

Research Paper

The Time Web: Correlating Nostalgia, Procrastination and Time Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Late 20th century saw a shift in the understanding of nostalgia as geographical to focus on its temporal aspects. Last century witnessed a wave of research on nostalgia as well as procrastination focusing on their more positive impacts. Despite the strong temporal basis of both these phenomena, there exists only scarce, if not zilch, literature studying them together. Thus, this paper investigates possible associations between these routinely experienced phenomena and temporal orientations. The aim of the present study was to correlate the phenomena of nostalgia, procrastination and time perspective. Using Batcho's Nostalgia Inventory, Lay's General Procrastination Scale and brief measure of Zimbardo's Time Perspective Inventory, an online questionnaire was prepared to collect data from respondents of age group 17 to 21 years through convenience sampling technique. Results obtained through descriptive and inferential statistics reflected significant correlations of nostalgia with past positive, present fatalism and future time perspective as well as of procrastination with past positive and future time perspective. The correlations obtained have been interpreted in light of the similarities among the phenomena and previous researches. Further implications for this study have also been discussed with respect to their applications in therapeutic and educational settings, and the need for further research regarding their impacts across ages and cultures.

Keywords: *Correlation, Nostalgia, Procrastination, Time, Time Perspective*

Nostalgia

It was only in the later half of the 20th century that nostalgia was introduced to primarily oscillate along the temporal contingency. As discussed by Fred Davis (1979) in his paper, nostalgia was "form of a sentimental yearning of any object, event, or place in the past, rather than an emotional response to homesickness" (Davis, 1979). Holbrook, whose research on nostalgia revolved primarily around the market and consumerism intentions, along with Schindler, defined nostalgia as "a preference (general liking, positive toward objects (people, places, or things) that fashionable, or widely circulated) when one was in adolescence, in childhood, or even birth". He accordingly developed a 20-item inventory for measuring historical nostalgia which requires respondents

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to rate how much they prefer things from when they were young or even before they were born (Holbrook, 1993). Batcho's Nostalgia inventory (Batcho, 1995; 1998), a scale containing 20 items requiring respondents to rate on a 9-point scale how much they miss things from when they were younger emphasizes on personal nostalgia. Nostalgia was, in broader terms, an affective yearning or desire to go back to the bittersweet memories of the past. As explained by Davis, nostalgic memories structured in positive past memories are deemed to possess certain special idealized features when juxtaposed against the present. And, the negative past memories do not elicit an affect as intense as they may have been originally; instead, "the hurts, annoyances, disappointments and irritations, if they are permitted to intrude at all, are filtered forgivingly through an "it was all for the best" attitude..." (Davis, 1979).

Nostalgic memories have been repeatedly observed to be triggered by olfactory sensations which require less cognitive processing, taste, song lyrics, things/ objects/ places from one's past while loneliness, feeling of social exclusion, boredom, existential threats, perceived meaninglessness, discontinuity between past and present self, comprise the category of internal triggers of nostalgia (Sedikides, et al., 2015; Andersson, 2011).

Nostalgia has been categorized into two divisions- Personal and Historical nostalgia, also termed as true and social nostalgia by Davis (Davis, 1979). Personal nostalgia is the yearning for one's past lived by the self, whereas historical nostalgia refers to a preference for the way things were perhaps even before one was born. Real nostalgia, a type as suggested by Baker and Kennedy (1994), refers to the sentimental yearning, for the self-lived past, paralleling the view of personal nostalgia.

A self-oriented function of nostalgia hints towards its effect on self-positivity, thus, boosting self-esteem and, its relation to the perception of a positive future. Nostalgia has been attributed with a great role in providing individuals a sense of continuity, especially triggered during moments of changes in one's life (Sedikides, et al., 2015). From an existential perspective, nostalgia has been found to instil meaning in one's life and therefore, protect oneself from an existential threat elicited by the human knowledge of one's mortal existence. Another essential function of nostalgia has been observed in its role in facilitating social connectedness.

Procrastination

Within Psychology, failure of self-regulation is seen as procrastination (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996; Baumeister, Heatherton & Tice, 1994). Solomon & Ruthblum (1984) interpreted procrastination as a needless and volitional delay of an individual's intended course of action towards a task, resulting in potentially overall worse outcome to the point of experiencing subjective discomfort, despite anticipated negative consequences. Procrastination is defined as the irrational tendency to delay tasks that should be completed (Lay, 1986); Redundant postponement of activities that one ultimately intends to complete, done to the extent of creating emotional distress (Lay & Schouwenburg, 1993).

