

The Role of Nostalgia in Advertising: Effects on Emotional Engagement and Purchase Intention

OTILIA-ELENA PLATON

Associate Professor Ph.D.

Faculty of Economics and Business Administration

“Nicolae Titulescu” University

185 Calea Văcărești, 4th District, Bucharest

ROMANIA

otiliaplanton@univnt.ro

Abstract: Nostalgia has become an increasingly important persuasive strategy in contemporary advertising, especially in a media environment marked by emotional saturation, fragmented attention and intense brand competition. This paper examines the role of nostalgia in advertising and its effects on emotional engagement and purchase intention. Drawing on specialized literature in consumer psychology, advertising and branding, the article argues that nostalgic appeals can strengthen consumer responses by activating autobiographical memory, positive affect, perceived authenticity and emotional connection with the brand. The paper also discusses real campaigns from brands such as Coca-Cola, Nintendo, Microsoft, Barbie and Spotify, showing how nostalgia can be used through retro aesthetics, childhood references, product relaunches, personalized memories and cultural symbols. A conceptual model is proposed in which nostalgia appeal influences emotional engagement, which in turn affects purchase intention. The paper also considers brand authenticity and consumer nostalgia proneness as moderating variables. The findings suggest that nostalgia can be highly effective when it is emotionally meaningful, culturally recognizable and consistent with brand identity. However, nostalgia may become ineffective or even counterproductive when used superficially or when it appears disconnected from the consumer's lived experience. The article concludes that nostalgia advertising is not simply a return to the past, but a strategic reconstruction of memory designed to create emotional relevance in the present.

Keywords: nostalgia advertising, emotional engagement, purchase intention, brand authenticity, consumer memory, retro marketing, advertising effectiveness.

1. Introduction

Advertising has always relied on emotion, but in the contemporary digital environment emotional differentiation has become even more important. Consumers are exposed to a constant flow of messages across social media, video platforms, search engines, streaming services, retail websites and mobile applications. In this context, brands increasingly seek communication strategies capable of creating immediate recognition, emotional resonance and long-term memorability. Nostalgia is one of these strategies.

This paper covers the role of nostalgia in advertising, with a specific focus on its effects on emotional engagement and purchase intention. Nostalgia is understood as a sentimental longing for the past, often connected to personal memories, childhood experiences, collective symbols, cultural moments or earlier stages in a consumer's life. In advertising, nostalgia can be activated through music, colors, packaging, slogans, celebrities, retro design, product relaunches, storytelling or references to previous decades.

The studied matter is important because nostalgia can transform advertising from a purely informational message into an emotionally charged experience. Consumers do not respond only to product attributes, price or functionality. They also respond to the feelings, identities and memories associated with brands. A nostalgic advertisement may remind consumers of family moments, childhood routines, past friendships, cultural icons or earlier media experiences. These emotional associations can increase attention, deepen engagement and strengthen purchase intention.

The author intends to answer this matter through a theoretical and applied analysis. The paper reviews specialized literature on nostalgia, emotional engagement and purchase intention, then integrates several real campaign examples. These examples are not treated as isolated marketing anecdotes, but as practical illustrations

of how nostalgia works in advertising. The paper also proposes a conceptual research model that can be tested empirically through surveys, experiments or structural equation modelling.

This article is related to existing specialized literature on nostalgia marketing, advertising effectiveness and consumer behavior. Previous studies have shown that nostalgia can influence attitudes toward advertisements, brand attitudes and purchase intentions (Muehling and Sprout, 2004; Merchant and Rose, 2013; Özhan and Akkaya, 2020). Research also suggests that nostalgic advertising may be particularly effective because it activates positive emotions, social connectedness and autobiographical memory. However, this paper contributes by linking nostalgia appeal, emotional engagement and purchase intention into a clear conceptual framework, while also discussing contemporary brand examples such as Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke", Nintendo's NES Classic Edition, Microsoft's "Child of the 90s", Barbie's 2023 marketing campaign and Spotify Wrapped.

2. Nostalgia as an Advertising Appeal

Theoretical perspectives suggest that nostalgia serves important psychological functions beyond simple remembrance. According to Davis (1979), nostalgia helps individuals maintain a sense of identity and continuity by connecting present experiences with meaningful elements of the past. Similarly, Wildschut et al. (2006) argue that nostalgia is a predominantly positive emotion that reinforces social connectedness, self-esteem and existential meaning. These functions help explain why nostalgia has become an effective advertising appeal. By activating personally or culturally significant memories, nostalgic advertisements can create an immediate sense of familiarity and relevance, allowing brands to establish emotional resonance more easily than purely informational messages.

