

Things Go Better with Nostalgia: “How the Coca-Cola Company Uses Brand Storytelling and Integrated Marketing Communications to Influence Its Holiday Marketing Efforts.”

By

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and Integrated Marketing Communications to Influence Its Holiday Marketing Efforts”

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Abstract

The idea of Santa Claus and Christmas go hand in hand for most people, largely because of the effective marketing of the Coca-Cola Company. Beginning in the 1930's, the Coca-Cola Company revolutionized the idea of Santa and has continued to influence the magic of Christmas ever since. Nostalgia and brand storytelling explain Coca-Cola's tremendous success in marketing their brand and associating it with Christmas and Santa. Results of a survey of 600 Tennessee residents highlight the success Coca-Cola has had associating their brand with Santa and cementing in consumers' minds the connection between Coca-Cola and Christmas. A "Share a Letter with Santa" promotional campaign is proposed as a means by which Coca-Cola can use new technology and media to leverage its positive brand equity with new uses of nostalgia to reinforce the associations between Coca-Cola and Santa.

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A Coca-Cola Christmas

When people think of the Christmas season, what comes to mind? Do they envision the holiday lights and decorations, gatherings with family, presents under the Christmas tree, or simply the man in the red and white suit? The idea of Santa Claus and Christmas go hand in hand for most people, largely because of the effective marketing of the Coca-Cola Company. Beginning in the 1930s, the Coca-Cola Company revolutionized the idea of Santa and has continued to influence the magic of Christmas ever since. The company's influence on advertising, bringing Christmas into our homes, forming holiday traditions, and designing the "Share a Coke" campaign has built and defined the American celebration of Christmas as we know it today.

To understand how the Coca-Cola Company has used its marketing efforts to influence the celebration of Christmas, one must first understand the definition of marketing. As stated by Shane Hunt, marketing is "an organizational function and set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its employees, customers, investors, and society as a whole" (Hunt, 2018). This is an effective way of communicating the idea that all products have value, and the goal of marketing is to facilitate the journey of that value from producer to consumer. Marketers categorize products into three subsets: goods, services, or ideas. One of the hallmarks of Coca-Cola's success rests in the fact that their marketers have found ways to connect their product with ideas and feelings that resonate with

consumers around the world. They have effectively communicated the idea that Coca-Cola and Christmas go together harmoniously.

Haddon Sundblom

Advertising was the initial route that the Coca-Cola Company took to influence the celebration of Christmas. To accomplish this goal, the Coca-Cola Company commissioned artist Haddon Sundblom to design the Coca-Cola Santa. Sundblom obtained his training from the Art Institute of Chicago as well as the American Academy of Art where he became a master of his own techniques. He was known for his bright painting style that depicted his subjects in a wholesome and joyful way. Before working with the Coca-Cola Company, he created the “Quaker Man” icon for the Quaker Oats Company along with works for Packard, Nabisco, and Colgate-Palmolive. Sundblom designed and painted the Coca-Cola Santa each year from 1931 until 1964, creating a total of thirty-four advertisements during his time with the company. Each advertisement featured a different scene while showing the same basic image of Santa.

The Sundblom Santa

Before Sundblom’s interpretation of Santa came about, early black and white illustrations created by Thomas Nast depicted Santa smoking a pipe, carrying several miscellaneous toys, while looking disheveled and unclean. Two recommendations given to Sundblom by the Coca-Cola Company were to make his illustrations of Santa have a jollier disposition than previous interpretations, and be marketable to children. To meet these recommendations, Sundblom originally designed the Coca-Cola Santa after the

resemblance of his next-door neighbor, Lou Prentice, who was a retired salesman.

Prentice served as Sundblom's model until his passing, and then he started to use himself. "As I took a closer look at my [reflection]," Sundblom remarked in December 1953, "I realized that I had a cartoon-like resemblance to Lou. Since that time, I have been using my own face as a model for Santa Claus" (Van, Bill and Dan Zimmer, 2008).

Sundblom's strategy of using himself worked well holistically, but this approach proved to be difficult in some of his illustrations. Sundblom made a few small mistakes because he was using the mirror image of himself to create the Coca-Cola Santa. In his illustration from 1956, Sundblom painted Santa's belt buckle backward and in his illustration from 1958 he forgot to incorporate Santa's wedding ring. Though these were later noticed, they didn't hinder the advertising and went largely unnoticed by consumers. Sundblom's final illustrations from the 1960s were based off photographs, instead of himself or his neighbor Lou. Regardless of who may be the inspiration for the illustrations, Haddon Sundblom gave the Coca-Cola Santa the distinctive brown boots, red suit, and fluffy white beard he is known for today and single-handedly reimagined the idea of the Coca-Cola Santa.

Sundblom's Advertising

When looking at his first advertisement, which was published in the Saturday Evening Post on December 26, 1931, one notices the first incorporation of Santa's classic red suit. In the ad, Santa's facial expression and body language contribute to the idea of a more charismatic and jollier disposition. This advertisement featured Santa himself as the focal point, and incorporated the slogan, "My Hat's Off to the Pause that Refreshes" (see

Figure 1). This slogan was used for marketing purposes by Coca-Cola during the 1930s and was featured in many different advertisements during that time.



Figure 1. Coca-Cola® 1931 “My hats off to the pause that refreshes” advertisement.¹

¹ Source: Conversations Staff. “5 Things You Never Knew About Santa Claus and Coca-Cola.” *Coca-Cola Journey*, www.coca-colacompany.com/stories/5-things-you-never-knew-about-santa-claus-and-coca-cola. Accessed 15 October 2019.

In 1938, Sundblom released his first advertisement featuring a child. The ad showed Santa embracing a young girl while drinking a Coke (see Figure 2). This advertisement incorporated the slogan, “Thanks for the Pause that Refreshes” and was welcomed by American families after the Great Depression. Sundblom’s design of this ad served as a reminder of the positivity and warmth that only Coca-Cola can provide. Depicting the interaction between Santa and the child was Coca-Cola’s first successful attempt at making him more marketable to children.

