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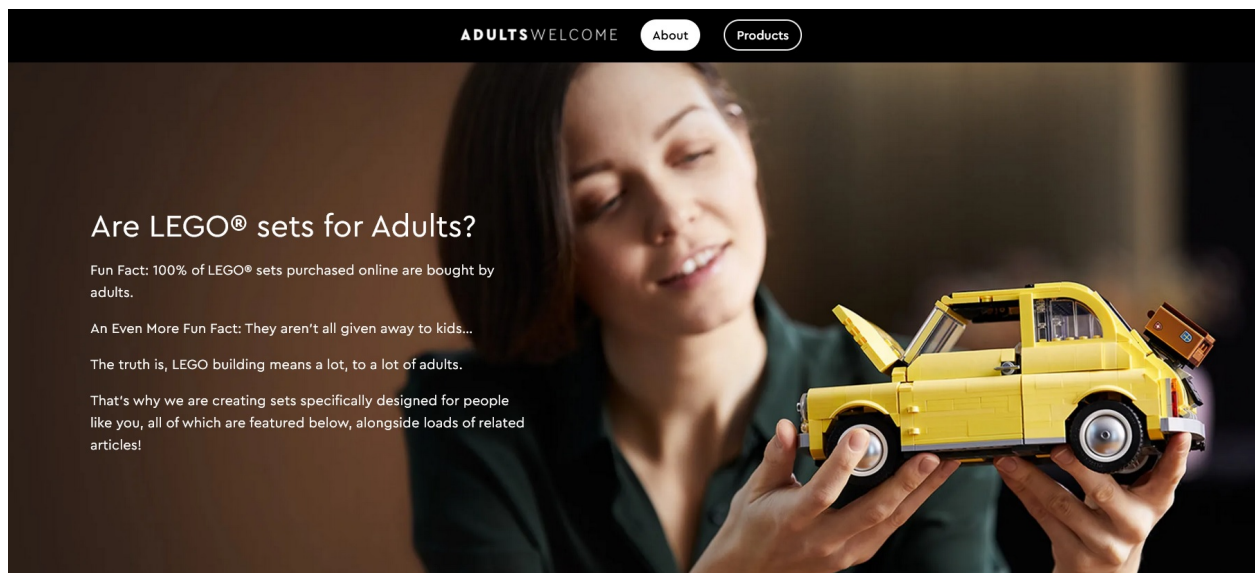
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Nostalgia and the Fear of Missing Out in Marketing: An Analysis of the LEGO Group

In recent years, the LEGO Group has started to market more heavily towards adults. During 2020, the LEGO Group saw an increase in sales largely due the increased number of people stuck at home who used the lockdown as a chance to develop a LEGO-building hobby. Around August of 2021, LEGO launched their “Adults Welcome” initiative.



The front page of the Adults Welcome page on lego.com, August 2021

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 look more minimalistic with a black background and sported an 18+ age rating.



10289 Bird of Paradise, from the Botanical Collection

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.

THE A.F.O.L.

Notably, there is another 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” line 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 group for this research paper since they are largely the primary demographic for these remade LEGO sets.

LEGO AND THE GIFT-WITH-PURCHASE

On June 15th, 2022, LEGO released 40567 Forest Hideout as a gift-with-purchase (GWP). This set was a remake of 6054 Forestmen's Hideout, first released in 1988.



40567 Forest Hideout (left) and 6054 Forestmen's Hideout (right)

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. Shortly after, sets designed to appeal to nostalgia like 40580 Blacktron Cruiser and 40581 BIONICLE Tahu and Takua also became GWPs.



40580 Blacktron Cruiser (left) and 40581 BIONICLE Tahu and Takua (right)

NOSTALGIA

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines nostalgia as “a wistful or excessively sentimental yearning for return to or of some past period or irrecoverable condition” (Merriam-Webster). For some, nostalgia brings positive memories of happy times, most often of childhood. For others, it is a painful reminder that the world is apparently no longer as simple as it once was. Regardless of whether it causes positive or negative effects, nostalgia has a uniquely powerful presence in the minds of people.

