

Original Article

Nostalgia Narrative: A Review on Emotional Appeals and Consumer Behaviour

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ABSTRACT: *This review examines how advertising leverages personal and collective nostalgia to drive consumer behavior, brand loyalty, and market engagement. Synthesizing historical timelines and recent empirical studies from 2022–2025, the text shows that nostalgic appeals enhance memory retention by 1.8x and raise repeat purchase intent by 12%. The cognitive pathways convert retro stimuli into favorable brand attitudes via mechanisms like self-continuity and social connectedness. However, performance boundaries exist: 51.1% of consumers exhibit strict price sensitivity when assessing high-priced nostalgic products. Ultimately, nostalgic marketing acts as an emotional anchor that effectively bridges generation gaps.*

KEYWORDS: *Nostalgia Marketing, Consumer Behaviour, Self-Continuity, Brand Recall, Price Sensitivity.*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. THE FUNDAMENTAL NATURE OF ADVERTISING

Advertising is defined as the strategic process of promoting products or brands through various methods designed to capture the attention of potential customers. The ultimate objective is to showcase the specific benefits, features, and utility of a brand. Beyond immediate sales, advertising serves a dual purpose: it acts as a tool for educating the public on various viewpoints or causes and functions as a long-term investment in shaping brand narratives. Effective advertising utilizes audience segmentation and ad placement optimization to maximize engagement levels across multiple channels.

1.2. THE EVOLUTION OF MEDIA: TELEVISION AND BEYOND

Television advertising has traditionally served as the cornerstone of mass-scale marketing due to its unparalleled reach and influential nature. It leverages a combination of visual and auditory capabilities—moving images, sound, and text—to provide a distinctive and immersive experience for targeted audiences. While digital platforms have emerged, the characteristic high production values and creative storytelling of TV commercials continue to set the benchmark for viewer engagement and brand credibility.

1.3. THE STRATEGIC SHIFT TO EMOTIONAL APPEAL

Modern advertising has shifted from purely informational content to emotional strategies aimed at building deep connections with consumers. These emotions range from joy and love to fear and nostalgia. The primary goal is to trigger an emotional response that acts as a long-term bridge between the brand and the consumer. Research indicates that emotional appeals have approximately a 31% success rate in advertising, often proving more effective than logic in driving consumer behavior.

1.4. THE TIMELINE OF NOSTALGIA IN INDIA

The application of nostalgic elements can be divided into three transformative periods:

- The Foundation (1970s – 1980s): This era was defined by "sonic nostalgia," where audio branding took center stage. Memorable jingles like Nirma's washing powder theme and Amul's witty topical illustrations laid down a foundation of brand equity that remains intact decades later.
- The Television Revolution (1990s): As the Indian economy opened up, commercials became cultural milestones. Ads like Dhara's "Jalebi" kid and the Liril waterfall sequence were not nostalgic at the time of broadcast; rather, they became the sentimental benchmarks that today's advertisers use as reference points.
- The Digital retro movement (2010s – Present): Modern brands now intentionally mine the past to secure future consumer commitment. Paper Boat successfully commoditized childhood memories, while Cadbury refreshed its classic 1994 "Asli Swad Zindagi Ka" cricket commercial with a modern, gender-swapped perspective in 2021.

1.5. NOTABLE CAMPAIGNS

TABLE 1 Nostalgia-Driven Campaigns

Brand	Creative concept	Psychological trigger
Paper Boat	"Drinks and Memories"	Childhood play (paper boats, kites) paired with Gulzar's nostalgic narration.

Cadbury	"Kuch Khaas Hai" Remake	A tribute to the 1994 stadium dance, updated to reflect contemporary social progress.
Maggi	"Welcome Back"	Leveraged the intense "missing" sentiment during the brand's 2015 market return.
Google	"The Hero"	A narrative focusing on cinematic dreams and family legacies from the 1960s.
Ambuja Cement	"Chhat Pe Milte Hain"	Focuses on the "terrace culture" of Indian homes as a space for kites and family bonding.

1.6. MEASURED IMPACT AND SUCCESS METRICS

Data from 2024–2025 emphasizes the tangible benefits of nostalgic marketing in India:

- Superior memory retention: Campaigns utilizing nostalgia see a 1.8x increase in brand recall over traditional advertising.
- Millennial engagement: Roughly 61% of Millennials indicate that nostalgic themes positively shift their brand perception and likelihood to buy.
- Willingness to spend: Consumers are frequently open to paying a 10-15% premium for goods that trigger positive personal memories.
- Authenticity scores: Approximately 70% of consumers view nostalgic ads as more "genuine," helping brands connect across diverse age groups, from Gen X to Gen Z.