In 1949, Sundblom released the first advertisement featuring reindeer. This ad was also the first to feature the “Sprite” Boy, who took on the role of an elf (see Figure 3). This advertisement incorporated the slogan “Travel Refreshed” and was inspired by the Clement Clarke Moore poem ‘Twas the Night Before Christmas.’ From 1949 onward, the Sprite Boy made several appearances in Coca-Cola’s Christmas advertising before exclusively appearing to promote the Sprite beverage in the 1960s.

In the Christmas advertisement from 1950, Santa was shown looking over his list of ‘Good Boys and Girls.’ This ad showcased the slogan “Talk About Being Good” which took on multiple meanings (see Figure 4). One meaning was for the children on his list to behave during the year and the other was for Santa’s opinion of drinking a Coke. In the 1957 Christmas advertisement by Sundblom, Santa was greeted with a Coke and a note affixed to the fireplace that read, “For Santa, from Bobby.” This advertisement featured the slogan “The Pause That Refreshes” and “Sign of Good Taste” which speaks to the idea that Santa relies on a Coke to deliver the magic of Christmas (see Figure 5).



Figure 2. Coca-Cola® 1938 “Thanks for the pause that refreshes” advertisement.²

² Source: Conversations Staff. “5 Things You Never Knew About Santa Claus and Coca-Cola.” *Coca-Cola Journey*, www.coca-colacompany.com/stories/5-things-you-never-knew-about-santa-claus-and-coca-cola. Accessed 15 October 2019.



Figure 3. Figure 3. Coca-Cola® 1949 “Travel refreshed” advertisement.³

³ Source: Conversations Staff. “5 Things You Never Knew About Santa Claus and Coca-Cola.” *Coca-Cola Journey*, www.coca-colacompany.com/stories/5-things-you-never-knew-about-santa-claus-and-coca-cola. Accessed 15 October 2019.



Figure 4. Coca-Cola® 1950 “... talk about being good!” advertisement.⁴

⁴ Source: Conversations Staff. “5 Things You Never Knew About Santa Claus and Coca-Cola.” *Coca-Cola Journey*, www.coca-colacompany.com/stories/5-things-you-never-knew-about-santa-claus-and-coca-cola. Accessed 15 October 2019.

“The pause that refreshes”



SIGN OF GOOD TASTE



Figure 5. Coca-Cola® 1957 “The pause that refreshes – Sign of good taste” advertisement.⁵

⁵ Source: Advertisement for Coca-Cola Company *National Geographic*, December 1957, back page.

The Christmas advertisement produced by Haddon Sundblom in 1963 was one of the most famous works he created for the Coca-Cola Company. This advertisement showcased many elements of how Coca-Cola and Christmas go together (see Figure 6). Santa was shown once more with his ‘Good Boys and Girls’ list while reading a note that said ‘Dear Santa, Please Pause Here, Jimmy.’ The note was yet again affixed to the fireplace with a Coke. In the corner of the advertisement, two children are shown peering to see Santa pausing for a Coke in their living-room. This ad alone perfectly depicts the anticipation, excitement, and pure joy of Christmas, and its close connection to drinking Coke.

Sundblom’s last advertisement was released in December of 1964 and was featured in a wide variety of magazines, including: The Saturday Evening Post, LIFE Magazine, and National Geographic. This advertisement featured Santa having a wholesome interaction with two children and their family pet (see Figure 7). Santa’s facial expression, body language, and red suit remain consistent with his jolly disposition, and the joyful expression on the children’s faces contribute to the idea that Santa, Coca-Cola, and children are forever interconnected. This advertisement featured the slogan “Things Go Better With Coke” and solidified Haddon Sundblom’s attempt to revolutionize the Coca-Cola Santa once and for all.



Figure 6. Coca-Cola® 1963 “Dear Santa, please pause here, Jimmy” advertisement.⁶

⁶ Source: Advertisement for Coca-Cola Company *National Geographic*, December 1963, back page.



Figure 7. Coca-Cola® 1964 “Things go better with Coke” advisement.⁷

⁷ Source: Conversations Staff. “5 Things You Never Knew About Santa Claus and Coca-Cola.” *Coca-Cola Journey*, www.coca-colacompany.com/stories/5-things-you-never-knew-about-santa-claus-and-coca-cola. Accessed 15 October 2019.

Bringing Christmas Into Our Homes

After making an impact on the Christmas season through advertising, the Coca-Cola Company began bringing the holiday into our homes with Coca-Cola branded merchandise. As stated by Troy Altman, “Today it is Sundblom’s Santa who decorates everything from Coca-Cola cans to Christmas sweaters, from greeting cards to home décor, all because Coca-Cola wanted to increase its winter sales” (Altman, 2019).

Coca-Cola Ornaments

This successful strategy got its start within the Coca-Cola Company in the early 1990s. Putting up the Christmas tree and decorating it with ornaments usually begins the holiday celebrations for most families. In 1991, the Coca-Cola Company released the “Bottle Cap” ornament collection which featured different illustrations of the Coca-Cola Santa designed by Haddon Sundblom (see Figure 8). Each year since 1991 the Coca-Cola Company has continued to release ornaments to commemorate the holiday season.

The Coca-Cola Town Square

Another way in which Coca-Cola brought Christmas into our homes was the release of the “Town Square Collection” in 1993. This collection was made up of porcelain lighted village figurines that consumers could use to decorate their homes for the holidays. Businesses such as restaurants, toy stores, arcades, and others were accompanied with children, ice skaters, and even animals who were all depicted enjoying the Christmas season (see Figure 8). The Coca-Cola Company also partnered with Lionel

to create a collection of trains for consumers to incorporate into their Christmas decoration landscape. The trains were designed to complement the Town Square Collection and could be placed around the family Christmas tree. These trains incorporated a special touch of the past as each boxcar showcased a different Santa designed by Haddon Sundblom (see Figure 8).

Coca-Cola Santa Packs

Coca-Cola also brought the holiday into our homes by releasing the “Santa Packs” in 1995. These classic six-packs featured one of Sundblom’s illustrations on the carton itself as well as on each of the bottles inside. This idea of redesigning product packaging for Christmas has continued each year since and is just another way that Coca-Cola and Christmas are branded together even today (see Figure 8).