Procrastination has been measured using a range of self-report scales including the General Procrastination Scale by Lay (1986) which is used to measure general aspects of procrastination.

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Procrastination is a common experience and can be defined as purposive postponement or delay and avoidance of engaging in or starting a decision-making process or completing a task, to the extent of experiencing emotional distress or discomfort.

According to Steel (2007), procrastinators are less future oriented and more present oriented. Procrastination can result in substantial impairment in personal, occupation functioning and poor academic performance, depression, experiencing negative emotions such as guilt and shame, and ill health behaviours such as postponing seeking treatment or care for health problems (Ferrari, 2010; Steel, 2007; Sirois, Melia-Gordon & Pychyl, 2003).

Comparative analysis of time perspective in the subjects with different levels of procrastination indicated that subjects with high level of procrastination are more concentrated and focused on enjoyment and pleasure at the present moment, do not look at opportunities, future plans, goals, prospects and risks in future, are negative and pessimistic about their past, have helpless and hopeless attitude towards life (Zabelina, Chestyunina, Trushina, & Vedeneyeva, 2018).

Significant findings affirm that present oriented students procrastinate more than future oriented students (Bosato, 2001). Lack of purpose or meaning in life may induce procrastination and the tendency to structure one's time may lessen the probability to procrastinate (Vodanovich & Seib, 1997).

Research by Ferrari and Specter (2000) suggests that chronic procrastination has positive relation with past orientation and negative relation with future orientation and no relation with present time orientation. This showed that individuals fail at working on schedule and attend more to past accomplishments and less to future prospects and goals. They recall past events where their likelihood towards postponement resulted in successful task completion. Consistent with Lay (1988; 1990) research, women and men with behavioural and cognitive procrastination propensity account that they focus less on the future and more on the past.

Procrastination has been viewed as wasting valuable time for reasons such as apprehension and uncertainty of future and leading from failures with success and failures of the past. Hence, time perspective has been studied in relation to procrastination.

Time Perspective

Time Perspective refers to “the manner in which individuals and cultures partition the flow of human experience into distinct temporal categories of past, present and future.” (Zimbardo, Keough, & Bod, 1997, p 1008). Time perspective works as a schema, a mental framework of reference to the events of our life, providing coherence and meaning to our life and influencing a wide range of psychological processes (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999; Gonzalez & Zimbardo, 1985).

Individuals use mental frames of past, present and future in encoding, storing and recalling past events and forming future goals and expectations (Boyd & Zimbardo, 2005). The manner in which our decision-making process and behaviour is under the current influence of past experiences and future goals, is conceptualized as Time Perspective which also represents the way in which an individual relates to the psychological concept to past, present and future. Human behaviour, including procrastinating behaviour can be predicted by the stability of time perspective as characteristics of personality (Frank, 1939).

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Philip Zimbardo and his research group developed a scale to assess individual differences in time perception by carrying out case studies, surveys and repeated factor analysis. The Zimbardo Time Perspective inventory is subdivided into five temporal dimensions:

- **Past Negative**- Reflects a pessimistic, aversive and negative view of the past.
- **Past Positive**- Opposite to the first dimension, relates to warm, good natured, sentimental and positive longing for the past.
- **Present Hedonism**- Reflects a hedonistic, risk taking attitude towards life and time with little concern for future consequences.
- **Present Fatalism**- Shows a hopeless and helpless attitude towards life and incessant belief in 'fate' and 'luck' and not individual action that determines the present and future outcomes.
- **Future**- As a temporal dimension reflects an attitude and inclination towards future rewards and goals (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999).

The Present Study

Nostalgia and procrastination have become everyday refuge from the present conditions. It is curious how things from the past often seem ideal leading people to wish "those times" would come back when things seemed to be simpler. These memories often form the content of our procrastinating thoughts in face of anxiety-inducing situations and this sparks a curiosity to wonder if procrastinating tendency is related to nostalgic tendency. Moving across the continuum of time as consolidated by the categories of time perspective, these three phenomena become complexly intertwined.