Nostalgia is often described as a bittersweet emotional experience. It involves longing for the past, but not necessarily sadness. In many cases, nostalgia produces warmth, comfort, continuity and emotional security. In consumer behavior, nostalgia can be personal, referring to an individual's own past, or historical, referring to a period the consumer did not personally experience but perceives as culturally meaningful.

Advertising uses nostalgia by reconstructing the past in a selective and emotionally appealing manner. The past presented in advertising is rarely realistic in full detail. It is usually simplified, aestheticized and emotionally edited. Brands emphasize what is comforting, recognizable and desirable: childhood joy, family rituals, old music, retro packaging, familiar characters or cultural references. This perspective is consistent with Stern's (1992) distinction between personal nostalgia and historical nostalgia. Personal nostalgia refers to memories derived from an individual's direct experiences, while historical nostalgia involves longing for a period that may not have been personally experienced but is perceived as culturally desirable. Both forms can be strategically employed in advertising, depending on the characteristics of the target audience and the symbolic associations that brands seek to activate.

Nostalgia advertising may operate through several mechanisms. First, it captures attention because familiar symbols are easier to recognize and process. Second, it activates memory and emotion, making the advertisement more personally relevant. Third, it strengthens brand authenticity, especially when the brand has a long history or a recognizable heritage. Fourth, it may reduce perceived risk because consumers associate familiar brands or products with previous positive experiences.

For example, Coca-Cola has repeatedly used nostalgia through Christmas imagery, classic bottle design, sharing rituals and emotional storytelling. Its "Share a Coke" campaign replaced the Coca-Cola logo on bottles and cans with personal names or nicknames, encouraging people to create personal and social connections through a familiar product. Coca-Cola officially relaunched "Share a Coke" globally in 2025, explicitly connecting the campaign with Gen Z's search for authentic connection and the nostalgia of personalized cans.

This illustrates an important feature of nostalgia advertising: it does not always mean returning unchanged to the past. Instead, brands often update nostalgic concepts for a new generation. In Coca-Cola's case, a previously successful personalization campaign is reintroduced with digital tools, QR codes and shareable content, blending memory with contemporary media behavior.

3. Emotional Engagement in Nostalgia Advertising

Emotional engagement refers to the degree to which consumers feel emotionally involved, interested or connected with an advertisement or brand. It goes beyond simple attention. A consumer may notice an

advertisement without being emotionally engaged. Nostalgia increases the probability of emotional engagement because it connects the brand message with personally or culturally meaningful memories.

The role of emotional engagement in advertising can be understood through engagement theory, which views consumer engagement as a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimensions (Brodie et al., 2011). Within this framework, emotional engagement reflects the degree to which consumers experience affective involvement with a brand message. Advertising campaigns that evoke strong emotions are more likely to attract attention, generate favorable evaluations and stimulate subsequent behavioral responses.

When consumers encounter nostalgic advertising, they may experience warmth, happiness, comfort, longing, amusement or identification. These emotions can increase the time spent with the message, the likelihood of sharing it and the depth of brand processing. In digital environments, emotional engagement may appear through likes, comments, shares, saves, user-generated content, participation in challenges or conversations around the campaign.

The relationship between nostalgia and emotional engagement can also be explained through autobiographical memory theory. According to Holak and Havlena (1998), nostalgic experiences are strongly linked to emotionally significant memories and personal life narratives. When advertising activates these memories, consumers become more immersed in the message because the communication acquires personal relevance. As a result, nostalgic advertising often generates deeper emotional processing than messages focused exclusively on functional product attributes.

Microsoft's "Child of the 90s" campaign for Internet Explorer is a relevant example. The campaign targeted millennials by using objects and references from the 1990s, such as old toys, school supplies and early internet culture. Its objective was to reconnect users emotionally with a browser many had used earlier in life, at a time when Internet Explorer was losing relevance. The campaign attempted to transform an outdated product perception into a nostalgic identity cue: users were not only invited to reconsider a browser, but to remember who they were when they first used the internet.