The Television Santa

In 2001, the Coca-Cola Santa became animated, as Sundblom’s 1963 advertisement was the basis of a television commercial. This advertisement was created by Alexandre Petrov, and brought Sundblom’s original work to life once again. The commercial depicted Santa being greeted by a note saying, “Dear Santa, this is for you.” signed Annie and Jimmy. After Santa peers over his “Good Boys and Girls” list, he takes a drink of the Coke that was left for him and loses his hat in the process. As his hat falls, Annie and Jimmy, who are watching from the corner, instantly laugh and are noticed by Santa. Once noticed, the children run to Santa and receive a warm heartfelt embrace from him. This advertisement is an example of Haddon Sundblom’s achievement of making

Santa more marketable to children, and Coca-Cola's effective use of its history in marketing with the works of Sundblom.

Santa and the USPS

The most recent way the Coca-Cola Company brought Christmas into our homes was with a partnership with the United States Postal Service in 2018. Last year, the United States Postal Service released the Sparkling Holidays collection, which included Forever stamps, a collectable writing set, and even framed artwork with Haddon Sundblom's designs of the Coca-Cola Santa. The United States Postal Service highlighted the Coca-Cola Santa from 1945, 1947, 1951, and 1963 within the collection (see Figure 9). As stated by Joseph Corbett, "I have no doubt that the Sparkling Holidays stamps will quickly become favorites. These four stamps feature classic images of Santa Claus, painted by Haddon Sundblom for the Coca-Cola Company. The paintings of the rosy-cheeked, smiling, grandfatherly man in his red suit embody the very essence of Santa" (Corbett, 2018).

Forming Holiday Traditions Outside the Home.

The Caravan Campaign

In the early 2000s, the Coca-Cola company began to focus on forming holiday traditions for consumers that took place outside of the home. The company's first and most successful attempt was with the "Christmas Caravan" campaign. The goal of this campaign was to bring one of their most popular commercials from 1995 to life. This commercial was designed by the W.B. Doner agency and featured a collection of Coca-Cola delivery trucks that created a glittering caravan of lights as the trucks passed through a small town. The ad also incorporated the jingle, "Holidays are coming, holidays are coming," which resonated fondly with many consumers. To bring the commercial to life twenty years later, the Coca-Cola company sent actual delivery trucks to a collection of cities across the United States as well as the United Kingdom (see Figure 10). The relaunch of the "Caravan Campaign" gave families across the globe a change to take a free photograph with Santa, receive holiday branded merchandise from Coca-Cola, as well as receive a complementary bottle of Coke for each member of their party. When asked about the success of the "Caravan Campaign," Coca-Cola's chief archivist Ted Ryan stated, "It's the linkage between the real and the digital doesn't happen very often, but when it does, it captures the magic of the moment. It reminds people of the wonderment that can be Christmas" (Bruce, 2019).



Figure 10. Coca-Cola® “Caravan Campaign”¹⁰

¹⁰ Source: Bruce, Christina. “Coke’s Holiday Trucks Roll On.” *Coca-Cola Journey*, www.coca-colacompany.com/stories/holidays-are-coming-coke-s-sparkling-christmas-trucks-roll-on. Accessed 8 February 2019.

“Share a Coke” Campaign

A more recent attempt made by the Coca-Cola Company to influence the celebration of the holidays is the “Share a Coke” campaign. This campaign began in the summer of 2014 and is revered as one of the most successful marketing campaigns in the company’s history. The marketers at Coca-Cola took two-hundred fifty of the world’s most popular names and placed them on the labels of the bottles; with the intention that consumers would share a coke with as many people as possible in their daily lives. It wasn’t long before the marketers of Coca-Cola put a Christmas spin on this campaign. The Coca-Cola Company released bottles with “Share a Coke with Santa,” “Share a Coke with Someone Nice,” and even “Share a Coke with Someone Naughty” (see Figure 11).

The initiative of “Share a Coke This Holiday” started during the winter of 2017 and has continued to grow and change into their current campaign called “The Gift Bottle” campaign. This campaign highlights and incorporates the same principles of the “Share a Coke” campaign while marketing the idea that the perfect gift for everyone on your list is a bottle of Coca-Cola. The bottles in “The Gift Bottle” campaign feature personalized tag labels such as “To Mom,” “To My Hero,” and “To My Favorite Teacher” (see Figure 11). This campaign focuses on the magic of giving as opposed to receiving during the holiday season.

Marketing Strategies

Nostalgia

What explains the Coca-Cola Company's success in associating its brand name with family celebrations at Christmas? The answer is nostalgia. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, nostalgia is "a wistful or excessively sentimental yearning for return to or of some past period or irrecoverable condition." In 1931, when the Coca-Cola Company commissioned Haddon Sundblom to create the Coca-Cola Santa, the company unknowingly laid the groundwork for marketing with nostalgia for many generations to come. Beginning in the early 1990s, the Coca-Cola Company started to revitalize and reincorporate Haddon Sundblom's illustrations of Santa into its marketing campaigns for the Christmas season. Sundblom's famous illustrations from 1931 to 1964 were no longer just present in LIFE magazine advertisements from the past; rather, his illustrations were also brought into customers' homes and lives through ornaments, Christmas tree trains, bottles of Coke, stamps, and even on television in animated form for families to enjoy over thirty-eight years later. This enabled a consumer to be reminded of the past when they decorated their homes, purchased a six-pack of Coca-Cola for their family, mailed their Christmas cards, or watched television.

Coca-Cola's use of nostalgia, though it can be subtle at times, doesn't seem to interfere with the company's success. One example of this is the naming of its "Sparkling Holidays" initiative with the United States Postal Service. The title of "Sparkling Holidays" can be traced back to Haddon Sundblom's Christmas advertisement from 1953. In this ad, Santa is depicted holding a sign reading "For Sparkling Holidays." This

campaign not only honored and showcased Sundblom's designs in a nostalgic way, but it also used one of the slogans imbedded in his illustrations to name, as well as market, the campaign to consumers today.

