

Feeling left out? Why consumers prefer nostalgic products

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When people acutely feel the need to belong, they may reach for a nostalgic treat, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"Have you ever wondered why it is that you are in the mood to watch an old episode of Friends, rather than your current favorite TV show? Or why you are suddenly craving an Otter Pop, a summery treat you haven't eaten since you were a kid?" ask authors Katherine E. Loveland (Arizona State University), Dirk Smeesters (Erasmus University, The Netherlands), and Naomi Mandel (Arizona State University).

The authors examined situations that lead people to prefer nostalgic products (products that remind them of the past) over more contemporary products.

They conducted a series of five experiments in which they found that the key to preferring nostalgic products is the need to belong. "Whenever a situation arises in which people feel a heightened need to belong to a group, or generally need to feel socially connected, they will show a corresponding higher preference for nostalgic products," the authors write.

In one experiment, the participants played a ball-tossing game on a computer in which some people were excluded soon after beginning. "Those people who were excluded after just a couple of ball tosses not only said that feeling like they belong is more important to them than

people who were not excluded did, but they also chose more nostalgic than contemporary products in a variety of categories, including movies, TV shows, food brands, cars, and even shower gel," the authors write.

In a final experiment, the authors discovered that when participants were excluded (from the same ball game as in the previous experiments) they not only felt a higher need to belong, but their need to belong was "cured" by eating a "nostalgic cookie"—a brand that had been popular in the past.

"Next time you know you are feeling left out, try watching a movie that you loved watching in college, or eating a food that reminds you of when you were a kid. It really will make you feel better," the authors conclude.

More information: Katherine E. Loveland, Dirk Smeesters, and Naomi Mandel. "Still Preoccupied with 1995: The Need to Belong and Preference for Nostalgic Products." *Journal of Consumer Research*: October 2010. A preprint of this article (to be officially published online soon) can be found at journals.uchicago.edu/jcr

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