The emotional logic of this campaign is important. Microsoft did not focus only on technical product features. Instead, it used generational memory as the persuasive hook. For consumers who grew up in the 1990s, the advertisement created recognition and emotional intimacy. The product became a symbol of personal history rather than merely a technological tool.

A similar mechanism can be observed in the Barbie movie marketing campaign. The 2023 campaign transformed Barbie into a cultural event by using nostalgia, pink visual identity, immersive experiences and broad brand partnerships. The campaign tapped into childhood memories while simultaneously repositioning Barbie as a contemporary cultural symbol. The Shorty Awards description of the campaign notes that it unfolded over an eight-month period and "tapped into nostalgia" while making Barbie omnipresent across physical and digital spaces.

Barbie demonstrates that nostalgia can work across generations. Older audiences may associate Barbie with childhood memories, while younger audiences may engage with the brand through memes, fashion, social media aesthetics and contemporary identity debates. Thus, nostalgia does not only preserve the past; it can reactivate a heritage brand within present cultural conversations.

From a psychological perspective, nostalgic advertising may also strengthen emotional engagement by fostering a sense of self-continuity. Belk (1990) suggests that possessions, brands and consumption experiences often become part of an individual's extended self. Consequently, brands associated with meaningful memories may evoke stronger emotional responses because they are perceived not merely as market offerings but as symbolic components of personal identity.

4. Nostalgia and Purchase Intention

Purchase intention refers to the consumer's likelihood or willingness to buy a product or service. In advertising research, purchase intention is often influenced by attitudes toward the advertisement, attitudes toward the brand, perceived value, trust, emotional response and social influence. Nostalgia may affect purchase intention by improving emotional attitude toward the advertisement and by strengthening the perceived bond with the brand.

The relationship between emotions and purchase intention has long been recognized in consumer behavior research. Rather than relying solely on rational evaluations, consumers frequently use emotional cues as heuristics when making purchase decisions. This perspective is reflected in the Affect Transfer Hypothesis,

which proposes that positive emotions generated by an advertisement can be transferred to evaluations of the advertised brand (Batra and Ray, 1986; MacKenzie et al., 1986). Consequently, advertisements that evoke nostalgic emotions may indirectly increase consumers' willingness to purchase by creating more favorable affective responses toward the brand.

The relationship between nostalgia and purchase intention can be explained through emotional transfer. When an advertisement evokes positive nostalgic feelings, those feelings may transfer to the advertised brand or product. Consumers may not only like the advertisement; they may also perceive the brand as warmer, more familiar and more trustworthy. This can increase the likelihood of purchase, especially when the product is connected to personal memory or cultural heritage.

Nintendo's NES Classic Edition is a strong example of nostalgia translated into purchase behavior. The product was a modern miniature version of the classic Nintendo Entertainment System, designed to evoke the collective memories of earlier gaming experiences. Research discussing Nintendo's nostalgic visual strategy notes that the NES Classic Edition Mini used the iconic symbol of the classic NES and tapped into gamers' collective memories.

In this case, nostalgia was not only an advertising appeal; it was embedded into the product itself. The design, games and user experience were all connected to memory. Consumers were invited to purchase not simply a gaming console, but a renewed access point to childhood or early gaming culture. This illustrates how nostalgia can increase purchase intention when the product offers an emotionally credible link to the past.

This mechanism is also consistent with the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). Within this model, nostalgia appeal represents an external stimulus that influences the consumer's internal emotional state, which subsequently affects behavioral outcomes such as purchase intention. Emotional engagement therefore acts as an intermediary psychological process through which nostalgic advertising exerts its persuasive influence.

Nostalgia may also influence purchase intention by reducing uncertainty. Familiar brands and retro products may be perceived as safer or more trustworthy because they are connected to previous positive experiences. This is particularly relevant in markets where consumers face too many choices. A nostalgic product can stand out because it already carries emotional meaning.

However, nostalgia does not automatically generate purchase intention. Its effectiveness depends on authenticity, target audience and brand fit. If the nostalgic reference feels artificial, opportunistic or irrelevant, consumers may reject it. Nostalgia must therefore be strategically aligned with the brand's history, product category and consumer expectations.

Previous empirical studies support this relationship. Muehling and Sprott (2004) found that nostalgia-based advertisements generate more favorable attitudes toward advertisements and brands, while Özhan and Akkaya (2020) reported that nostalgia proneness positively influences ad-evoked nostalgia, brand evaluations and purchase intention. These findings suggest that nostalgia can contribute to consumer decision-making not only through memory activation but also through the creation of positive affective associations that enhance brand attractiveness.