From a research perspective, much similarity exists in the factors leading to the experience of both these phenomena such as fear of failure, fear of success, fear of rejection, unpleasant present conditions, anxiety, self-efficacy, feeling of hopelessness, as well as their effects on the self-esteem, emotions, motivation, coping, and general psychological well-being among others. Given the time contingency of nostalgia and procrastination, Zimbardo's categorization of time perspective helps understand this relation. Therefore, the present study investigates any possible association between the three phenomena, which may lead to revisit the possible impacts of the experience of these phenomena when combined.

Focusing on the temporal aspects of nostalgia and procrastination as two phenomena oscillating in the fluid dimension of time, the present study aims at determining the possible relationships between the three phenomena of nostalgia, procrastination and time perspective. Nostalgia has majorly been studied to have roots in the past and implications for the present and future while procrastination, a phenomenon with a variety of definitions, broadly suggests the tendency to delay any present task for the future. It is surprising that two phenomena with their theories so firmly rooted in time have never been explored in relation to one another. With both the phenomena having important and multiple implications for the present and future, it becomes imperative to study them in light of the five dimensions as given by Zimbardo in his theory of time perspective.

The following operational definitions have been taken into consideration for our study-

- Nostalgia is defined as "the longing for one's remembered past" (Stern, 1992).
- Procrastination is defined as the irrational tendency to delay tasks that should be completed (Lay, 1986).

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- Time Perspective is “a fundamental dimension in the construction of psychology that emerges from the cognitive processes that partitions the human experience into past, present and the future” (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999).

Our present research aims to assess the correlation between nostalgia, procrastination and time perspective, and interpret them in light of existing research. It was hypothesized that there will be significant correlations between nostalgia, procrastination and time perspective.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Convenience sampling method was used for the present research. Participants were aged between 17 to 21 years, the mean age of the participants being 18.80, so as to obtain correlations not influenced by the effect of age difference or generation gap on nostalgia, procrastination and time perspective. The sampled respondents comprised primarily of college students. A total of 184 respondents participated in the research study comprising of 69 male and 113 female respondents and 2 respondents who preferred not to mention their gender. Data was collected from respondents spread across different regions of India spanning all geographical directions thus covering diverse Indian cultures. Respondents varied in their educational affiliations.

Measures

The questionnaire consisted of the informed consent form assuring confidentiality, demographics sheet for recording the age, gender, educational qualification and affiliation, and the three suitable scales (one each for nostalgia, procrastination and time perspective), along with a feedback form. The following scales were selected based on the literature review for each phenomenon and the focus of the study:

Scale 1: Nostalgia

Nostalgia Inventory by K.I. Batcho (1995) is a 20-item inventory that requires respondents to rate on a 9-point scale (1 = not at all, 9 = very much) how much they miss things from when they were younger. It measures how often and how deeply people feel nostalgic. The inventory has been found to have internal consistency of 0.86 as measured by Cronbach's alpha (Batcho, DaRin, Nave, & Yaworsky, 2008).

Scale 2: Procrastination

General Procrastination Scale by Lay (1986) is a 20-item self-report questionnaire. Each item uses a 5-point Likert scale with 1= extremely uncharacteristic and 5= extremely characteristic. The scale consists of 10 reversed key items. The GPS has shown an internal consistency with alpha coefficient=0.82 (Lay, 1986).

Scale 3: Time Perspective

Zimbardo's Time Perspective Inventory is originally a 56-item scale. For the current study, a brief version of this inventory containing 15 items was used with three items dedicated to each of the five sub-categories for time perspective. The inventory used a 5-point Likert scale with 1= very untrue and 5= very true. The brief ZTPI has been found just as stable as the original ZTPI with mean retest reliability as 0.73 (Zhang, Howell, & Bowerman, 2013).

Procedure

The three scales, each for nostalgia, procrastination and time perspective were converted into Google form format along with a first display page asking for informed consent of the

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potential participants. Link to the online Google Form was circulated via social media platforms. Clear instructions for responding to the scales were provided.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the Google Forms were fed into the spreadsheet software in order to generate descriptive statistics for the collected data. SPSS (version) and spreadsheet software were used to statistically analyse data. Suitable tables were generated to present data for each measured variable. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to obtain the correlations between the three variables.

