and social struggle (Cervellon & Brown, 2018).

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The sentimentalist perspective

The sentimental perspective presents the main characteristic of understanding nostalgia as a feeling related to the biography of individuals or groups, with this being triggered predominantly by positive memories of one's youth. This perspective is the oldest and concentrates most research in the field, starting in the 1990s. Three Social Science authors seem to be of fundamental importance for the formation of a set of premises about nostalgia in the field of Marketing, which continue to be adopted in recent studies: Fred Davis, Colin Campbell and Grant McCracken.

The book by Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, published in 1979, appears as the most common reference in conceptualizing nostalgia. Contemporary studies that adopt such a perspective, for example, Khoshghadam et al. (2019) and Huang, Huang and Wyer (2016), normally cite seminal research in the field as that by Holbrook and Schindler (1991), Stern (1992) and Belk (1990, 1991) to conceptualize nostalgia. These seminal field works, in turn, conceptualize nostalgia based on the idea that the phenomenon is a mixed feeling of pleasure and pain in relation to an idealized individual or collective past, supported by the aforementioned Davis (1979). In other words, the seminal works of Marketing in the 1990s, cited by most current studies from the sentimentalist perspective, predominantly come from the same author to conceptualize nostalgia.

The concept of nostalgia by Davis (1979), in turn, aligns with two other concepts of great relevance in consumer studies, which may explain its wide adoption. The first concept is daydream by Colin Campbell. According to Campbell (1987), daydream refers to an imaginative construction of meanings of perfection, which are pursued materially through consumption. Its purpose would not necessarily be the acquisition and use of an object, but the pleasure of imagining its potentialities in the sphere of meanings, because the imperfections of empirical reality would break the charm that the object has in the sphere of imagination. The second concept is Grant McCracken's "displacement of meanings". According to McCracken (1988), the idea that the contemporary world is perceived as essentially inauthentic causes the consumer to shift their ideals and expectations to idealized dimensions of time and space, seeking to access them materially through objects. In common, these concepts help to support the notion that nostalgia is manifested in the confrontation between real and imaginary, the objects having idealized meanings, which seems to have created fertile ground for the birth of a cognitive concept.

Of Marketing authors, the concept that stands out in terms of frequency is that by Holbrook and Schindler (1991, p. 330), according to which nostalgia would be "a preference over objects that were common in an individual's youth". Belk (1990, p. 670), for whom nostalgia is "a melancholic state induced by an object, a scene, a smell or type of music", and Holak and Havlena (1998, p. 218), for whom nostalgia is "a complex feeling, emotion or mood with a positive value produced by the individual's reflection on things associated with the past", they are also less frequently mentioned. It is worth mentioning that both Holbrook and Schindler (1991) and Belk (1990) as well as Holak and Havlena (1998), despite highlighting different nuances of nostalgia in their conceptualizations, make mention of Davis (1979) to support their conceptions about the phenomenon.

Recent studies from the sentimentalist perspective, in general, seem to be more concerned with understanding how nostalgia affects the consumer and consumer relations than properly discussing nostalgia itself. For example, Lasaleta et al. (2014) concluded that nostalgia leads to charity behavior, as it sensitizes consumers to reduce their attachment to money in the face of a symbolic connection with a relevant "other" who shares a common past. Kessous, Roux and Chandon (2015) identified that consumers are more likely to collect and present loved ones with products from brands perceived as nostalgic. Areni (2019) concluded that consumer engagement with social media content that evokes nostalgia meets the need for ontological security. Ford et al. (2018, p. 19) created the concept of brand nostalgia as the "reflection of the past composed of memories, emotions and thoughts related to the consumer's lived or idealized experiences with the brand".

Anyway, researchers from the sentimental perspective, despite creating new conceptual variations on nostalgia, seem to share the following premises in their investigations: 1) nostalgia is an individual or collective feeling of retrospective orientation, emerging from the confrontation between present and past; 2) nostalgia is a universal cognitive response (that is, independent of the context) triggered by predominantly mnemonic stimuli; 3) in the context of consumption,

nostalgia results from the shift of meanings from perfection to an idealized past, and the objects act as material bridges for these idealized dimensions, combining the pleasure of the attempted return with the frustration of recognizing the irrecoverability of the past.

