

Michael Zmed

Professor Gardiakos

ENC1102H

26 September 2023

\* Highlighted content is new

### Research Proposal

My topic for this research is a rhetorical analysis of the combined effect of nostalgia and the fear of missing out in advertising and product development as it is used by the LEGO Group. To do this, I will be examining advertisements and sets. For the purposes of this paper, nostalgia will be defined by Kamil Lubiński's dual definitions. Historical nostalgia is wanting to have been born in a different era. Personal nostalgia occurs over things one has personally experienced. This paper focuses on personal nostalgia. I would also like to examine how they use the fear of missing out (FOMO) in tandem with nostalgia when releasing gift-with-purchases (GWPs). In recent years, the LEGO Group has started to produce remakes of sets that sold particularly well in the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s. For the purposes of this paper, a remake is defined as a LEGO set that shares a name or evokes the design of a set that the company produced previously. These remakes try to emulate the appearance of their predecessors through the use of more modern, advanced pieces and building techniques.

#### Purpose:

In recent years, I, along with several other LEGO fans, have noticed that LEGO is starting to market more heavily towards adults. Around August of 2021, LEGO launched their "Adults Welcome" initiative. During 2020, the LEGO Group saw an increase in sales largely due the increased

number of people stuck at home with nothing better to do than buy LEGO sets. The “Adults Welcome” initiative primarily served as a way for LEGO to encourage adults who had not grown up with LEGO as a child to purchase the building toy as an adult. To do this, LEGO started producing larger, more expensive sets based on pop culture icons, famous vehicles, artistic display pieces, and other sets designed to draw in a more mature audience. Even the packaging was changed to be minimalistic and sported an 18+ age rating. Most of these adult-oriented sets would be lumped under the Icons theme. For the purposes of this research paper, a LEGO theme is defined as any sets produced under the same intellectual property or that otherwise share similar properties to other sets in the theme.

Notably, there is another notable group of adults who grew up with the building toy and continued to support the company into their adult years. These adult fans of LEGO (AFOLs), while potentially having nostalgia for some of the pop culture sets produced under the “Adults Welcome” wave of sets, also likely have nostalgia for the LEGO sets they grew up with. This group of lifetime LEGO fans will be the primary focus of my research.

On June 15th, 2022, LEGO released 40567 Forest Hideout as a GWP. This set was a remake of 6054 Forestmen's Hideout, first released in 1988. Initially, the only way to get 40567 Forest Hideout was by spending \$150 or more USD on other LEGO sets on lego.com or in LEGO stores between June 15 and June 22, 2022. After that period, the only way to get the set was through third-party sellers. The promotion was very successful for LEGO<sup>[citation needed]</sup> likely due to a mix of nostalgia for the set and the FOMO surrounding the set's short window for purchase. Shortly after, nostalgic sets like 40580 Blacktron Cruiser and 40581 Tahu and Takua also became GWPs.

### Methods:

For primary research, I want to look at the LEGO Group's history of marketing to adults in general along with their history of remaking nostalgic sets. I will likely examine LEGO advertisements and sets that could be considered geared towards adult audiences and try to define what makes them different from LEGO advertisements and sets made with children in mind. Some specific themes I have in mind are select GWP's starting with 40567 Forest Hideout, Ninjago sets, Model Team sets, train sets, 10320 Eldorado Fortress, 10305 Lion Knights' Castle, and others, depending on which sets seem more relevant as my paper becomes more developed. For secondary research, I will read through research articles done on the effect of nostalgia in toy marketing. There are a couple of YouTube videos I have in mind that cover the topic from a buyer's perspective and made me aware of the issue in the first place. I have the YouTuber's contact info on multiple platforms and he's fairly active online, so I might try to ask him where he got his sources from.

I am not sure if this is necessary, but I was also thinking of creating a survey for AFOLs in the various communities I'm part of. The survey will show them different nostalgia-inspired LEGO advertisements and ask them how effective they find them and why. I may ask them about their opinions on recent GWP's and whether or not they would prefer them to be regular retail sets. I would also like to ask them about sets they would like to see remade, as it might shed light on whether or not Lego is actually remaking the sets people want.

### Discussion and Implications:

I hope that my study will shed some light on how LEGO is becoming slightly predatory with their heavy usage of nostalgia and FOMO when selling new products. Ideally, I will be able to show the degree to which nostalgia and FOMO is able to convince people to buy more than they initially want. Based on my sources, I hope to determine which ages are most susceptible to nostalgia bait and if these nostalgic sets have any market for younger fans who did not grow up with the sets the remakes are based on. Since LEGO is one of the largest toy companies on the planet, I hope my findings will be applicable to the wider concept of nostalgia and FOMO being to market toys to older audiences. Ideally, my research will make buyers more aware of how nostalgia and FOMO can lead them to poor financial decisions. The discourse communities surrounding my research have discussed how nostalgia affects toy purchases by adults, but there has not been as much research on how FOMO can factor in on those purchases, particularly with LEGO, one of the most powerful toy brands in the world.

## Annotated Bibliography

Lubiński, Kamil. “The Effects of Nostalgia-Based Advertising on a Toy Company’s Brand Equity: The Example of the LEGO Group.” *Zeszyty Naukowe (Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny w Krakowie)*, no. 6(990), 2020, pp. 29–48, <https://doi.org/10.15678/ZNUEK.2020.0990.0602>.

Kamil Lubiński from the Lodz University of Technology interviewed 255 Polish consumers in order to determine whether or not nostalgia precedes brand loyalty. He specifically examined how prior experience to the LEGO brand influenced purchasing choices into adulthood. This article is particularly useful because it has great relevance to the nostalgic half of my research question.