The Coca-Cola company also used the idea of nostalgia to promote their Christmas marketing and public relations campaigns. Allowing families to take a photograph with Santa through the "Caravan Campaign" is nostalgic for the parents of young children. That experience is a sentimental reminder of the past, and it often connects them to a time when they were sitting on Santa's lap to tell him their wishes themselves. This cycle can continue to become a nostalgic experience for future generations of children as they bring their families to have a photograph with Santa. At its core, nostalgia is one of the reasons the Coca-Cola company has experienced such success in marketing the celebration of Christmas.

Brand Storytelling

Along with nostalgia, the Coca-Cola Company has also used its brand storytelling to influence the celebration of Christmas. According to Kaitlin Loyal, brand storytelling is "using a narrative to connect a brand to its customers, with a focus on linking what the brand stands for to the values it shares with its customers" (Loyal, 2018). Over the years, the Coca-Cola Company has focused on ideas such as global refreshment, happiness, family, and unity, and has used these hallmarks to influence every aspect of the company. One example of how these values are interwoven into Coca-Cola can be seen through its "Share a Coke" campaign. This campaign is the most

noteworthy example of how Coca-Cola uses brand storytelling to influence its marketing efforts.

Expanding the “Share a Coke” campaign from a summer campaign to a Christmas campaign was a strategic step to continue the influence of Coca-Cola’s brand storytelling. The Christmas season is a time where many people come together with their family and usually experience a time of unity and happiness while longing for a globally refreshing beverage that only Coca-Cola can provide. Marketing the idea that a bottle of Coke is not only the perfect gift, but also the gift that everyone wants, is yet another way for the Coca-Cola Company to remain a relevant part of the celebration of Christmas. It also gives Coca-Cola a way to continue promoting the core values of its’ brand story.

Consumer Generated Content and Social Media

Brand storytelling can be noticed within the “Share a Coke” campaign in a variety of ways, and the first is through consumers being prompted to create online media content for the campaign itself. The Coca-Cola Company used social media to target consumers and persuade them to share their photos and stories using the #ShareaCoke hashtag. Consumers shared around five-hundred-thousand photos using the hashtag in the first year, and the Coca-Cola Company yielded roughly twenty-five million new Facebook followers in the first year alone. The hashtag provides a collection of evidence of consumers coming together for Christmas and sharing happiness through refreshment from Coca-Cola. Also, gaining new potential consumers through social media and Facebook provides a way for more people to be impacted by the values and brand story of Coca-Cola for many Christmas seasons to come.

A Call to Action

The final way the “Share a Coke” campaign promotes Coca-Cola’s core values is the way in which it connects with consumers on a personal level and gives consumers a powerful call to action. The phrase “Share a Coke” prompts consumers to not only have a Coke themselves, but to also consider giving one to someone else as a gift. “Share a Coke this Holiday” is catchy and easy to remember, making the call to action consistent in consumers’ minds. This enables the values of Coca-Cola to be furthered, while the magic of global refreshment is given for Christmas year after year.

Integrated Marketing Communications

The final strategy Coca-Cola uses to influence the celebration of Christmas is Integrated Marketing Communications. According to Shane Hunt, Integrated Marketing Communications is, “a promotional strategy that involves coordinating the various promotion-mix elements to provide a clear and consistent message about a firm’s products” (Hunt, 2018). Integrated Marketing Communications is the strategy that makes all the Coca-Cola Company’s marketing efforts come together to create the clear and consistent message about Coca-Cola and Christmas in consumers’ minds. The Coca-Cola Company has worked to promote the idea that Coca-Cola and Christmas complement one another, and ultimately go together, while using both nostalgia and brand storytelling. Looking at Coca-Cola’s Integrated Marketing Communications through the lens of nostalgia, explains why a store display, magazine ad, calendar, or even a Christmas ornament can feature the same Coca-Cola Santa advertisement and slogan but be released thirty years apart. Furthermore, from a brand storytelling perspective, the Share a Coke

campaign provides an avenue for Coca-Cola's values of global refreshment, happiness, family, and unity to be constantly communicated to consumers in today's market.

Consumers' Perceptions of Coca-Cola

To examine the effectiveness of Coca-Cola in using nostalgia and storytelling to sell their brand, a series of questions about Coca-Cola were added to the March 2019 Tennessee Consumer Outlook survey conducted by the Office of Consumer Research in the Jones College of Business at Middle Tennessee State University. The results reported here are based on online surveys of 600 randomly selected adult residents of Tennessee. Using the panel-sampling services of Qualtrics.com, a stratified sampling procedure was used to obtain an equal representation of consumers from each region of the state. With a sample of 600 people, we can say with 95% confidence that the amount of survey error due to taking a random sample instead of surveying all members of the population is $\pm 4\%$. Other factors such as problems with question wording and question interpretation can also introduce additional bias or error into the results.

Consumers' favorite soft drink

Consumers were first asked to indicate their favorite brands of soft drink. The percentage of respondents selecting each brand is shown in Figure 12. Respondents were allowed to select more than one brand.