5. Brand Examples and Campaign Analysis

5.1 Coca-Cola: Personal Memory and Shared Rituals

Coca-Cola's use of nostalgia is deeply connected to rituals of sharing, family, friendship and celebration. The "Share a Coke" campaign personalized packaging by replacing the logo with names and nicknames. This strategy transformed a mass product into a personal object. Consumers were encouraged to search for their own names or the names of friends and family members, turning purchase into a social and emotional act.

The relaunch of "Share a Coke" in 2025 shows how nostalgia can be adapted to a digital generation. Coca-Cola described the campaign as a way for Gen Z to tap into the nostalgia of personalizing a can and to create authentic connection in a digital world. This demonstrates that nostalgia advertising can combine old emotional mechanisms with new technologies of sharing.

5.2 Nintendo: Retro Product Design and Collective Gaming Memory

Nintendo's NES Classic Edition illustrates product-based nostalgia. Instead of only using nostalgic imagery in advertising, Nintendo relaunched a product format strongly associated with earlier gaming culture.

This strategy appealed both to older consumers who had direct memories of the original console and younger consumers attracted by retro gaming aesthetics.

The nostalgic appeal was strengthened by the physical design of the console, the preloaded classic games and the symbolic value of Nintendo's heritage. In this case, emotional engagement was likely generated by memory, playfulness and identity: purchasing the console meant reconnecting with a formative entertainment experience.

5.3 Microsoft: Generational Nostalgia and Brand Reconsideration

Microsoft's "Child of the 90s" campaign used nostalgia as a repositioning tool. Internet Explorer had become associated with outdated technology, but the campaign tried to reframe it as part of the emotional history of the millennial generation. By showing familiar 1990s objects and cultural references, the campaign aimed to create warmth around a brand that had lost cultural relevance.

This example shows that nostalgia can be used not only to sell products, but also to repair or soften brand perception. However, nostalgia alone may not be enough if the product experience does not meet contemporary expectations. Emotional engagement can open the door, but product performance remains essential for long-term conversion.

5.4 Barbie: Nostalgia, Cultural Relevance and Omnichannel Engagement

The Barbie movie campaign represents a large-scale example of nostalgia integrated with contemporary cultural marketing. The campaign used the historical familiarity of Barbie while expanding the brand into fashion, entertainment, social media, immersive spaces and partnerships. Its visual identity, especially the use of pink, acted as an immediate nostalgic and cultural signal.

The campaign's success was partly based on the fact that Barbie already had strong memory associations. Many consumers had personal childhood experiences with the brand. The marketing strategy reactivated these memories while also making Barbie relevant to contemporary debates about identity, femininity and popular culture. The campaign's official awards description emphasizes both nostalgia and the ambition to make Barbie omnipresent across digital and physical spaces.

5.5 Spotify Wrapped: Personalized Nostalgia and Digital Self-Memory

Spotify Wrapped is not traditional nostalgia advertising in the retro sense, but it uses a contemporary form of personal nostalgia. Each year, users receive a personalized summary of their listening habits, transforming recent consumption data into emotional memory. The campaign encourages users to reflect on who they were during the past year through music and audio choices.

Spotify Wrapped shows that nostalgia does not always refer to distant decades. It can also refer to the recent personal past. The emotional power comes from self-recognition: users see their tastes, moods and routines transformed into shareable identity content. Marketing analyses frequently describe Wrapped as effective because it combines personalization, emotional connection and social sharing.

6. Proposed Conceptual Model

Based on the literature reviewed and the practical examples discussed throughout this paper, a conceptual model is proposed to explain the mechanism through which nostalgia advertising influences consumer behavior. The model positions nostalgia appeal in advertising as the independent variable, emotional engagement and brand attitude as the mediating variables, and purchase intention as the dependent variable. In addition, the model incorporates brand authenticity, consumer nostalgia proneness, product-brand fit, and generational relevance as moderating variables that may strengthen or weaken the proposed relationships. The moderating variables could play a role on the following relations:

