How nostalgic branding affects the consumers definition of originality media essa...

Media

Like the ever stereotyped conversation between the youth and the elderly, today's culture seems to only have one message to everyone living through this decade, ' Things were better in the old days'. This message stems from the, possible overuse, of nostalgia within current advertising and branding. Nostalgia, formerly understood to be a severe illness affecting soldiers at war suffering from homesickness, is one of those subjects that crops up time and time again in popular culture, yet perhaps most frequently within design. It is understood now as the longing sense to return to a time idealised in your mind yet is becoming increasingly synonymous with the idea of returning to something which can never be returned to. The constant stream of imagery showcasing happy children from the 50s or gleaming couples from the 60s is fast becoming the only referencing point many of the public have with these decades. The use of them in design often leads to many questions on suitability, is the use of nostalgia the ultimate sin? Or is it merely the key to unlocking the intended emotional response from the consumer? Companies seem to strive on using nostalgia in every market, we've come to a point in history where looking back is far easier than looking forward. We view the last few decades with rose tinted glasses and embrace the opportunity to exploit the things that we deem to be ' of that time' and allow us to reminisce in our youth, and increasingly often, a history which did not occur within our own lives, that suggest of a far easier, fruitful existence. In modern society we've become accustomed to certain marketing strategies used by brands in a bid to win our loyalty and custom. Many of us have learnt to look past the elite jargon used on packaging to understand the product, yet it is our visual world that is saturated with design, of all different

eras, that can manipulate us; this rather begs the question, is it because we genuinely loved and miss the past? Or has nostalgia become purely the effect of the marketing and branding currently flooding our view of the world that causes us to consider the past so favourably? It can, and has been, argued that currently we don't have much of an identity as an ' era'. Are we are so preoccupied with the past that we're forgetting to look forward? Or when we do look forward, it appears to be a bleak, depressing and perhaps even a frightening place. The problem here is that it could result in all designs being halted. An example of this is ' skeuomorphism' the phenomenon of keeping certain design features even though their original usage have been made redundant by the items current (newer) form. This can be said of digital cameras; although they have the potential to be any shape we can imagine, they still resemble the original shape, a shape that was necessary because of the technology; they favoured functionality over beauty. Another example of skeuomorphism is the interface design of Apple's iOS. The UI of their Iphone for example uses a lot of design features, which in reality, are unnecessary. Using material effects on the headers and background of apps we associate with physical objects, such as the notepad and calculator. This usage begins to highlight one of the benefits of this nostalgic reasoning, it simply convinces the consumer that, although the product has changed, it is still part of the same family, and they still understand how to use it. It aids the notion of making the future a little less scary and keeping the innovations that they produce seem relevant to the consumers needs. This is the same reason for the Amazon Kindle featuring a ' page turning' effect. In reality there is nothing to turn, but it makes us, the

consumer, understand that it is a ' book'. Here we begin to uncover some of the possible benefits, what exactly would be gained from a life without nostalgia? It is often said that we can not understand the future without first understanding the past, but is this really true? During my research I found a few designers who are trying to motivate their peers to be more original, instead of reusing iconography from the past, to experiment with newer mediums and styles. One such movement I found, that started just last year (2012) is called ' Post-Nostalgia' branding themselves as the ' revolution' they encourage designers to send them work that has no influence from the past." It serves to illustrate the fact that we do not currently have a distinct visual voice in graphic design. The goal is to create a new visual identity that does not rely on recycled material." Perhaps we are stuck in ' rut' as it were, does creativity go hand in hand with this idea of nostalgia? Can we ever truely be original and come up with new, groundbreaking ideas, if we're constantly searching for inspiration, clinging to the decades, even centuries of humanities offerings before us? To show this I will look into various brand competitors and how their marketing changes dependant on their ' perceived', by the consumer, originality and legitimacy.

Main

One of the most famous brands in the world, that utilises nostalgic branding incredibly well is Coca-Cola. The company has a well established ethos which the consumer, seemingly understands. TheyOnce upon a time two individuals attempted to create health drinks for the public, they each ended up making two of the most popular American brands known around the globe today. We're all familiar with the story, Coca-Cola was invented in the