In general, the works from this perspective, despite being more numerous and constituting an older aspect in the field, dedicate more effort to test different effects of nostalgia on the consumer, assuming the seminal conceptual notions of the field, than to outline some new attempt to understand and conceptualize what it is. The only effort to review nostalgia within the sentimental perspective stems from studies that investigate the individual and socially positive aspects of nostalgia (Kessous et al., 2015; Lasaleta et al., 2014; Zhou, Wildschut & Sedikides, 2011). In this way, the crystallized notion in the field of Psychology is confronted that nostalgia is a predominantly negative, melancholic and alienating feeling (Routledge, 2016). However, nostalgia is still conceived as a cognitive phenomenon.

The cultural perspective

The cultural perspective is relatively more recent in the field of Marketing, presenting, as a consequence, fewer research. Its main characteristic is to investigate not only how nostalgia affects consumption, but how consumption and the marketing system also modify it. Two Social Science authors stand out in providing the premises for this perspective: Svetlana Boym and Fredric Jameson.

The historian Boym (2001), in her book *The Future of Nostalgia* argues that although nostalgia is widely studied as a medical phenomenon, it is a historical emotion born and propagated with romanticism and mass culture. It would thus transform society and be transformed by historical, cultural and technological changes. For Boym, nostalgia is a structural rather than an individual phenomenon. Boym's book is the source of Social Sciences most cited by authors from this perspective.

Another author cited by researchers from this perspective is Fredric Jameson. Of him, it is mentioned, above all, the book *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, from 1991, with the main element adopted in his work being the idea that nostalgia in contemporary times is a symptom of the postmodern condition. Such nostalgia, according to Jameson (1991), would be timeless or about "a past out of time" (Higson, 2014), that lives with the present and manifests itself more as an aesthetic preference than as a feeling (Brown, Hirschman & Maclaran, 2001). Both Boym's and Jameson's literature work with the notion that nostalgia is a structural phenomenon and dependent on the historical context.

One of the main concerns of researchers from this perspective is to understand how the Marketing system and technology interact with nostalgia in contemporary times. Higson (2014), in research on nostalgia consumption in films and internet sites, describes this as an important stimulus for nostalgia, since the availability of images and representations of the past in the online environment creates an immense symbolic repertoire for the consumer. The author also verified in his study that the consumer does not simply respond to a nostalgic stimulus, but plays an active role in creating nostalgia by engaging in a text and modulating it according to their own interests. Cross (2017) analyzed contemporary nostalgia from the study of toy collections and observed that the speed of changes in goods created a form of nostalgia more associated with a recent past than a distant past. The author identified that the Marketing system has a fundamental role in creating a new relationship between the consumer, their collections and their feelings. In his study of toy collections, Cross (2017) found that nostalgia fostered the birth of a toy collection market, helping in the process of legitimizing the idea that adults can also consume these objects previously associated exclusively with childhood. Such legitimation, in turn, has led new generations of consumers to buy and use toys continuously between childhood and adulthood, transforming the discontinuity that gave rise to nostalgia into a continuity. In other words, nostalgia was the source of destruction itself, in this case.

This perspective also aligns with the recent debates about nostalgia in the Social Sciences, seeking to understand nostalgia as a structural and context-dependent phenomenon, which occurs only in certain ontological temporalities (Angé & Berliner, 2015). Brunk et al. (2018), for example, they identified specific forms and dynamics of nostalgia within the context of changing the political and economic regime in Germany after the fall of the Berlin wall, as its influence in the naturalization of capitalist hegemony through the resignification of social memories. The authors identified the emergence of three types of nostalgia for socialism in moments of dissatisfaction with the new capitalist system, which, ironically, led to the emergence of new markets for nostalgic products against capitalism, emphasizing that nostalgia takes specific forms in different contexts.

The cultural perspective also addresses nostalgia as a phenomenon oriented simultaneously to the past, the present and the future, and not a sentimental confrontation between past and present. Cervellon and Brown (2018), for example, they demonstrate how French consumers of the neo-burlesque style use resources from the past in an ironic way to create contrasts between a past of submission to machismo and a present of social struggle, in order to build social conditions for a freer future. This premise is consistent with the argument by Pickering and Keightley (2006) that nostalgia, as opposed to being a negative opposite of utopia, is a mechanism not only of production, but also of using social memory to build desired futures from the critique of the present.