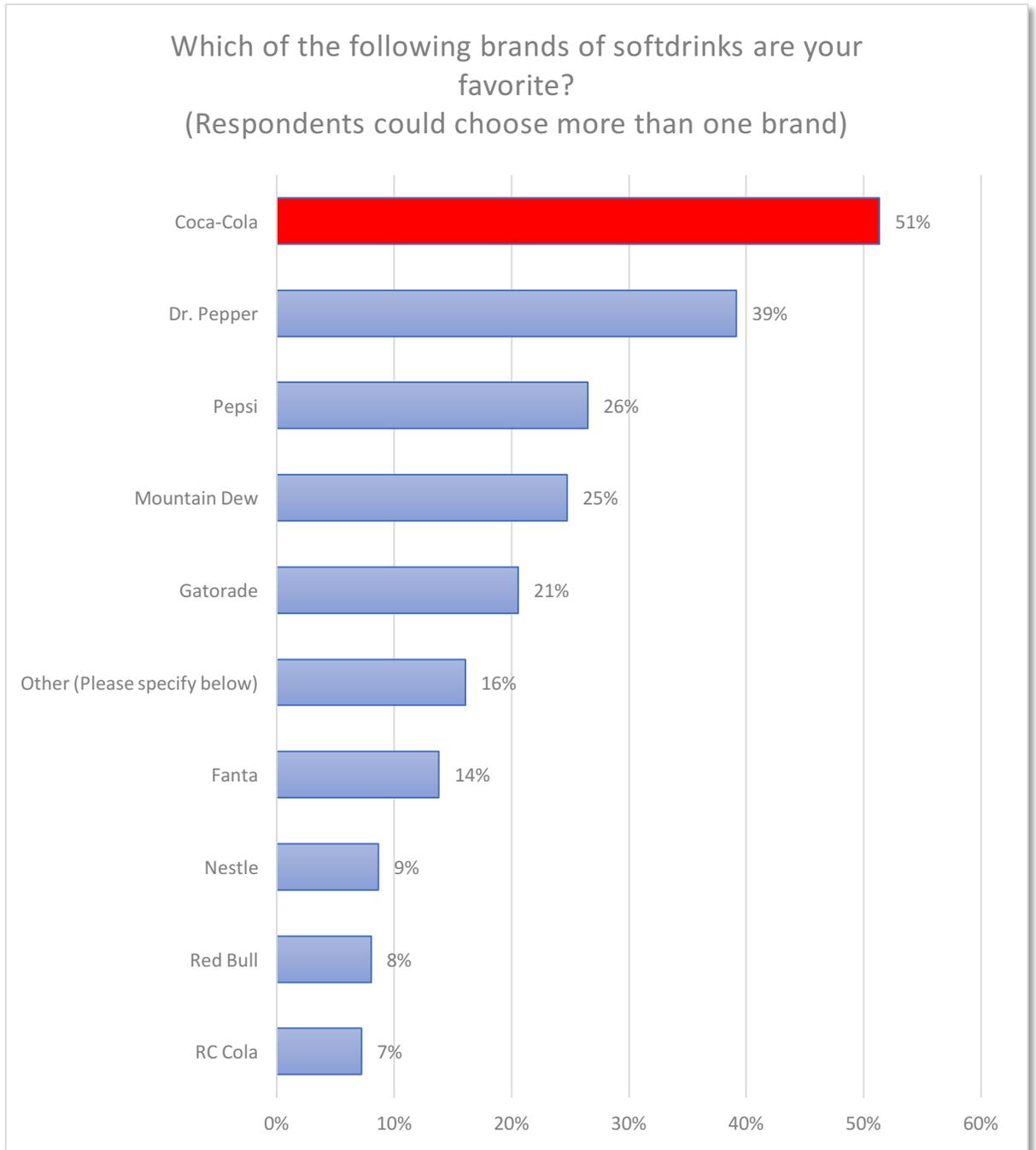


Figure 12. Consumers' favorite brands of soft drinks.

Clearly, Coca-Cola is consumers' most preferred brand of soft drink. Along with nostalgia and brand storytelling, the Coca-Cola Company utilizes effective product positioning strategies to achieve this success. In marketing, product positioning is how a product is designed to be perceived in the marketplace, relative to its main competitors. Coca-Cola has continuously used slogans like, "It's The Real Thing," or "Things Go Better With Coke" and even "Coke Is It!" to help consumers understand the superior taste, experience, and value that only Coca-Cola can provide.

Another effect of Coca-Cola's positive product positioning strategies is the company's high level of brand equity. Brand equity is the value that comes from consumer's perception of a product rather than the tangible features of the product. All of these elements positively influence customers' opinion of a particular brand, and lead to fifty one percent of people in Tennessee choosing Coca-Cola as their favorite brand of soft drink. Although this sample reflects the opinions of consumers from the south, Coca-Cola's commanding presence in all markets has created brand loyalists that have evolved into brand ambassadors worldwide.

Associations between Coca-Cola and Santa

The second question on the survey asked how closely consumers associate Coca-Cola with Santa. The results shown in Figure 13 unequivocally show that Coca-Cola has been extremely successful in associating their brand with Santa. No other brand even comes close to Coca-Cola's connection with Santa. These results reinforce the importance and impact of Haddon Sundblom's work on developing customers' perception of the modern-day Coca-Cola Santa. He began crafting his interpretation of the Coca-Cola Santa back in 1931, and his iconic illustrations have remained consistent in consumers' minds for almost ninety years. The Coca-Cola Company used Integrated Marketing Communications to repeatedly show his illustrations on advertisements, product packaging, and items for the home to create a lasting association of a portly Santa Claus wearing a red suit with white trim with Coca-Cola and Christmas. To continue this strongly held linkage, the company must market Coca-Cola, Santa, and Christmas together by creating new and innovative ways to positively influence customers' purchasing decisions. The results of this question inspired the proposed "Share a Letter with Santa" campaign to be outlined in the next chapter. This proposed campaign can help Coca-Cola continue their holiday marketing efforts.

Which brand of soft drink do you most closely associate with the image of a portly (heavy set) Santa Claus wearing a red suit with white trim?