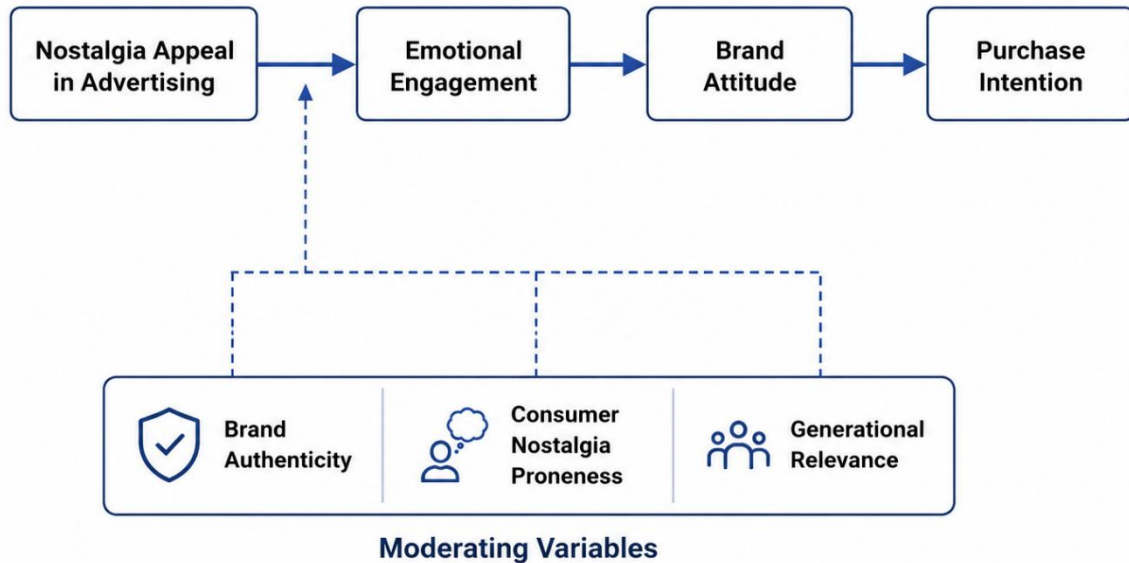
- Brand Authenticity influences the relation Nostalgia Appeal → Emotional Engagement.
- Consumer Nostalgia Proneness influences the relation Nostalgia Appeal → Emotional Engagement.
- Generational Relevance influences the relation Nostalgia Appeal → Emotional Engagement.
- Product-Brand Fit influences the relation Nostalgia Appeal → Purchase Intention.

The logic of the model is grounded in the broader tradition of advertising effectiveness research, particularly the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). According to this perspective, marketing stimuli influence consumers' internal cognitive and emotional states,

which subsequently shape behavioral responses. Within the context of nostalgia advertising, the nostalgic appeal functions as the stimulus, emotional engagement represents the internal emotional state of the consumer, and purchase intention constitutes the behavioral outcome. This theoretical lens suggests that consumers do not respond directly to nostalgic cues merely because they recognize them; rather, such cues first activate emotional processes that influence subsequent consumption-related decisions.

The proposed model is also consistent with the Affect Transfer Hypothesis, which argues that emotions generated by an advertisement can be transferred to the advertised brand, thereby influencing consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions. When nostalgic advertising evokes feelings such as warmth, comfort, belonging, happiness, or sentimental reflection, these emotions may become associated with the brand itself. As a result, consumers may evaluate the brand more positively and become more inclined to purchase its products or services.

Figure 1. The proposed conceptual model



The model can be translated into the following hypotheses:

- H1:** Nostalgia appeal in advertising has a positive effect on emotional engagement.
- H2:** Emotional engagement has a positive effect on brand attitude.
- H3:** Brand attitude has a positive effect on purchase intention.
- H4:** Emotional engagement mediates the relationship between nostalgia appeal and brand attitude.
- H5:** Brand attitude mediates the relationship between emotional engagement and purchase intention.
- H6:** Emotional engagement and brand attitude jointly mediate the relationship between nostalgia appeal and purchase intention.
- H7:** Brand authenticity positively moderates the relationship between nostalgia appeal and emotional engagement, such that the relationship is stronger when perceived brand authenticity is high.
- H8:** Consumer nostalgia proneness positively moderates the relationship between nostalgia appeal and emotional engagement, such that the relationship is stronger for consumers with higher levels of nostalgia proneness.
- H9:** Product-brand fit positively moderates the relationship between nostalgia appeal and purchase intention, such that the relationship is stronger when consumers perceive a high degree of fit between the nostalgic appeal and the advertised product or brand.
- H10:** Generational relevance positively moderates the relationship between nostalgia appeal and emotional engagement, such that the relationship is stronger when the nostalgic cues are perceived as relevant to the consumer's generational experiences.