Barbara B. Stern, in her article “Historical and Personal Nostalgia in Advertising Text: The Fin de siècle Effect”, adds further developments to the definition of the concept of nostalgia. She refines nostalgia into two types: Historical and personal. Historical nostalgia “expresses the desire to retreat from contemporary life by returning to a time in the distant past viewed as superior to the present” (Stern 13). Wishing to have lived during the 1920s is an example of historical nostalgia. Personal nostalgia “idealize[s] the personally remembered past” (16). For example, wishing to return to one’s childhood is personal nostalgia. This research paper largely

focuses on personal nostalgia and how it is used in marketing, although there are small elements of historical nostalgia present as well.

Further refining the definition of nostalgia, Sung Youl Jun from the Sogang Business School at Sogang University in Seoul, South Korea and other researchers provide two different types of nostalgia in their article “The Effects of Nostalgia Marketing on Consumers’ Brand Extension Evaluation”. Collective nostalgia is created by memories of positive experiences in groups whereas personal nostalgia is based on unique memories of achievements. These two definitions will become more relevant as this research paper begins to analyze the content of LEGO’s advertising. The authors found that when nostalgia is used in marketing, the positive feelings generated by the nostalgia became attributed to the brand selling the product.

Expanding on the effects of nostalgia, Ramendra Singh from the Marketing Group at the Indian Institute of Management Calcutta in Kolkata, India and several others wrote “A Road Less Traveled in Nostalgia Marketing: Impact of Spiritual Well-Being on Effects of Nostalgic Advertisements” in order to examine the different emotional responses people have to nostalgic marketing. Specifically, they wanted to see how spiritual well-being affects how people receive nostalgic marketing. For example, when seeing a nostalgic advertisement, where one person would be filled with happy memories of simpler times, another would be filled with dread when they consider how far removed they are from that perceived simpler time. This echoes Barbara Stern’s view on nostalgia, which is that “nostalgia's fictionalizing process is seductive, in that it offers consumers a sanitized version of the past as an escape from a problem-laden present” (Stern 20). Nostalgia is a distraction, a coping method to help deal with a difficult present. Evoking the memories of an apparently stressless childhood through images of a favorite toy can cause a powerful reaction in viewers that can be exploited by advertisers.

Jane Eva Baxter from the Department of Anthropology at DePaul University wrote “Adult Nostalgia and Children’s Toys Past and Present” in order to examine how the nostalgia of adults affects what kinds of toys are being produced in the market today. The paper specifically looks at certain toys that keep reappearing in the toy market because parents recognize them from their childhoods and purchase them for their own children. Baxter examines two nostalgic toys: The Fisher-Price Chatter Telephone and Mickey Mouse Ears. She mentions that although toys like these do not necessarily prepare children for the modern world—particularly the Fisher-Price phone, which is modeled after a rotary telephone—they make it easier for older generations to associate their own childhood into the experiences of current children. Interestingly, Baxter notes that “[the toys] are also both objects that are not marketed directly to children, but instead are targeted at adult consumers who have previous knowledge of the products” (Baxter 232). Marketers know that using nostalgia in their advertisements will fall flat for viewers that have no emotional connection to the time period. In the case of the LEGO GWPs, they are relying on older fans’ memories of the remade sets as well as the sets’ desirability on their own to market them.

In similar fashion to how Baxter found that toys with prior popularity and a recognizable brand name extended their lifespans on store shelves, Kamil Lubiński from the Lodz University of Technology in his article “The Effects of Nostalgia-Based Advertising on a Toy Company’s Brand Equity: The Example of the LEGO Group” attempted to determine the degree to which nostalgia affects brand loyalty. To do this, he interviewed 255 Polish consumers in order to specifically examine how prior experience to the LEGO brand influenced purchasing choices inspired by nostalgia. He found that “previous experience with a brand, particularly during childhood, does influence a nostalgia-oriented purchase intention” (Lubiński 39). People who

played with LEGO bricks as children were more likely to favor the brand and purchase sets in their adulthood. Furthermore, Lubiński found that there was “a substantial tendency to evoke nostalgic thoughts regarding the LEGO® brand among the respondents aged 30–39” (39). Because the current year is 2023, one can assume that the group of people most susceptible to nostalgic advertising right now were born between 1984 and 1993. Interestingly, Lubiński also cited sources that stated that “‘toys’ were identified as the most purchased nostalgic product, second only to an intangible product: music” (37). Toys can serve as physical representations of childhood, so it is no surprise that they are so relevant to the nostalgia market.