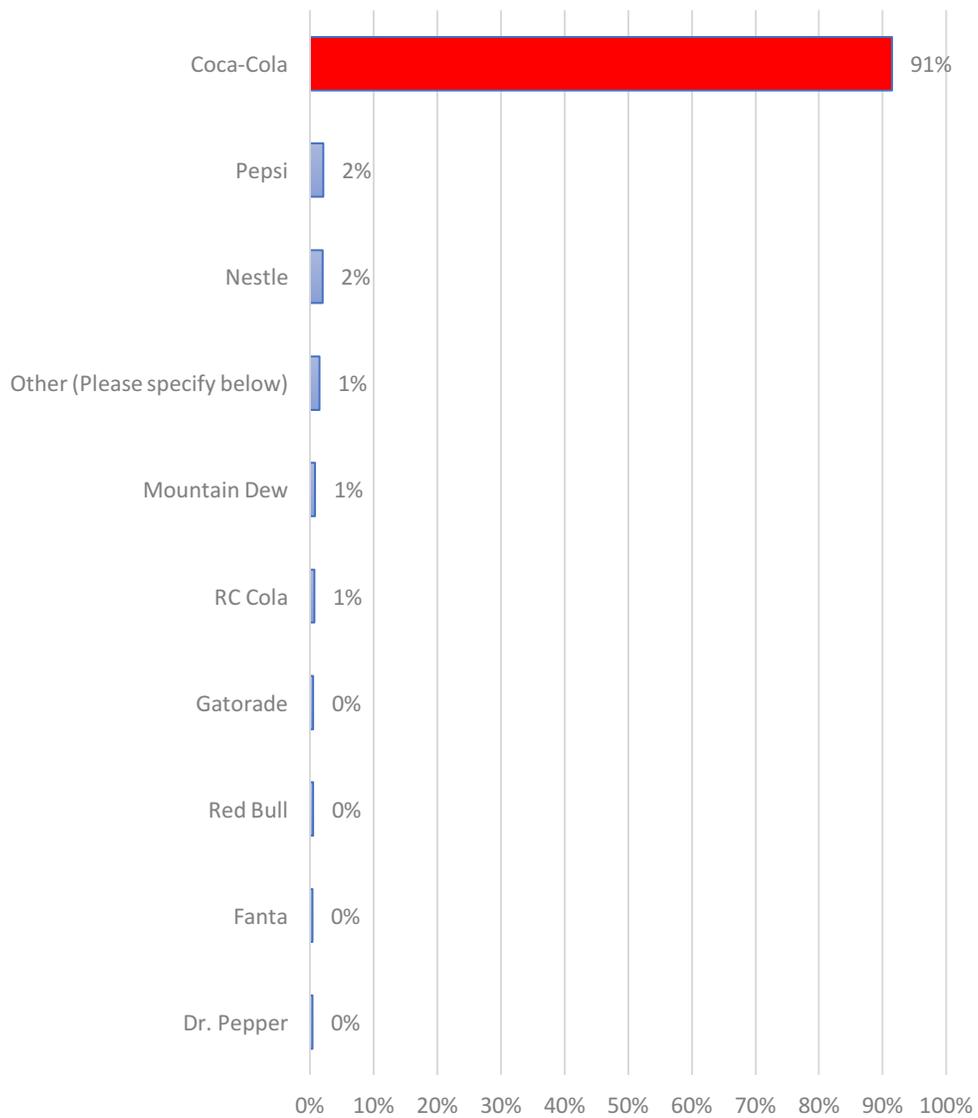


Figure 13. Associations between Coca-Cola and Santa.

Other meanings associated with Coca-Cola

To further examine other meanings consumers associate with Coca-Cola, respondents were shown a list of statements and asked to identify those that are closely associated with Coca-Cola. This question yielded expected results as shown in Figure 14. The large percentage of responses for Santa Claus, nostalgic, old fashioned, the holiday season, and Christmas speak to the effective use of nostalgia in Coca-Cola's marketing, while the percentage of response for happiness shows the association of Coca-Cola's brand storytelling strategies with the celebration of Christmas. Further, the small percentage of responses for modern and progressive provide more evidence of Coca-Cola's success in using nostalgia to market their brand.

Coca-Cola Polar Bears

While Haddon Sunblom's Coca-Cola Santa was highly associated with Coca-Cola, Ken Stewart's animated polar bears were the most often selected response. The first Coca-Cola polar bear appeared in a French advertisement back in 1922 and continued to be seen sporadically over the next seventy years. In 1993, the Coca-Cola Company started showcasing polar bears more consistently with their "Always Coca-Cola" campaign, which consisted of different commercials designed for different seasons and target audiences. One of Coca-Cola's most popular campaigns was the "Northern Lights" commercial, which introduced Stewart's animated polar bears to consumers for the first time. Stewart was inspired to design this commercial around the idea of drinking Coca-Cola at the movies, and it showcased polar bears watching the aurora borealis as the "movie" while enjoying a refreshing Coca-Cola. This commercial was so popular that

it led to him creating others for the company, including his most recent commercial in 2012 where polar bear cubs are shown with their family selecting the perfect Christmas tree, while enjoying the pure refreshment and joy of a Coca-Cola.