late 19th century by John Pemberton as a Health drink called ' Coca Wine' soon enough it was rebranded ' Coca-Cola' and by 1886 was being sold under that name and was branded as such , in almost the exact style as it still uses, and soon became the leader in the market. A few years later another soda came along, originally known as ' Brads drink' and then rebranded 5 years later to ' Pepsi-Cola' Originally created as a digestive aid, the drink became the infamous rival to Coca-Cola. The rivalry between the two brands is one of the most infamous rivalries in the history of business and marketing. Coke has been the world number one for the majority of the 110 year battle, with Pepsi being the underdog. One way in which this is clear is the evolution of each brands respective visual identity. Of the two brands Coca-Cola has changed the least, although it has tried a few styles it has always used the same scripted style since becoming a popular brand. Pepsi on the other hand has struggled throughout its life to find its feet. As the supposed underdog Pepsi has soldiered on like the younger brother in a psychological cliché, always searching for his own identity. He tried to copy the styles of the elder sibling, hoping to be seen as cool by his peers. He tried to be different, by trying some new colours. He tried to rebel and be his own man, he wanted to be seen as strong and current, so adopted a new typeface. Then big brother had a midlife crisis and tried a new look, even tried a nickname. Little brother used this time to shine, and found a more realistic style and stuck with it for a while, just occasionally trying out some feng-shui. Big brother went back to its tried and tested formula and once again was Mothers favourite. So Pepsi once again had an identity crisis and tried to reinvent himself to match in with the cool kids style.

" Where Coke's brand is built on nostalgia, Pepsi is the " choice of a new generation" [...] is forward looking and at times futuristic. The problem with designing the future is that it gets old quick."

It could be said that Coca-Cola has an original logo and is relevant. But I think this is more a judgement of the product than the design. The iconic logo is something unique to the brand now, but 100 years ago that style was very common as that was the dominant style of handwriting at the time. Therefore the design is not original. I would also disagree with calling the design relevant as it was neither relevant to the product or with design today. The winning factor for Coke is that it is seen to be both these things. As the brand was the first, and has been a constant in the world for all current living generations, the brand has a unique nostalgia related to it." A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better Coke than the one the bum on the corner is drinking." –Andy WarholDefining the TrendsetterPerhaps the difference between these two cases has more to do with each brands respective success as deemed by the consumer. Both are the market leaders in their respective fields but what is it that instills that sense of superiority to both Coca-Cola and Starbucks? And why does this influence the consumers idea of originality? First we need to look into their respective branding. Branding is more than a simple task in semiotics and imagery, it's an understanding of the companies product and message encompassed as a visual metaphor that, with any luck, will become wholly related to that singular brand. Brand association is a vital aspect of this. It encompasses every single attribute, from the visual, to the slogan, to a radio jingle. it's everything the consumer thinks of when thinking of a brand. Using

the Gestalt Theory here, in short, the idea that the visual is perceived as whole, before the intricacies are noted. As such there is no argument that branding is not a singular task but a very calculated project to send one particular message to a consumer. Once a strong association between brand and product is secured by the consumer, they are unlikely to switch loyalties unless required to do so. This idea is used effectively in the Heinz slogan ' Beanz Means Heinz' the brand reinforced the loyalty of the consumer by identifying itself as the only real, original, product on the shelf. In 2012 the slogan was voted the best slogan in a poll by Creative Review magazine. Maurice Drake who coined the slogan in 1967 said of it's longevity:'... over 40 years later, the seemingly timeless ' Beanz Meanz Heinz' slogan still continues to have relevance and brand power.'This combined with the strong references to the companies history on the packaging results in a very well thought out campaign that invokes that special sense of nostalgia that serves to reinforce the idea of originality and superiority. Nostalgia, used in this way has become somewhat of a trend in design over the last few years, with brands trying to cash in on our emotive response to the recession and wistfully dreaming of our simple childhoods, the era before the worries of modern day life. Brands such as Hovis and John Lewis attempt this by reinforcing through their television adverts how long they've been a part of our culture, evoking a response akin to learnt behaviours. In psychological terms that is simply the practise of doing something because that's what you were taught to do, such as buying that bread because your Mother always did. Other brands use nostalgia in a more organic way, such as Lyles golden syrup. The company's packaging has almost stayed the exact same since it's

conception. The packaging perfectly encapsulates everything it needs to, it's the original in the UK, infact in 2010 it became the oldest brand in the world as according to Guinness World Records. This longevity of the product and the fact it has always used the same packaging means you associate it with the past, leading to brand nostalgia. As they say ' If it isn't broke, don't fix it'. This whole concept of brand nostalgia is what I think, keeps Coca Cola as brand leader. Unlike Lyles, it has changed it's packaging, but it's the logo that, although it has changed, it has changed so little that it still evokes an emotional response. We all remember sipping a chilled Coca Cola when younger, we all know what it is and how it tastes. This nostalgic response is something very carefully manipulated by the Coke group as it is their main marketing ploy branding themselves with a family friendly tone and smiley happy children. Cokes branding relies on identifying the current product as the same product you bought in your youth. This forces the packaging and logo to undergo very minimal changes that are often unnoticed by the consumer. Pepsi, as we established earlier focus on it's relevance to the new generation. This causes them to be seen completely differently to the wholesome ' all American' view of Coke. In the past few decades we have seen them attempt to rework their style to accept this, in reality they are the copycats, but they are now just as different in the consumers eyes as any other competitor." The design work you are currently doing is unoriginal and irrelevant" My gut instinct here is to disagree, and to argue that everything I do is relevant. It is something I aim for in every project given. Personally relevance is important because I see it as my works relation to the consumer/audience. If a design isn't relevant, and therefore does not relate