THE FEAR OF MISSING OUT

The other half of this research paper is inspired by the fear of missing out, henceforth abbreviated as FOMO. FOMO is defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as the “fear of not being included in something (such as an interesting or enjoyable activity) that others are experiencing” (Merriam-Webster). For example, FOMO can appear when seeing others experiencing something fun on a social media post or seeing that a desirable item is only available for a very limited time.

Alfina from the Department of Management at Airlangga University along with several other researchers in their article “FOMO Related Consumer Behaviour in Marketing Context: A Systematic Literature Review” studied how the fear of missing out affects the marketing world. They mention that previous research mostly revolves around the psychological effects, but there is not as much on how it is specifically used in marketing. The researchers reviewed the literature that has been written on the subject of FOMO already and examined the history of how consumers reacted to experiencing FOMO. They found that FOMO is often viewed negatively.

Despite this, it also leads to positive consumption behaviors. The researchers found that FOMO as it appears on social media is seen as a negative thing. However, people who make a FOMO-inspired purchase from a brand tend to like the brand more afterwards.

Similar to Alfina's research, Chris Hodkinson from the University of Queensland Business School wrote "Fear of Missing Out' (FOMO) Marketing Appeals: A Conceptual Model" in order to examine how consumers react to FOMO-based advertising. Hodkinson mentions that previous research only examined how consumers initiate FOMO in themselves regardless of whether or not the sellers are making an effort to market it that way. This article shows how companies have used FOMO in their marketing schemes and suggests how they can continue to do so. It also examines the origins of the term FOMO as it appeared in academic research. The study's method involved using several experiments involving a sample of younger university students since they are of an age most susceptible to FOMO. It also involved examining several texts that involved FOMO marketing. They found that the opinions of non-participants in a FOMO-event had a large influence over the minds of those that participated in the FOMO-event and could encourage them to participate again. If non-participants regretted not participating, those that did participate were proud that they did and were more willing to avoid missing out on future events.

Timothy Reisenwitz and Jie Fowler from the Department of Management and Marketing at Valdosta State University wrote in "Personal and Social Determinants of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) in Younger Consumers" about how several different variables affect the level of FOMO in a consumer. The variables analyzed were "social media usage, self-concept, social identity, smartphone usage, innovativeness, and gender" (Reisenwitz and Fowler). The study also elaborates on previous research that stated that there are two parts to the construct of FOMO: A

personal and social dimension. Personal FOMO is missing out on an experience one wishes for oneself. Social FOMO is the fear of missing out on experiences that other people are enjoying. LEGO's nostalgic GWPs have elements of both personal and social FOMO. In the case of personal FOMO, AFOLs may want to recreate the feeling they had as a child when playing with similar LEGO sets. The social FOMO comes from the fact that these GWPs are available to anyone who purchases from lego.com during the time window.

METHODS

The primary research for this paper was performed through several avenues. One avenue was comparing the box art and design language of remade sets to their predecessors to see how LEGO uses nostalgic art to entice consumers. Although the LEGO Group releases several GWPs a year, this research paper only looked at sets specifically inspired by a previous set based on an original LEGO IP. The original box art and the remade box art were analyzed to find the elements that remained similar across generations, new elements added in the modern version, and elements specifically recreated to evoke the same feeling the original box art did. The sets were examined through a lens of intertextuality. James E. Porter from Purdue University at Port Wayne defines intertextuality as “the principle that all writing and speech—indeed, all signs—arise from a single network” (Porter 34). Intertextuality is the idea that all texts are interconnected; Every new text is partially or heavily inspired by the texts that the author was aware of during the time of writing. In this case, texts can be anything the author created. A text could be a book, a song, a painting, or even a LEGO set. LEGO set designers might be influenced by the sets they played with as a child, the sets that fellow designers have produced, their favorite films, and everything else in their lives. LEGO sets are not designed in a vacuum.