With more recent clippings, the cultural perspective is under construction. The texts presented in this section do not necessarily compose a cohesive view on nostalgia. However, these works have in common interpretations and discussions that challenge the adequacy and completeness of the sentimental perspective of nostalgia. Such works prioritize a perspective that does not restrict nostalgia to a feeling, but approaches it as a resulting contemporary cultural phenomenon: 1) the emergence of new cultural representations about time; 2) of the actions of the Marketing system; and 3) of the possibilities created by new technologies. In this sense, these studies reveal new possibilities to fit the phenomenon of nostalgia.

In summary, we can point out three types of premises from the cultural perspective that challenge the notions used by the sentimentalist perspective to conceptualize nostalgia: 1) nostalgia is a cultural phenomenon sensitive to representations about time, simultaneously oriented towards the past, the present and the future; 2) nostalgia presents itself in different ways according to the context, occurring only in certain ontological temporalities; 3) in the context of consumption, nostalgia not only has effects on consumption and markets, but is also modified by them. Having outlined conceptual distinctions around the two approaches present in the investigation of nostalgia, the following topic seeks to point out ways, limitations and provocations to the two perspectives identified.

Contributions, limitations and provocations to the sentimentalist and cultural perspectives

As discussed in the previous section, the cultural perspective still seems to present important possibilities for reinterpreting nostalgia in the field of Marketing, since it brings premises and interpretations that challenge and expand the notion of sentimentalist nostalgia, prevalent among Marketing researchers. The focus on historical, social and technological changes, as well as the role of the Marketing system, brought to the field an understanding of nostalgia as a cultural phenomenon. In this sense, there are still studies that answer: how has the Marketing system changed historically to accept the idea of launching vintage products as legitimate? How does the notion of an “outdated object” become a “retro” object? How did the aestheticization practices of objects from the past gain legitimacy in the Marketing discourse? Issues like these can generate insights into the relationship between marketing systems and the transformation of consumer temporal representations.

Another interesting point described in the studies in the previous section refers to the possible transformations of the person-object relationship by technology. How does technology, by creating a representational repertoire about the past so large and accessible, change the affective relationships between consumer and object? How does the recoverability of the past in the present and the merger of these categories change the relationship between the consumer and the object? Is this experience that fuses past and present without feeling a type of nostalgia? Or should the concept of nostalgia be restricted to a feeling of pleasure and pain in the face of the irrecoverable? If so, what construct describes this phenomenon of experiencing the past-present in which aesthetic preference predominates over feeling (Brown et al., 2001)? The delimitation of what is nostalgia before the identification of new temporal articulations present in the person-object relationship, in this sense, remains open.

Regarding the categories that locate an object in time, for example, questioning whether it is from the past or contemporary, whether it is “1970s” or “1990s”, the cultural perspective also instigates questioning: How does the constant recycling of images and objects from the past in the present affect the temporal categorization of objects? In other words, if an object from the past is relaunched on the market and becomes popular in another time, would this object still be perceived as “old” by younger generations who are unaware of its relaunch? Would it be possible for the flood of re-releases to create an inaccuracy in the recognition of what is effectively new or re-release? It would be ironic for coexistence between people and objects of the past if they are not recognized as the past, because it would be impossible to evoke sentimental nostalgia. In other words, would it be possible for vintage markets and technology to destroy the temporal awareness of products?

Even though the two perspectives identified signal fertile paths (even though the two perspectives identified signal fertile paths) for new understandings about the relationship between nostalgia and consumption, we can critically reflect on some of its limitations. Our effort to identify the conceptual bases of nostalgia in the countryside signals the theoretical weakness of the concept of nostalgia adopted by the sentimentalist perspective, since most studies use practically the same sources to conceptualize the phenomenon. Although these refer to some pioneering studies in the field, as previously presented, all of them start from the same reading of nostalgia that seems unable to explain its dynamics and contemporary contours. The universalist and individualistic view of the phenomenon is unable to answer questions like: why are we witnessing an increase in the interest of various consumer groups in the past? Why has this market interest in nostalgia been occurring at this historic moment? As Brown (2018) observed, why does this “wave” of nostalgia that was thought to end after the turn of the millennium show no signs of abating? Finally, studies from the cultural perspective bring interpretations and evidence that weaken the sentimentalist view of nostalgia.

The cultural perspective, on the other hand, is more open to new understandings of the phenomenon by adopting a view aligned with anthropological perspectives, historical and sociological, prioritizing the context and cultural dynamics around nostalgia. However, like the sentimentalist perspective, it conceives consumption as a process centered on the human agent, despite investigating nostalgia by making an effort to integrate structure and agency. This dualistic view, despite allowing the identification of broader and more integrated dynamics of the phenomenon of nostalgia, yet it neglects the role of other elements that go through the consumption process, such as objects, body and mental routines, skills and language, among others.