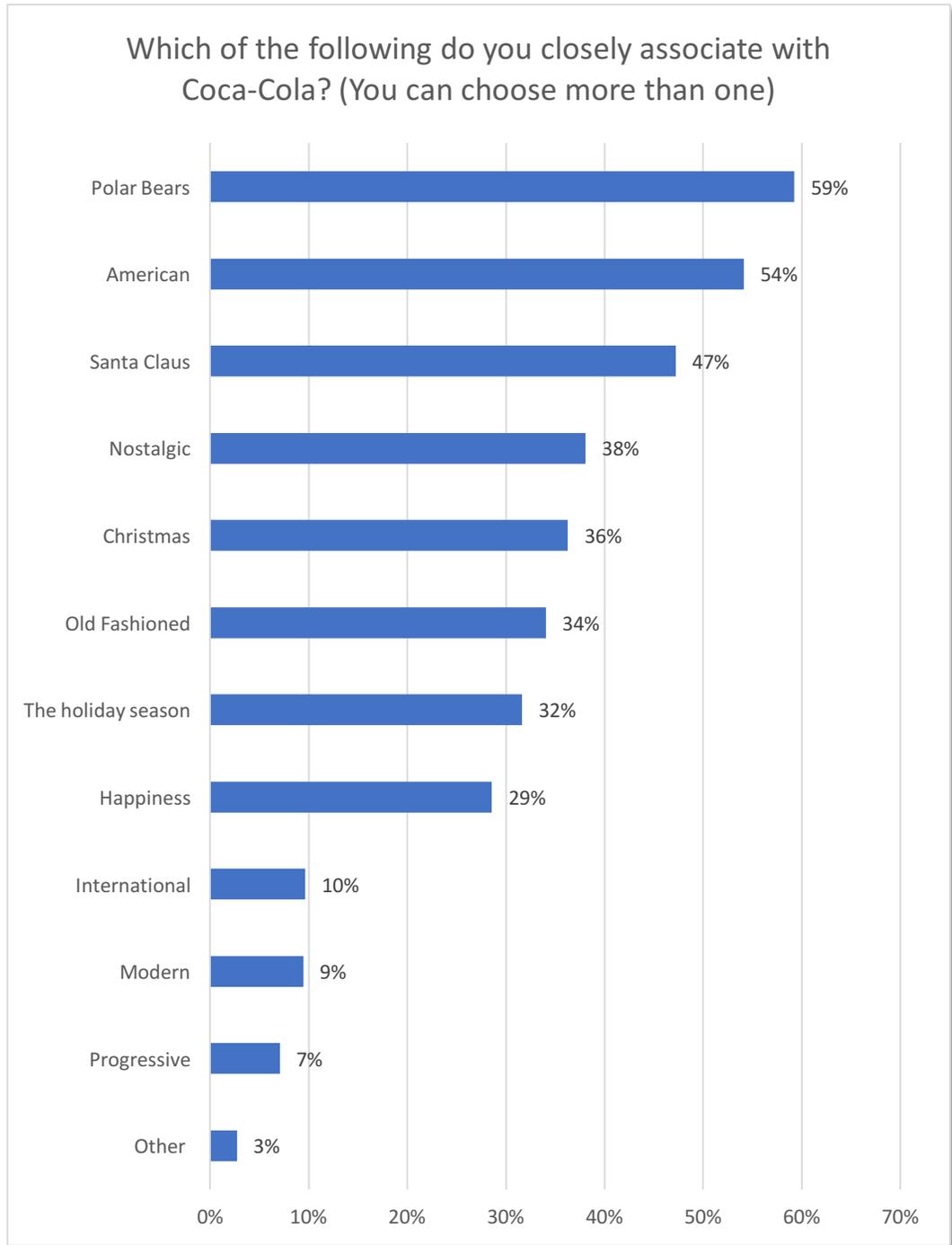


Figure 14. Other Meanings associated with Coca-Cola.

Coca-Cola versus Pepsi

While the previous survey questions limited consumers' responses to only those that were provided on the survey, the two final questions asked on the survey were designed to allow a wider range of responses. Stated as open ended questions, respondents were asked, "What words or phrases do you associate with Coca-Cola?" and "What words or phrases do you associate with Pepsi?" The question about Pepsi was included since Pepsi is Coca-Cola number one competitor.

As shown in Figure 15 is the word cloud depicting the 25 most frequently mentioned words for Coca-Cola. The larger the word, the more frequently it was mentioned. Similarly, Figure 16 shows the word cloud for Pepsi. The most frequent responses for Coca-Cola were polar bear, red, and refreshing. Conversely, the most frequent responses for Pepsi were blue and sweet. These results reveal the powerful associations respondents had with the colors and symbols that are most closely related to each brand. Coca-Cola's logo is known as a wordmark as it uses the company name with proprietary letterforms while also functioning as the recognizable logo. Also, Coca-Cola's consistent use of red with their classic white logo script has influenced consumer's ability to remember the brand and associate it with words like red, white, and refreshing. For Pepsi, its use of iconography, which is the traditional or conventional images or symbols associated with a subject or product, has enabled their customer base to form positive associations with the red, white, and blue logo, even if the brand name of "Pepsi" isn't present. These principles offer some explanation for the one-word qualitative responses found in the survey.

“Share a Letter with Santa” Promotional Plan

As already outlined, Coca-Cola has effectively used nostalgia and storytelling to promote their brand. How can Coca-Cola continue to leverage its positive brand equity with new uses of nostalgia to reinforce the associations between Coca-Cola and Santa? The purpose of this section is to describe and outline a promotional plan allowing Coca-Cola to use new technologies and media tools to further enhance their association with Haddon Sundblom’s Coca-Cola Santa and tell their story to a new generation of customers.

Objective/Purpose

The “Share a Letter with Santa” promotional plan is designed to build upon the Coca-Cola Company’s “Sparkling Holidays” campaign with the United States Postal Service during the holiday season of 2018. In that campaign, a collection of Haddon Sundblom’s Coca-Cola Santa images and the Coca-Cola brand were printed on physical envelopes that were mailed through the U.S. Postal Service. The goal of the proposed “Share a Letter with Santa” campaign is to continue honoring the work of Haddon Sundblom, while offering a novel way for the Coca-Cola Company to continue incorporating the strategies of nostalgia and brand-storytelling into its holiday marketing efforts.

Methodology

To achieve this goal, the proposed campaign will redesign Coca-Cola's holiday product packaging, offer a concept for in-store displays, and ultimately give children a way to write a virtual letter to Santa through the company website.

Product Packaging

The "Share a Letter with Santa" campaign incorporates three of Haddon Sundblom's original advertisements from 1932, 1957, and 1963 onto the labels of Coca-Cola bottles, with the phrase "Share a Letter with Santa" on the opposite side. These images were selected because they depict Santa reading letters that were left for him and will serve as the nostalgic touch to this campaign. (see Figure 17).

In-Store Product Displays

The "Share a Letter with Santa" campaign will incorporate mailbox displays (see Figure 18) in retail locations showcasing Sundblom's advertisements from 1932, 1957, and 1963, and hold Coca-Cola products. These displays will be red and have the phrase "Share a Letter with Santa" on them in contrasting white lettering along with the Coca-Cola logo.

Virtual Letters

This campaign will offer consumers the ability to share a virtual letter with Santa through the Coca-Cola Company's website after scanning the "QR" code provided on the bottles of Coke or in-store mailbox displays.

QR Codes

QR codes are “a machine-readable code consisting of an array of black and white squares, typically used for storing URLs or other information for reading by the camera on a smartphone.” (see Figure 17 and Figure 18). By scanning the QR code, consumers will be taken to the “Share a Letter with Santa” website. This is where they will be able to write and submit a virtual letter to Santa. The website will also allow Coca-Cola to capture valuable information about consumers; including demographics, attitudes, and perceptions. Of course, most of this data will be entered by a parent if a child is too young to do so. However, the campaign is not limited to children. Adults (parents) can participate too as a way to reminisce and share their childhood memories and stories of Christmas with their children.



Figure 17. Proposed Bottle Wrapping for the “Share a Letter with Santa” Campaign.



Figure 18. "Share a Letter with Santa" In-Store Display.

Pre-Letter Questions

Before consumers can submit their letter to Santa, they will be asked to enter various demographic information, including:

- Name
- Email address (if applicable)
- Phone number
- Age
- Gender
- Date of birth.

Post-Letter Questions

After submitting their letter, adults (parents) will be asked to answer questions such as:

- What is your favorite memory of Christmas as a child?
- Describe your current perception of the Coca-Cola Company?
- What products are you most/least satisfied with?
- What products would you like to see from the company in the future?