At the center of the model lies the assumption that nostalgia appeal positively influences emotional engagement. Consumers exposed to nostalgic advertising are more likely to feel emotionally connected to the advertisement and the brand. Emotional engagement then increases purchase intention by strengthening positive attitudes, perceived familiarity and emotional attachment. This relationship is supported by research indicating that nostalgic memories are emotionally rich and often connected to personally meaningful experiences, social relationships, and identity construction (Wildschut et al., 2006). Nostalgic advertisements activate autobiographical memories and encourage consumers to mentally revisit significant moments from their past.

Such memory activation increases the personal relevance of the advertising message, making consumers more emotionally involved in the communication process. Rather than processing the advertisement solely as commercial information, consumers experience it as a symbolic reminder of meaningful life experiences.

The mediating role of emotional engagement is particularly important because nostalgia alone may not be sufficient to influence behavioral outcomes. Exposure to nostalgic elements does not automatically generate purchase intentions unless consumers become emotionally connected to the message. Emotional engagement serves as the psychological mechanism through which nostalgic stimuli are translated into consumer responses. This perspective aligns with contemporary engagement theory, which views emotional involvement as a critical antecedent of brand relationships, consumer loyalty, and purchase behavior. Highly engaged consumers tend to pay greater attention to marketing communications, develop stronger attitudes toward brands, and demonstrate increased willingness to support brands through purchasing and advocacy behaviors.

Brand attitude is an additional mediator because many nostalgia advertising studies (e.g., Muehling & Sprott, 2004; Merchant & Rose, 2013) show that nostalgia first improves attitudes toward the advertisement and the brand, which then influence purchase intention.

The relationship between emotional engagement and purchase intention can also be explained through theories of emotional decision-making. Consumer decisions are rarely based exclusively on rational evaluations of product attributes. Instead, emotional experiences frequently influence judgments of value, trust, and desirability. When nostalgia generates positive emotional engagement, consumers may perceive the advertised brand as more familiar, authentic, and psychologically comforting. These perceptions reduce emotional distance between the consumer and the brand, thereby increasing the likelihood of purchase.

The model further proposes that brand authenticity moderates the relationship between nostalgia appeal and emotional engagement. Nostalgia is more effective when consumers believe the brand has a legitimate connection to the past it references. Authenticity has become an increasingly important concept in branding literature because consumers are often skeptical of persuasive communication attempts. Nostalgic appeals are likely to be more effective when consumers perceive the brand as having a legitimate historical connection to the memories, traditions, or cultural symbols being referenced. Heritage brands such as Coca-Cola, Nintendo, or LEGO possess an established history that allows nostalgic narratives to appear credible and meaningful. Conversely, when a brand adopts nostalgic themes without a genuine connection to the referenced past, consumers may perceive the appeal as opportunistic or manipulative, reducing its emotional effectiveness.

Another important moderator is consumer nostalgia proneness, defined as an individual's tendency to experience nostalgic feelings and derive psychological satisfaction from reminiscing about the past. Research has consistently demonstrated that individuals differ in their susceptibility to nostalgic experiences (Muehling and Sprott, 2004; Özhan and Akkaya, 2020). Consumers with high nostalgia proneness are more likely to engage emotionally with nostalgic advertising because they naturally enjoy recalling personal memories and reflecting on previous life stages. For these consumers, nostalgic cues may trigger stronger emotional reactions and deeper psychological involvement than for individuals who are less nostalgic by nature.

The model also incorporates product-brand fit as a moderator influencing the relationship between nostalgia appeal and purchase intention. Product-brand fit refers to the perceived consistency between the nostalgic message and the characteristics of the advertised product or brand. The effectiveness of nostalgia depends not only on the emotional power of the appeal but also on its perceived relevance. Certain product categories, such as food, beverages, toys, entertainment products, fashion items, and heritage brands, possess natural connections to memory and personal experience. In these contexts, nostalgia may strengthen purchase intention because consumers perceive a logical and meaningful relationship between the past-oriented message and the product itself. When such fit is absent, consumers may struggle to understand the relevance of nostalgic references, reducing the persuasive impact of the advertisement.