RESULTS

Table No. 1 Descriptive Statistics of the measured variables

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Nostalgia Inventory	117.359	27.103
General Procrastination Scale	60.272	11.434
Time Perspective		
Past Positive	11.902	2.798
Past Negative	11.011	3.286
Present Hedonism	10.924	2.367
Present Fatalism	9.141	2.907
Future	10.424	2.617

The mean and standard deviation for each variable is displayed in Table 1. As seen in Table 1, the mean obtained for scores on Nostalgia Inventory ($M=117.359$) is the highest. the mean obtained for scores on Present Fatalism Time Perspective ($M=9.141$) is the lowest. The standard deviation for Nostalgia Inventory is the highest ($SD= 27.103$) and the standard deviation for Present Hedonism Time Perspective ($SD= 2.367$) is the lowest.

Table No. 2 Correlations (Pearson's) obtained between variables of Nostalgia and Procrastination with categories of Time Perspective

	Time Perspective				
	Past Positive	Past Negative	Present Hedonism	Present Fatalism	Future
Nostalgia	.417**	.111	.015	.339**	.232**
General Procrastination	-.147*	.056	.127	.124	-.515*

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). $n=184$

The correlations obtained between Nostalgia and Time Perspective, and Procrastination and Time Perspective are displayed in Table 2. As seen in Table 2, the highest significant correlation was obtained between General Procrastination and Future Time Perspective ($r=-.515$, $p<0.05$). Lowest significant correlation was obtained between General Procrastination and Past Positive Time Perspective ($r=-.147$, $p<0.05$).

Table No. 3 Correlation (Pearson's) obtained between variables of Nostalgia and Procrastination

	General Procrastination
Nostalgia	-.101

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The correlation obtained between Nostalgia and Time Perspective is displayed in Table 3. As seen in Table 3, The obtained correlation between Nostalgia and Procrastination is negative and insignificant.

INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

The aim of the present research was to correlate the three phenomena of nostalgia, procrastination and time perspective. The study was conducted to find any relevant relations between them given the temporal aspect associated with each of these phenomena.

The results show an insignificant but negative correlation ($r = -.101$) between the phenomenon of nostalgia and procrastination. Both nostalgia and procrastination are common phenomena experienced by people with no significant differences between males and females (Wildschut, Sedikides, Routledge, & Arndt, 2006; Ferrari, 1993). Despite much similarity in the factors leading to the experience of both these phenomenon such as fear of failure, fear of success, fear of rejection, unpleasant present conditions, anxiety, lack of self-control, distractibility, self-efficacy, feeling of hopelessness or meaninglessness, as well as their effects on the self-esteem, emotions, motivation, coping, and general psychological well-being among others, the two time contingent phenomenon show insignificant negative correlation. Nostalgia is primarily a yearning for the past that is more often associated with redemption consequences (narrative follows from a negative life scene to a positive and triumphant one) while procrastination refers to delaying or postponing tasks that has been shown to follow contamination sequence (progression from a positive life scene to an affectively negative one) (Wildschut, Sedikides, Routledge, & Arndt, 2006). Therefore, while the two phenomena have relations to similar triggers and effects, the nature of these relations vary almost inversely in case of the nature of these impacts.

The obtained correlations between nostalgia and past negative and present hedonistic, albeit positive, were insignificant. Some studies have indicated the role of mood on the recollection of nature of memories (positive or negative). The negative past memories do not elicit an affect as intense as they may have been originally and are filtered forgivingly to be perceived in an idealized manner (Davis, 1979). Therefore, the insignificant correlation obtained between nostalgia and past negative time perspective does not imply absence of any relation between the two. Nostalgia, even by definition has been implicated to be primarily rooted in positive memories of the past which a person resort to in times of present uncertainty thereby implying its closer relations with past positive and present fatalistic time perspectives. This is evident in the significant positive correlations obtained for nostalgia with past positive ($r = .417$; $p < 0.01$) and with present fatalism ($r = .339$; $p < 0.05$).

Nostalgia has a major role in providing people with meaning to their life and deal with the existential threats through memories of the past. Nostalgia even in the context of existential threat has been related with the feeling of loss (Sedikides & Wildschut, Finding Meaning in Nostalgia, 2018). Nostalgia is situated in past to the extent that psychoanalysts propose it as a yearning to return to the mother's womb, the only place humans know as the state of absolute happiness (Nawas & Platt, 1965). The changes experienced by the individual in the present incites a feeling of loss and uncertainty thereby triggering nostalgic experience as an attempt towards stability and reducing the feeling of anxiety. Such helpless and changing times are often attributed to conditions or forces outside of one's own control such as fate or destiny. Resorting to positive memories from the past becomes a means of refuge from the uncontrollable present and the uncertain future.