When tracing a history of the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) field, Askegaard and Linnet (2011) remember that this was born from the critical view of consumer behavior research influenced by Psychology and Economics, arguing that such sciences brought premises that place the consumer in a controlled environment and put the structural conditions of consumption in the background. However, the authors note that the anthropological alternative adopted by CCT from the 1980s – that conceives the consumer as a reflective identity builder; who lives in consumer communities; and that seeks symbolic resources in the market – despite emphasizing the meaning structures, it ended up keeping the consumer as the center of the consumption process, neglecting other elements and dynamics. Likewise, it seems that the cultural perspective of nostalgia, despite striving to overcome the universalist and cognitive view of the phenomenon by highlighting its historical and cultural contours, also fell into the same anthropocentric trap (Reckwitz, 2002a) from the beginning of CCT, shifting the emphasis on the individual to culture, but still conceiving the social world as purely human.

In this sense, it will be argued below that the Theories of Practice can contribute to create new possibilities for investigating the phenomenon of nostalgia by transcending the structure-agency dualism, looking at the integration of the different elements that participate in the consumption process from the practices as a unit of analysis (Moura & Bispo, 2019). Another contribution of this approach is still in its attention to objects, not only with its expressive loading, but as elements that act materially in the performance of social life. The following topic seeks to present fundamental concepts of Practice Theories, as well as some illustrative examples of the potential for developing the theme of nostalgia from the use of this approach.

Practice Theories: main concepts

The Practice Theories, despite the alias “theory”, do not compose a unified theory, but a group of concepts and premises whose main originating sources are texts by different authors, such as Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, Jean Lave, Etienne Wenger, Theodore Schatzki, Harold Garfinkel, Michel de Certeau, Andreas Reckwitz, Davide Nicolini, Antonio Strati, Barbara Czarniawska, Silvia Gherardi and Elizabeth Shove, Mika Pantzar and Matt Watson (Gherardi, 2019; Hui et al., 2017; Nicolini, 2013). According to Hui et al. (2017), although these authors have different views on society and its functioning, they are united by sharing the premise that practices constitute the basic domain of the study of Social Sciences, and these being understood as organized sets of actions that connect and form larger complexes and constellations. Feldman and Worline (2016) they add that the Practice Theories also share the idea that things (including identities, ideas, institutions, power and material goods), instead of having meaning as innate characteristics of their being, they acquire meaning as they are situated in social practices.

It is worth noting that studies that share such premises do not necessarily form a school of thought. In the field of organizational studies, for example, the label “Studies Based on Practice” groups a series of approaches with different theoretical bases that adopt the practice as a lens for the study of the organizational phenomenon (Bispo, 2013). In the field of culture and consumption studies, Warde (2005) uses the label “Practice Theories” to describe studies that understand consumption as a present moment in social practices. Shove et al. (2012) and Feldman and Worline (2016), for example, use the label “Practice Theory” to describe this group of premises about the social world. Thus, considering the diversity of approaches to practice as a basic unit of the social and the positioning of such a discussion in the field of consumer studies, this study uses the label “Practice Theories”, proposed by Warde (2005), to refer to the set of concepts and premises exposed in these works.

According to Reckwitz (2002b), a practice can be an individual performance (*praxis*) or a social entity (*praktiken*). As an individual performance, the practice describes a human action and is related to doing; as a social entity, a practice means “a type of routine behavior that consists of several interconnected elements: forms of bodily, mental activities; things and their use; knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how and states of emotion” (Reckwitz, 2002b, p. 249). For Schatzki (1996, p. 89), practices are “nexuses of doing and saying”, dispersed in time and space. Warde (2005) maintains that this nexus of actions and sayings is coordinated and connected by three elements of practice: understandings, procedures and engagements. The categorization of elements of practice by Shove et al. (2012) seems to place more emphasis on the role of materiality, by defining its components in the following groups: 1) materials: covering objects, infrastructure, tools, hardware and the body itself; 2) competences: multiple forms of understanding and practical knowledge that make the connections between the elements of practice; and 3) meanings: the social and symbolic meaning of participation in practice.