then, to me, it fails to even be design. The most important factor is design is the audience. They are what separates the fields of art and design, without the audience our purpose is to merely create nonsensical visuals. On the other hand, originality is incredibly hard to define; and, if I'm entirely honest, the more I've researched the concept for this piece, the less I understand it. In some ways I would argue that the whole concept of originality is a false ideology. It seems to be something we strive for and, very rarely, attain. Perhaps, originality IS an illusion. We seem to all strive for it the same way we strive to be the best at whatever we do. The biggest failure is understood to be when you've copied somebody else, if you're copying someone else exactly then you haven't achieved anything. This is the basis of Copyright laws, the idea that whoever came up with the original idea or object, deserves the credit for it. Yet, what if we argued that nothing is ever 'truely' original? I consider a vital part of humanity to be the collaboration of creative ideas, it's this that has made us the dominant species on the planet, we shared ideas, languages and tools with each other to create society. This means that however original one may claim to be, it was always influenced by a previous idea. We wouldn't have the world we have today if the wheel had never been invented and then shared. I think my issue with originality is the idea of ownership and superiority. Being the ' first' does not make you the best. Using this idea of originality usually only serves to stamp out creativity, how do we continue to grow and create if we always fight against the idea that, at some point, we were influenced by others and used others tools to build our creations? ' Copying' is almost seen to be dirty word. A sin. We struggle to accept that it's really the basis of everything we do. We

cannot create work in a vacuum. If we were left alone in confinement we would not wake up one day and create a masterpiece. Graphic design is visual language, like all other language it is only useful to communicate. Every language on earth is built by the collaboration of minds. A similar concept is the Internet. We wouldn't have the ' World Wide Web' had it not been for the inventor Tim Berners-Lee. He's infamous for building upon the foundation of the ' Internet'; then just a network infrastructure. He connected up the dots as it were, to create something which just over 30 years later, many people in the western world rely upon for their most basic needs. Yet not once has he ever tried to claim ownership of the ' Web' in fact he plays down his role to it's basic components. On his website he cites all the other systems and credits the people who put them into effect before he had the idea to connect them up. He envisioned the web as a way to share and communicate, without policing, without ownership of that idea the web has formed into something of pure beauty." The Web as I envisaged it, we have not seen it yet. The future is still so much bigger than the past," Therefore, I will admit that, no, my work is not original. I cannot really claim it to be. My work on any given brief certainly has an original quality, the concept is my own, and I have applied my working knowledge of design, current trends (to keep it relevant), and my understanding of the consumers needs. The issue here though, is where did I gain this knowledge? The truth of the matter is that my personal preferences have been influenced by many, often conflicting sources. Costa Vs StarbucksAnother brand battle happening everyday on british high streets is that of the coffee shops, Costa and Starbucks. These two stores, perhaps surprisingly were founded in the

same year, 1971. The reason I say this may be surprising is because according to my own independently run survey, all respondents thought that Starbucks was the older of the two brands. This may be due to the fact Starbucks is the larger international chain, especially as all of my respondents also considered Starbucks to be the most successful. Many other people didn't even realise that Costa was a UK brand, yet everyone knew that Starbucks was American. The brand knowledge here is interesting because, Starbucks being the much larger company (Insert figures) has given the consumer a feeling of being the original brand. This, as with Coke and Pepsi, again creates the feeling by the consumer that one brand has slightly copied the other, ' original' brand. In this case we can see it quite clearly when seeing the logos side by side. AlthoughI think this is a brilliant example of what really happens in every daIf we are seen to be too original (unconventional) in our work... a) our clients won't buy itb) if our clients did buy it their consumers won't buy it. What makes DESIGN different to other subject areas, such as Music and Art, is that isn't a form of expression. It is a communication tool. By changing our understanding of Originality and Relevance within design we can begin to worry less about how our designs are perceived by the design community and more about whether it is suitable for our clients. We can also move away from worrying about copying designs, sometimes a logo is required to be very simiilar for the sake of the consumer.

Conclusion