Finally, the model recognizes the moderating role of generational relevance. Nostalgia is inherently linked to temporal experience, meaning that different generations associate nostalgia with different cultural symbols, technologies, media experiences, and social contexts. A campaign built around 1990s popular culture may evoke strong emotional reactions among millennials but may have limited impact on younger consumers who lack direct experience with that period. Similarly, Generation Z may respond more positively to references associated with early social media platforms, childhood digital experiences, or cultural phenomena from the 2000s and early 2010s. Generational relevance therefore influences the extent to which nostalgic cues are recognized, interpreted, and emotionally experienced.

Taken together, the proposed conceptual model suggests that nostalgia advertising operates primarily through emotional mechanisms rather than purely cognitive evaluations. The model extends previous research

by integrating nostalgia appeal, emotional engagement, and purchase intention within a single explanatory framework while acknowledging the boundary conditions that determine advertising effectiveness. By incorporating moderators related to authenticity, individual predispositions, brand-product congruence, and generational experience, the model recognizes that nostalgic advertising does not affect all consumers equally. Instead, its effectiveness depends on a complex interaction between advertising content, brand characteristics, and consumer-specific factors.

The proposed framework provides a foundation for future empirical investigation and offers opportunities for testing both direct and indirect effects through structural equation modelling. Such an approach would contribute to a deeper understanding of how nostalgia functions as a strategic advertising tool in contemporary consumer markets and under which conditions it is most likely to generate meaningful behavioral outcomes.

7. Methodological Direction for Future Research

Future empirical research could test this model through an experimental design. Participants could be exposed to two types of advertisements: one nostalgic and one non-nostalgic. After exposure, they could complete a questionnaire measuring emotional engagement, attitude toward the advertisement, attitude toward the brand, perceived authenticity and purchase intention.

A second possible method would be a survey-based study. Respondents could be asked to evaluate real nostalgic campaigns such as Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke", Nintendo's NES Classic Edition, Microsoft's "Child of the 90s" or Barbie's 2023 campaign. The survey could measure nostalgia intensity, emotional engagement, brand authenticity, purchase intention and demographic variables such as age and generational cohort.

Structural equation modelling could be used to test the mediating role of emotional engagement and the moderating effects of brand authenticity and nostalgia proneness. Qualitative interviews could also provide insight into how consumers interpret nostalgic symbols and whether they perceive them as authentic or manipulative.

This methodological approach would allow researchers to move beyond the assumption that nostalgia "works" and instead identify when, why and for whom nostalgia advertising is effective.

8. Discussion

The analysis suggests that nostalgia advertising is powerful because it connects brands with memory, identity and emotion. In an advertising environment dominated by speed, novelty and algorithmic targeting, nostalgia offers a different kind of value: emotional continuity. It reminds consumers of who they were, what they loved and which brands accompanied meaningful moments in their lives.

However, nostalgia advertising must be used carefully. The most effective nostalgic campaigns are not simple copies of the past. They reinterpret the past for the present. Coca-Cola updates personalization through digital sharing. Nintendo reintroduces classic gaming through a modern compact device. Barbie transforms childhood brand memory into a contemporary cultural event. Spotify turns personal data into yearly emotional reflection.

The danger of nostalgia advertising lies in superficiality. Retro colors, old logos or vintage music are not enough if the campaign lacks emotional relevance. Consumers can recognize when nostalgia is used as a decorative trend rather than as a meaningful brand strategy. This is why authenticity and product-brand fit are essential.

Another important aspect is generational targeting. Nostalgia is not universal. Different generations are nostalgic for different symbols, media, objects and cultural moments. Millennials may respond strongly to 1990s references, while Gen Z may feel nostalgia for early social media, childhood games, YouTube culture or 2000s aesthetics. Brands must therefore understand not only the past, but the consumer's relationship to that past.

Finally, nostalgia advertising can influence purchase intention because it reduces emotional distance between consumer and brand. A nostalgic advertisement can make a product feel familiar before it is bought. It can also make the act of purchase feel like participation in a memory, a community or a personal story.