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It is rather interesting that a temporal phenomenon situated so firmly in past displays a strong correlation with the future time perspective ($r = .232$; $p < 0.01$) as well. As noted by Nawas and Platt (1965), Zwingmann in his description of nostalgia mentions it as a response to not only the changes in the present but also to the anticipation of these changes. They also note that without an understanding of a person's goals, intentions and perceptions of the future, one cannot seek to understand their past and present. They thereby also propose nostalgia as triggered by fear of the future uncertainty (Nawas & Platt, 1965).

Our research indicates an insignificant negative correlation between procrastination with past positive ($r = -.147$; $p > 0.05$) and future time dimensions ($r = -.515$; $p > 0.05$). Albeit the results do not indicate any statistically significant correlation between procrastination and either present orientation, the obtained correlations unlike the correlations on past and future dimensions are positive. Unlike previous related researches, procrastination does not seem to be higher for present-oriented people.

Researches have shown that neglect of past experiences including failures is associated with motivational mechanism of procrastination (Buehler, Griffin, & McDonald, 1997), and may result in an avoidance response leading to postponement of work. Whereas a present-orientation may help a person to focus on completion of task (Van Eerde, 2003). This myopic temporal perspective can further accentuate procrastinating behaviour due to failure to develop a long-term perspective towards time implying failure of self-regulation (Ferrari, 2001), poor self-efficacy beliefs, low motivation, and low efficiency (Chu & Choi, 2005). According to a theory by Steele (2007) and research by Ferrari & Specter (2000) too, procrastination is less future-oriented.

Another interesting finding is the significant negative correlation between procrastination and past positive dimension in contrast to the insignificant positive correlation found between procrastination and past negative dimension. While negative previous experiences do not seem to influence procrastinating tendencies, people who do not place emphasis or focus on positive past memories seem to procrastinate more. This can be explained by the prevalence of higher procrastinating tendencies among people with lower self-efficacy beliefs and lower self-esteem.

Implications, Limitations and Future Directions of the Present Research

The present research explores possible relations between the phenomenon of nostalgia, procrastination and time perspective in Indian context.

Procrastination involves delaying of tasks, failing to meet deadlines leading to a chaotic time structure and associated consequences of anxiety, low self-esteem and accentuated fear of failure. Time orientation has been defined by Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) as “a non-conscious, continual flow of personal and social experiences assigned to temporal categories, or time frames, that help people give order, coherence, and meaning to these events” and can thus be useful when studied in relation to procrastination to provide an insight into the perception of time by procrastinators in comparison to non-procrastinators. This can help design relevant and effective interventions.

Effective time management techniques can be designed to encourage goal setting and increasing motivation towards achieving them. Increasing self-efficacy beliefs and helping

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people cope with fear of failure can help in reducing apprehensions and fear regarding future and thereby reduce procrastination tendencies.

As declared by Nawas & Platt (1965) for nostalgia and Schraw, Wadkins, & Olafson (2007) regarding procrastination, phenomenon as ubiquitous as these along with time perspective need further research especially in relation to each other to facilitate better coping mechanisms, interventions, academic programs, and therapies.

The obtained correlations cannot be used to attribute any causal relationship between these phenomena. The current research can be expanded with the use of qualitative methods and applied to samples of different ages and cultures.

CONCLUSION

The study shows significant relationship of nostalgia with past positive, present fatalism and future time perspectives. Procrastination was found to have significant relations with past positive and future dimensions. No significant relation was found between nostalgia and procrastination.

While personal nostalgia is highly situated in positive past memories and future orientations, general procrastination's negative relation with these two dimensions reflects on the conflicting nature of consequences of the two phenomena. Nostalgic content is primarily based in positive memories of the past as well as directed towards future orientation perhaps as a means of refuge from the uncontrollable fatalistic present.

Procrastination seems to be lower for people who perceive time through past positive or future orientation. Positive past memories, as in nostalgia as well, help foster optimistic approach, self-esteem and self-efficacy beliefs which lead towards determined action towards completion of tasks assigned. A future orientation gives people a long-term perspective involving possible negative consequences of postponing actions.

List of Abbreviations

1. M: Mean
2. SD: Standard Deviation
3. r: Coefficient Correlation
4. p: p-value

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Consent to participate

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Authors' contributions

Both the authors contributed to the conception and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation, and writing of the paper.

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