Such emphasis on the materiality of the approach by Shove et al. (2012) is consistent with the observation by Reckwitz (2002a) that, while culturalist approaches to social theory study social phenomena from the understanding that the structuring of human actions is the result of collective symbolic orders, for Practice Theories, the social world consists not only of human beings and their intersubjective relationships, but also simultaneously with materiality, such as the body, knowledge, language and mind. It is worth noting that materiality is not only about physical things, it is more a quality of the relationships between subjects and things than of the things themselves (Borgerson, 2005). This relationship between human beings and things is defined by Moura and Bispo (2019) as sociomateriality.

As the practice is a social entity, the individual acts as a “carrier” of a practice, and not as the agent that determines it and orchestrates other elements (Shove et al., 2012). In other words, individuals are bodies/minds that participate in social practices. Thus, while cultural approaches to social theory are predominantly based on an anthropocentric perspective, Practice Theories treat the individual in a decentralized way, with his/her body, for example, being a material element, while his/her mind is treated as an element of competence.

By integrating material elements into the social world, theories of practice also have important consequences for the study of the material world. While cultural approaches understand the material world mainly as a set of things that carry cultural meanings or objects of representation for humans, for Practice-based approaches, things should be understood as artifacts that participate in social practices and play an agency role, which is expressed in the effects on other elements of a practice (Borgerson, 2013). An example of a study that investigates the agency of objects is the study by Epp and Price (2010), in which the authors describe the biography of a table in the context of a family and demonstrate that such an object, even when they are removed from family practices, they continue to exercise their agency due to their history in the family context. Thus, consumers are constantly looking for alternatives to reincorporate this object in their practices. This agency is manifested, for example, in the definition of the type of house to buy or how the decoration of a certain room will be so that the table can be part of the materiality practices. The moment it remains dormant, it still generates mobilization of the other elements in order to modify other family practices for its return.

Reckwitz (2002b) also highlights the role of the body and mind in social practices. While cultural approaches understand body and mind as hierarchically related elements, the body being an instrument of the mind, a practice-based approach understands that the body has the role of performing behavioral acts and the mind involves comprehension routines, desire and know-how. This means that a practice involves, in addition to the participation of human beings and material elements, certain competences, which inform and integrate the elements of the practice.

Social practices also have a dominant relationship. According to Shove et al. (2012), a dominant practice is one that overlaps less important practices and guides the ways in which people spend their time and define the priorities around which their lives are organized. The authors also emphasize that the practices go through three phases, in a generic way. Before it becomes a consolidated social practice, that is, with the relationships between the elements effectively established, there is a protopractic – where the elements demonstrate the potential for connection, but are not related. Similarly, when the links between the elements of the practice are no longer supported, there is an ex-practice.

It is worth noting that the concepts and premises about the Theories of Practice listed in this section do not seek to outline a panorama that is intended to be complete and that integrates the different aspects of these theories. On the contrary, we seek to list concepts and premises of these theories that enable new readings of the phenomenon of nostalgia in the field of Marketing, proposing a sociomaterial approach (Moura & Bispo, 2019) of the theme. Thus, the notion shared by Practice Theories that, the social world is composed not only of human beings, but also of things – like the body, the mind, objects and skills – with a fundamental role in social dynamics, provides important possibilities to illuminate other aspects of the relationship between consumption and nostalgia in addition to cognitive processes and categories of cultural meanings. In addition, the categories of elements of the practice, the dominance relationship between practices and the notion of shared agency between human beings and objects provides a relevant conceptual framework for new readings on nostalgia, as will be exemplified below.

Possibilities for reinterpreting nostalgia through practice theories

As previously argued, the two theoretical perspectives on nostalgia present a human-centered view, conceiving it as the center of the consumption process, thus relegating materiality to a second level. How, then, could nostalgia be investigated from the sociomaterial perspective of Practice Theories?

First, from the notion that nostalgia is a historical emotion (Boym, 2001), the practice perspective can be used to study nostalgia as a social practice. In this way, it focuses not only on consumer representations of the past, but also the bodily routines (for example, expressions, behaviors, actions) and mental (certain ways of wanting and feeling) and the skills to “nostalgize”, as well as the role of objects in this process. Such a possibility would involve investigating consumption as a context that brings together the elements of a nostalgic practice.