In addition, nostalgia advertising can also function as a mechanism of differentiation in an increasingly saturated competitive environment, where many brands communicate similar messages focused on innovation and performance. By activating autobiographical memory, brands are able to create a deeper connection than

simple exposure to an advertising message, as consumers do not merely process information but relate it to their own lived experiences. This reactivation of personal memory can increase both attention and message retention, thereby enhancing the long-term effectiveness of the campaign. At the same time, this type of communication can contribute to strengthening brand loyalty, as consumers tend to associate nostalgic brands with stability, continuity, and trust in a world perceived as rapidly changing.

9. Conclusions

This paper examined the role of nostalgia in advertising and its effects on emotional engagement and purchase intention. The main outcome is that nostalgia can be a highly effective advertising appeal when it activates meaningful memories, creates emotional engagement and reinforces brand authenticity. Nostalgic campaigns can increase purchase intention by making brands feel familiar, emotionally relevant and culturally significant.

The expected impact of this research is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, the paper contributes to advertising and consumer behavior literature by proposing a model in which emotional engagement mediates the relationship between nostalgia appeal and purchase intention. Practically, the paper suggests that brands can use nostalgia to build emotional connection, but only when nostalgic elements are authentic, audience-relevant and consistent with the brand's identity.

Further research should empirically test the proposed model across different product categories, generations and cultural contexts. Future studies could compare personal nostalgia with collective nostalgia, examine differences between retro packaging and nostalgic storytelling, and investigate how digital platforms transform nostalgia into shareable content. More research is also needed on the risks of nostalgia advertising, especially when consumers perceive campaigns as manipulative, outdated or culturally insensitive.

In conclusion, nostalgia in advertising is not simply about looking backward. It is about using the emotional power of memory to create relevance in the present. When used strategically, nostalgia can transform advertising into a bridge between past experience, present emotion and future purchase behavior.

References:

- [1] Batra, R. and Ray, M.L. (1986). 'Affective responses mediating acceptance of advertising', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 13(2), pp. 234–249.
- [2] Belk, R.W. (1990) 'The role of possessions in constructing and maintaining a sense of past', *Advances in Consumer Research*, 17, pp. 669–676.
- [3] Brodie, R.J., Hollebeck, L.D., Juric, B. and Ilić, A. (2011). 'Customer engagement: Conceptual domain, fundamental propositions, and implications for research', *Journal of Service Research*, 14(3), pp. 252–271.
- [4] Coca-Cola Company (2025) 'Iconic "Share a Coke" is back for a new generation'.
- [5] Coca-Cola Europacific Partners (2025) 'Get to know Coca-Cola's iconic Share a Coke campaign'.
- [6] Davis, F. (1979) *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*. New York: Free Press.
- [7] Holak, S.L. and Havlena, W.J. (1998) 'Feelings, fantasies, and memories: an examination of the emotional components of nostalgia', *Journal of Business Research*, 42(3), pp. 217–226.
- [8] Hollebeck, L.D. (2011). 'Demystifying customer brand engagement: Exploring the loyalty nexus', *Journal of Marketing Management*, 27(7–8), pp. 785–807.
- [9] MacKenzie, S.B., Lutz, R.J. and Belch, G.E. (1986). 'The role of attitude toward the ad as a mediator of advertising effectiveness: A test of competing explanations', *Journal of Marketing Research*, 23(2), pp. 130–143.
- [10] Merchant, A. and Rose, G.M. (2013) 'Effects of advertising-evoked vicarious nostalgia on brand heritage', *Journal of Business Research*, 66(12), pp. 2619–2625.
- [11] Mehrabian, A. and Russell, J.A. (1974). *An Approach to Environmental Psychology*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- [12] Muehling, D.D. and Sprott, D.E. (2004) 'The power of reflection: an empirical examination of nostalgia advertising effects', *Journal of Advertising*, 33(3), pp. 25–35.
- [13] Özhan, Ş. and Akkaya, D.T. (2020) 'The effect of nostalgia proneness on ad-evoked nostalgia, attitude and purchase intention', *İşletme Araştırmaları Dergisi / Journal of Business Research-Turk*, 12(4), pp. 380–390.
- [14] Stern, B.B. (1992) 'Historical and personal nostalgia in advertising text: the fin de siècle effect', *Journal of Advertising*, 21(4), pp. 11–22.
- [15] The Shorty Awards (2024) 'Barbie The Movie Marketing Campaign'.
- [16] Wildschut, T., Sedikides, C., Arndt, J. and Routledge, C. (2006) 'Nostalgia: content, triggers, functions', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 91(5), pp. 975–993.