Benefits: Nostalgia and Brand Storytelling

This campaign will allow the Coca-Cola Company to continue marketing using the nostalgic elements of Haddon Sundblom's advertising on their product packaging, in-store product displays, and virtually through the company's website. This campaign will also further the efforts of the "Share a Coke this Holiday" campaign from 2017 and the

“Sparkling Holidays” campaign from 2018. These campaigns speak directly to Coca-Cola’s brand storytelling efforts, and they must be continued so that the association of Coca-Cola and Christmas remain consistent in consumers’ minds year after year.

Benefits: Consumer Data

Data from consumers’ responses to the survey questions collected before and after submitting each letter to Santa will allow the Coca-Cola Company to gain useful insight into who their customers are, how satisfied they are with the company, and ways their overall experience can be improved in the future. This information will help the company tailor its marketing efforts moving forward to give consumers the personalized product offerings they desire.

Summary of Consumer Actions

The following is a list of actions to be performed by consumers as they take part in the “Share a Letter with Santa” campaign:

- The “Share a Letter with Santa” campaign is first initiated by locating and scanning the QR code on the special edition bottles of Coke or on the specially designed in-store product displays.
- Once the QR code is scanned using a mobile device, the customer will be directed to the “Share a Letter with Santa” platform page on the Coca-Cola Company website.

- Before typing their note, children, or their parents, will be required to answer a series of demographic “pre-letter” questions such as their name, email address, phone number, age, gender, and date of birth.
- After the “pre-letter” questions are successfully answered, children, or their parents, will be able to “Share a Letter with Santa,” by typing their note in a designated field on the web page.
- Following the letter’s submission, parents, or their children, will be asked to complete a series of “post letter” perception questions. These questions will ask them to reflect on what products they are most satisfied with, what products they would like to see in the future, and finally their overall perception of the Coca-Cola company.

Conclusion

Since his inception by Haddon Sundblom in 1931, the Coca-Cola Santa has embodied the celebration of the Christmas holiday. One job for Coca-Cola has been to make sure that, with each new Christmas season, the Coca-Cola Santa remains relevant and new. Their efforts in advertising, bringing Christmas into our homes, forming holiday traditions outside the home, and creating the “Share a Coke” campaign have helped to solidify their legacy and forever influence the way we celebrate Christmas. The company has also expertly used nostalgia, brand storytelling, and integrated marketing communications as marketing strategies to shape the celebration of Christmas. Through its marketing efforts, the Coca-Cola company has created strong and positive association between the brand, Santa, and Christmas. The “Share a Letter with Santa” campaign presents a way for Coca-Cola to build upon of its previous marketing successes and to continue influencing the holidays in consumers’ hearts and minds for generations to come.

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IRB

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IRBN007 – EXEMPTION DETERMINATION NOTICE

Thursday, August 01, 2019

Principal Investigator **Anthony W Weatherford** (Student)
Faculty Advisor Timothy R. Graeff
Co-Investigators NONE
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Department Department of Marketing

Protocol Title ***Things go better with nostalgia: How the Coca-Cola company uses brand storytelling to influence its holiday marketing efforts***

Protocol ID **19-1281**

Dear Investigator(s),

The above identified research proposal has been reviewed by the MTSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the **EXEMPT** review mechanism under 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) within the research category (4) *Study involving existing data*. A summary of the IRB action and other particulars in regard to this protocol application is tabulated as shown below:

IRB Action	EXEMPT from further IRB review***	Date	8/1/19
Date of Expiration	NOT APPLICABLE		
Sample Size	500 (FIVE HUNDRED) records		
Participant Pool	Survey records from adult participants - Quarterly TN Consumer Outlook Surveys, Office of Consumer Research (JC Business)		
Exceptions	NONE		
Mandatory Restrictions	1. Participants must be 18 years or older 2. Informed consent must be obtained from the participants 3. Identifying information must not be collected		
Restrictions	Not approved for participant enrollment		
Approved IRB Templates	NONE		
Funding	NONE		

Comments	NONE
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***This exemption determination only allows above defined protocol from further IRB review such as continuing review. However, the following post-approval requirements still apply:

- Addition/removal of subject population should not be implemented without IRB approval
- Change in investigators must be notified and approved
- Modifications to procedures must be clearly articulated in an addendum request and the proposed changes must not be incorporated without an approval
- Be advised that the proposed change must comply within the requirements for exemption
- Changes to the research location must be approved – appropriate permission letter(s) from external institutions must accompany the addendum request form
- Changes to funding source must be notified via email (irb_submissions@mtsu.edu)
- The exemption does not expire as long as the protocol is in good standing
- Project completion must be reported via email (irb_submissions@mtsu.edu)
- Research-related injuries to the participants and other events must be reported within 48 hours of such events to compliance@mtsu.edu

Post-approval Protocol Amendments:

The current MTSU IRB policies allow the investigators to make the following types of changes to this protocol without the need to report to the Office of Compliance, as long as the proposed changes do not result in the cancellation of the protocols eligibility for exemption:

- Editorial and minor administrative revisions to the consent form or other study documents
- Increasing/decreasing the participant size

Only THREE procedural amendment requests will be entertained per year. This amendment restriction does not apply to minor changes such as language usage and addition/removal of research personnel.

Date	Amendment(s)	IRB Comments
NONE	NONE.	NONE

The investigator(s) indicated in this notification should read and abide by all applicable post-approval conditions imposed with this approval. [Refer to the post-approval guidelines posted in the MTSU IRB's website.](#) Any unanticipated harms to participants or adverse events must be reported to the Office of Compliance at (615) 494-8918 within 48 hours of the incident.

All of the research-related records, which include signed consent forms, current & past investigator information, training certificates, survey instruments and other documents related to the study, must be retained by the PI or the faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) at the secure location mentioned in the protocol application. The data storage must be maintained for at least three (3) years after study completion. Subsequently, the researcher may destroy the data in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity. IRB reserves the right to modify, change or cancel the terms of this letter without prior notice. Be advised that IRB also reserves the right to inspect or audit your records if needed.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board
Middle Tennessee State University