Take for example a consumer who engages in the practice of music consumption. While running in the morning, this consumer has a habit of listening to music through Spotify. The headphones connected to their smartphone isolate outside sounds from the busy street, allowing a detailed appreciation of the songs suggested by the app in the “Discoveries of the week” playlist. This playlist is one of this consumer’s favorites, as it offers “old news”, because, although born in the 1980s, he enjoys discovering national and international music from the 1960s, a time that they imagine as a period of great artistic creativity, so much so that he has a collection of vinyl records from the period at home. At home, the consumer has a record player that is used less often, but on more special occasions, as in meetings with friends, family celebrations and when they remember their grandfather, who had given him most of his records. In addition, this consumer has a teenage son and likes to meet with him in the room where his collection is to talk about the songs and artists of the past and to demonstrate how to handle the record player and proper care for vinyl records.

The previous example, despite addressing nostalgia from the phenomenology of the subject, it also makes it possible to shed light on structural aspects contained in music consumption routines, which end up revealing what this nostalgic practice would be. Firstly, it is worth highlighting the articulation not only of the dimension of meanings at the individual or group level, but also the role of skills and materiality. Regarding materiality, the Spotify application, which works through an internet connection, through a smartphone operating system, it offers an immediately accessible offer of songs from the past and also an algorithm that selects and suggests songs for the hypothetical consumer based on what he hears. This reinforces his preference for music from the 1960s through the presentation of new songs from the period, which increases his knowledge and his imagination about that period.

Vinyl records, because they only work on an old record player, require the articulation of skills different from those used to consume music by Spotify. While competencies related to running applications on mobile devices are articulated for the consumption of music by Spotify, the consumption of music through the vinyl record collection requires skills related to the identification of specialized stores, handling and operation of equipment and care for the maintenance of discs and record players. The vinyl record collection also involves the articulation of behaviors, knowledge and social meanings related to the social practice of collecting. In the sphere of meanings, there is still a distinction between listening to music through contemporary materiality and ancient materiality. While new technologies and skills are associated with leisure, individualism and efficiency, the old materialities and associated skills are related by the consumer to special occasions and memories and socialization.

In addition, in the previous example we can also reflect on possible transformative effects of this nostalgic practice on other practices coupled with the practice of music consumption. The hypothetical consumer meeting with his friends (socialization practice) to listen to music (leisure practice) has, as an example, this nostalgic practice, which leads consumers and their friends to share an interest in the past – in this case, vinyl technology and the skills and meanings associated with it. The coalition between leisure and educational practices through nostalgic practice would also occur when the consumer taught his son about the use of the record player and its discs. In this case, the son of the hypothetical consumer participates not only in an educational practice, but he also learns to recognize transformations that are articulated from the gathering of new objects, meanings and competences. In this sense, nostalgic practice would have the potential to transform a particular practice with which it engages and create zones of approximation between practices, linking them temporarily.

The lens of practice can also contribute to the study of nostalgia from a historical perspective by allowing the mapping or identification of transformations in social practices over time. Practices articulated in conjunction with nostalgic practice usually involve a consumer effort to connect elements of ex-practices (Shove et al., 2012), that is, objects, skills and meanings of the past that are in a state of latency. In addition, this insertion of abandoned elements of ex-practices into consolidated practices could transform the latter, in order to create a new practice replacing the current one or parallel to it. The study of such dynamics, however, would require a relatively broad time frame, because establishing new relationships and breaking current links are often time-consuming processes.

In the case of the exemplified music consumer, we can think that the practice of music consumption itself was transformed by the invention of devices that allowed recording the performances of musicians. That is, a practice that was ephemeral and depended on the artist performing live music, based on the invention of the phonogram, started to integrate material and symbolic elements of family practices, for example. In the same way, the creation of video clips started to enable visual consumption of music, and integrated new elements to the practice of music consumption, such as video and cinematic appreciation skills. Just as new technologies provided transformations in the practice of music consumption, creating new possibilities for experiences, one can ask: what are the implications of the aesthetic and technological transformations triggered by the rescue of elements of ex-practices for the practice of music consumption? In summary, how does the coexistence of elements of practices and ex-practices affect consumption?

Commenting further on the transformation of practices, Boym (2001) argues that the creation of historical monuments, museums and even theme parks are consequences of nostalgia. We can think of these spaces as repositories that feed nostalgic practices, keeping objects alive, meanings and competences, as well as their connections. Thus, we can also reflect on how the contemporary scenario can transform the nostalgic practice itself. A possible question would be: how the availability of new technologies such as artificial intelligence, can augmented reality and the World Wide Web's own data collection affect nostalgic practice? Or even, how do new technologies expand the connections between nostalgic practice and other social practices? What are the implications of increasing memory capacity for nostalgic practice?