These remade sets are perfect examples of this concept. The remakes cannot exist without the originals that inspired them.

To determine how the LEGO Group used FOMO to market these GWPs, several factors were analyzed. The banners announcing the existence of some select GWPs were analyzed to determine how the information provided was designed to entice viewers. Other outside factors like larger, more expensive sets coinciding with the release of these GWPs that matched the theme were noted. LEGO will often pair up large set releases with GWPs that supplement the set as a whole. For example, when 76417 Gringotts Wizarding Bank from the Harry Potter theme was released on September 1, 2023, 40598 Gringotts Vault was available as a GWP from September 1 to September 13. The latter is a small bank vault that can be attached to the much larger bank structure to add more to the display.

Other analysis was done on the LEGO Group's website. The Best Sellers page was analyzed to see how much presence the Icons theme held. Although the main focus of this article are the remade GWPs, several of those GWPs were paired with sets from the Icons theme that were remade sets from similar themes, like Castle to Castle and Space to Space.

RESULTS

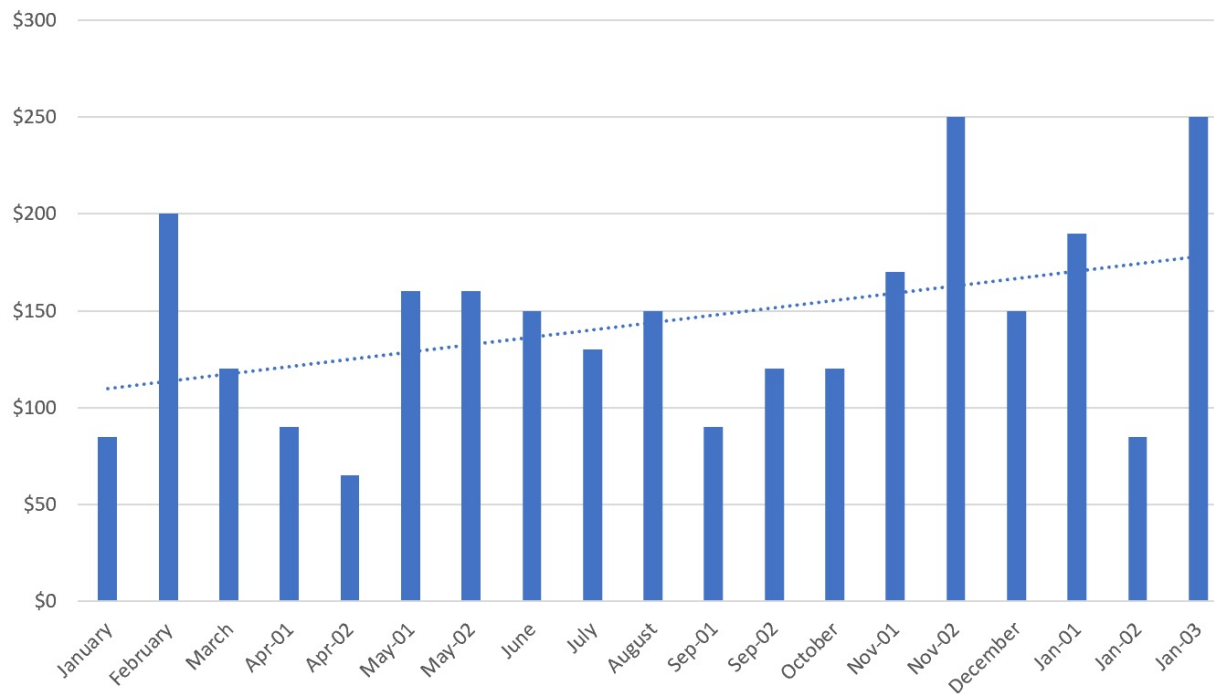
According to the LEGO Group's 2022 Annual Results, one of the most popular themes in 2022 was Icons. Icons is a broad theme that produces sets across a variety of subjects, from scale-model flowers to Chevrolet Corvettes to modular buildings. Icons also produces models from intellectual property partners, like Rivendell from The Lord of the Rings, the Ghostbusters' ECTO-1, Optimus Prime, or the DeLorean Time Machine from Back to the Future. One other line of sets produced under the Icons label are the remakes of the old sets. Unfortunately, this