Boym (2001) also notes that nostalgia has a productive character, because it “spatializes time”, producing categories of the past to reflect on the present and the future; and “temporalizes the space” combining different notions of time in the “here and now”, seeking to exceed the present. In this sense, the lens of practice would allow investigating how nostalgic practice spatializes time, creating temporal categories of the past and allocating objects and images in them. For example, when a temporal category of “1960s music emerges”, a space of time is created that separates what is present / modern / contemporary from a fragmented past consisting of several categories of past, like “1980s”, “1950s”, “1920s”, so that certain objects, images and competences are allocated in such categories, while others fall by the wayside.

Likewise, it can be historically reflected on how nostalgic practice temporalizes space in the contemporary scenario, combining different notions of time in different social practices. The practice of illustrated music consumption, for example, combines innovative elements and technologies (such as streaming services, cloud storage etc.) with technologies that were practically abandoned (record player and vinyl). Why do some elements, even with substitutes that surpass them technologically, persist in practices? Why were other elements totally abandoned? What clues does a latent element leave within current practices that may indicate its possible return? How does nostalgia relate to latent elements of consumer practices? Finally, the questions raised in this section illustrate only a few interpretive possibilities based on the concept of nostalgia as a social practice. However, the reflections made here intend to indicate paths for future research on nostalgia in the field of Marketing that challenge the current way in which the field has been studying the phenomenon and its place in consumption.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The objective of the present study was to reflect and to propose new possibilities of investigation of the phenomenon of nostalgia in the field of Marketing from Practice Theories, arguing for an alignment between nostalgia research and new approaches in the field of consumer behavior that emphasize socio-material aspects of consumption. By revisiting the literature on nostalgia in the consumer behavior field to understand how researchers conceptualizes and investigates the phenomenon, it was possible to identify two main theoretical and conceptual approaches: the sentimentalist and the cultural.

The sentimentalist perspective, the oldest and most prevalent in the field of consumer behavior, has its roots in social theories that focus on the relationship between the consumer and a referent (brand, product, advertising, other consumer) and the cognitive processes of idealization, investigating mainly the effects of nostalgia on consumption and privileging research at the individual level. The relatively more recent and diverse cultural perspective in its investigations, understands nostalgia as a cultural phenomenon in motion, that not only changes the phenomenon of consumption but is also transformed by the Marketing system and by social and technological changes. Thus, the first contribution of the study was the conceptual organization of studies on nostalgia in the field of consumer behavior, which can help the conceptual positioning of future research on the topic.

Then, when we critically analyze the contributions and limitations of the two perspectives identified, it was argued that these, despite bringing different views, share an agentic bias, conceiving the consumer as the center of the consumption process. They are also anthropocentric as they understanding the social world as exclusively human, excluding the material world or treating it as a world apart from objects in the service of consumer representations and uses. Based on a critical appraisal of the two perspectives and conceptual discussion of the Practice Theories, it was also possible to contribute through the creation of proposals for re-reading nostalgia through examples of possible investigations on the relationship between nostalgia and consumption using the Practice Theories as lenses.

It is also worth mentioning the limitations of the present study. First, the conceptual organization of literature does not exhaust the themes and approaches of nostalgia present in the field, because it does not quantify or qualify the literature based on bibliometric or systematic criteria. On the other hand, it is believed that the selected and reviewed literature, being predominantly from international journals of high impact in the area of Marketing and of great relevance for consumer behavior research, allows to establish an overview of the main conceptual approaches of the topic, since the studies published in journals of this nature open or influence new research paths.

It should also be noted that the examples used to illustrate possible applications of Practice Theories to investigate nostalgia do not exhaust the interpretations and possible associations when adopting such a perspective. The examples were used, mainly, to illustrate some concepts of Practice Theories that we consider applicable to the understanding of the phenomenon of nostalgia in the context of consumption, challenging current perspectives on the topic. As argued in the text, the very concepts of the Practice Theory presented and discussed are not capable of capturing all the complexity of this lens, which is under construction.

We hope, therefore, that this study will contribute to renew the research on nostalgia in Marketing, indicating viable and relevant investigative paths for the consumer behavior research community by proposing new readings on a phenomenon that, even referring to the past, never seems to have been so contemporary.

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