does make analyzing the popularity of these sets somewhat difficult because the popularity of the theme may be due to the production of cultural icons unrelated to the LEGO Group's history. On the Best Sellers section on the LEGO Group's website there are 50 sets displayed as of early November 2023. Of those 50 sets, 13 are from Icons. Of those 13, only one is a remade set; 10305 Lion Knights' Castle. However, despite the set's \$399.99 price tag, it sports a perfect 5.0 rating based on user reviews.

In August 2022, LEGO released 40567 Forest Hideout as a GWP. The promotion ran from June 15 to June 22 at a price threshold of \$150. If one spent \$150 or more on lego.com during that time frame, a copy of the Forest Hideout would be provided free of charge, while supplies lasted. There was no other way to get the Forest Hideout besides buying it from a third-party reseller. The Forest Hideout would return as a GWP at the same threshold from August 2 to August 14 to coincide with the release of 10305 Lion Knights' Castle, another reimagined castle remake.

Jay Ong is a blogger who has been posting about LEGO since December 2011. The website is considered "Recognised LEGO Fan Media", meaning that it has been officially recognized by the LEGO Group and is part of the LEGO Ambassador Network, a worldwide group of devoted LEGO fans who have representation within the LEGO company through an ambassador. On January 17, 2023, he wrote an article titled "LEGO GWPS (GIFT WITH PURCHASE) ARE GETTING MORE EXPENSIVE, PROVEN BY GRAPHS AND DATA".

The article examines and graphs the prices of the various GWPs throughout 2022 and January of 2023. Below is a graph taken from the article.



It shows the trendline slowly increasing over the course of 2022 and into 2023. There are some things to note about the data. The GWP that was released in February 2022 was a taxi designed to complement 10297 Boutique Hotel, a larger set released at the same time. As such, the higher price threshold made some sense because it was meant to be purchased alongside an already expensive set. The other GWPs during the time were comparatively low in price but slowly increased. It should be noted that this graph only looks at 2022 and the beginning of 2023. However, there was a change in the style of GWPs offered starting in 2022. Previously, most GWPs were polybags. Polybags are LEGO sets that are packaged in a thin plastic bag. They usually contain less than 100 pieces and retail for around \$5 when sold separately. The key word here is “separately”. These GWP polybags were available elsewhere, they were just harder to find than other retail LEGO sets. 2022 saw a wide increase in larger, exclusive GWP sets packaged in cardboard boxes typical of normal retail sets.



Above are the box art for 6054 Forestmen's Hideout and the remade 40567 Forest Hideout. It is already clear that there are several similarities between the two boxes. For example, in the top left corner, there is a yellow band. On the original box, the text reads "LEGOLAND" and on the remake it says "Forest Hideout", but the aesthetic is the same. Likewise, both boxes share visually similar backgrounds. Both backgrounds feature rolling green hills with a bright yellow sky and an orange sun. The positioning of the set number and the LEGO logo are similar. The color blocking on the sets themselves are alike. The wood of the tree is black, the roof of the hideout is blue, and the base of the tower and the leaves about it are green. The box of the remake is very clearly designed to mimic the essence of its predecessor in this example of how intertextuality is being used to increase nostalgic feelings. In like fashion, the banner announcing the existence of the GWP was in a similar eye-catching bright yellow shade.

Get this Forest Hideout gift

Celebrate the LEGO Group's 90th anniversary with this tribute to the classic 1988 Forestmen's Hideout set from the Castle System. Comes with accessories and 2 minifigures. Receive this gift with LEGO® purchases of \$150 or more, valid 6/15-6/22 while supplies last.*

[Shop now >](#)

Here we can see that the GWP was only available from June 15 to June 22 2023 at the price threshold of \$150. It would later return the same year from August 2 to August 14 at the same price threshold. The set dominates half of the banner, sharing its appearance with the set's box art. The bright yellow of the background matches the 90 Years of Play logo in the bottom left corner, which itself matches the LEGOLAND banner that appears on the remade sets.



In like manner, 6894 Invader and 40580 Blacktron Cruiser are very visually similar, with similar backgrounds, product placement, and logo design. It becomes apparent that the box art and advertisements for these GWPs are intentionally designed to appear nostalgic and inviting; A chance to reopen one's childhood, provided that the necessary price threshold was met.

DISCUSSION

Through my research, it is clear that LEGO is using nostalgia and the fear of missing out more often in their marketing. Largely beginning with the celebration of the 90th anniversary of the company in 2022, LEGO began remaking classic sets and creating new sets inspired by those eras, both for normal retail and as GWPs.

From the examination of the GWPs, it can be seen how LEGO uses subject matter, art, and prior brand experience to evoke nostalgia in AFOLs in order to encourage them to purchase these GWPs. The limited time window and the AFOL community itself largely stoked the flames of FOMO when it came to some of these remade GWPs.

As shown in the outside research discussed earlier in this paper, nostalgia and FOMO are powerful forces when it comes to influencing a buyer's opinions. The LEGO Group is clearly not unaware of the power these two factors have on their marketing. The recurrence of these remade GWPs and their increasing prices hint that these GWPs have been successful for the LEGO Group, and that they will likely continue. It is important to note that I do not know exactly how successful these remade GWPs have been for LEGO. I assume that they have been successful based on the fact that they keep appearing. Another shortcoming comes in the simple fact that there have not been that many remade sets, GWP or not. These sets only began appearing in earnest in 2022 to celebrate the LEGO Group's 90th anniversary. As such, there is not that much data to look over. It remains to be seen how long this trend will continue for. This research paper could be repeated several years into the future to see what trends appeared.

As mentioned previously, as of 2023, the current age range most susceptible to nostalgic marketing according to Kamil Lubiński's research was born between 1984 and 1993. It makes sense that the coming waves of nostalgic sets will be from those eras. 6054 Forestmen's Hideout was originally released in 1988 and 6894 Invader in 1987. 40581 BIONICLE Tahu and Takua, mentioned at the beginning of this paper, was inspired by sets originally released in 2001. As of the writing of this paper, 6048 Majisto's Magical Workshop, which was originally released in 1993, is about to receive a remake in the form of 40601 Majisto's Magical Workshop. The

remake will be available as a GWP from November 18 to November 19 at a price threshold of \$250.

AFOLs are left with a difficult choice. They can continue purchasing these GWPs to satisfy their nostalgic cravings, but if demand continues to be high, thresholds will likely not decrease. If they vote with their wallets and refuse to buy these GWPs, LEGO may stop producing them, putting an end to any modern nostalgia. It appears that the LEGO Group is in an excellent position. Knowing how powerful nostalgia and FOMO are together, they can likely afford to continue this practice until demand for these remade sets fizzles out. However, it is highly likely that there will always be an ever-replenishing source of AFOLs who will be nostalgic for the sets they grew up with, so demand may never fizzle out.

Overall, using nostalgia and FOMO are marketing strategies that have proven themselves many times over, and they will likely be used many times in the future. The LEGO Group is one of the largest toy companies in the world. As such, their marketing practices can be and may have already been adopted by other toy companies that are old enough and popular enough to leverage nostalgia. Nostalgia is an ever-present experience, and FOMO can often get the better of us. Consumers must be aware of their emotional weaknesses in order to navigate business moves like these.

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