1.7. THE CULTURAL RESONANCE OF NOSTALGIA IN INDIA

The unique effectiveness of this strategy in India is rooted in several local factors:

- Shared experiences: The prevalence of joint families and common traditions (festivals, sports, snacks) makes nostalgia a powerful, universal communication tool.
- Psychological comfort: In an age of rapid digital change and economic shifts, these ads serve as "emotional anchors," offering consumers a sense of familiarity and peace.
- Legacy and trust: For heritage brands like Coca-Cola or Parle-G, revisiting the past is seen as an authentic celebration of their history rather than a marketing gimmick, deepening long-term consumer trust.

1.8. CLASSIFICATIONS OF EMOTIONAL APPEALS

Emotional advertising is categorized by the specific psychological state it intends to evoke in the viewer:

- Happiness and Joy: These are common and highly effective appeals that spread positivity and create a spark of "feel-good" association with the brand.
- Sadness and Empathy: These appeals build a strong emotional connection by encouraging the consumer to feel empathy toward a cause or situation.
- Fear and Anger: While tricky, fear is incredibly effective at stimulating consumers to avoid danger or negative impacts. Anger is often utilized to promote action against social injustices.
- Humor: This serves as an entertainment-focused method to engage the target audience and lighten the mood, fostering positive brand associations.

1.9. THE POWER OF NOSTALGIC APPEAL

Nostalgia is defined as a positive emotion derived from remembering past memories, childhood experiences, or "olden days".

- Mechanisms of action: Nostalgia works by reintroducing legacy visuals, retro music, and pop culture cues to revisit iconic campaigns with a modern twist.
- Social connectedness: It connects people through shared cultural moments and family/friend associations.
- Quantitative impact: Nostalgic advertisements have been found to increase repeat purchase intent by 12% and achieve 1.8x higher recall rates compared to non-nostalgic ads.
- Ambivalence and context: Recent research highlights that nostalgic ads are most effective in group settings or low-crowding environments, whereas their impact may disappear in high-crowding situations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW: STRATEGIC VALUE OF NOSTALGIA IN CONSUMER MARKETING

Nostalgia, traditionally defined through an analytical lens of past memories, personal yearning, and ambivalent or bittersweet emotions, has transitioned from a purely psychological phenomenon into a highly effective tool for modern corporate communication. Across industries ranging from fast-moving consumer goods and fashion to national branding initiatives marketers rely on retro-focused campaigns to navigate increasingly saturated media environments.

The collective literature demonstrates that nostalgia functions along two primary axes: personal nostalgia, which targets an individual's unique autobiographical memories and childhood markers, and historical or collective nostalgia, which leverages a

shared generational or societal past. When triggered by strategic advertising, these distinct dimensions generate structural changes in consumer brand attitude, self-concept, and final purchase intentions.

2.1. CORE THEMATIC SYNTHESSES

2.1.1. EXPLANATORY FRAMEWORKS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

The internal cognitive pathways that convert nostalgic stimuli into behavioral intent are largely driven by variables linked to self-identity and emotional balance.

- **Self-Continuity:** A critical mechanism underlying effective retro-advertising is its capacity to reinforce a consumer's sense of personal history. Research by Kumar et al. (2025) highlights that advertising-induced nostalgia directly improves a person's "perceived continuity of self," which subsequently triggers a direct positive shift in brand attitudes and buying intentions. This concept links to the core theoretical pillars identified by Srivastava et al. (2022), who position self-restoration and continuity as fundamental themes that make nostalgic ads successful.
- **Mediating Affective States:** Processing these messages often relies on highly complex emotional paths. Using the Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM), Koh (2023) demonstrates that personal nostalgia works because it evokes a unique combination of mixed thoughts and mixed emotions, which serve as direct precursors to favorable ad attitudes and purchase intentions.

2.1.2. SOCIETAL, CULTURAL, AND ALIENATION DRIVERS

When moving from individual consumers to broader groups, nostalgia behaves as a protective psychological coping mechanism against contemporary societal stress.

- **The Role of Alienation:** Zhang et al. (2022) establish that group-based "collective nostalgia" is strongly predicted by real-world stressors, including relative deprivation, social alienation, interpersonal alienation, and environmental alienation. Interestingly, broader cultural or historical discontinuities do not demonstrate a statistically significant effect on driving this emotion.
- **National Consciousness:** Once collective nostalgia is activated, it positively shifts national brand consciousness. This specific transition is mediated by personal, social, and collective identities. Furthermore, as overall social emotion improves, the positive impact of social and collective identity on domestic brand favorability grows even stronger.
- **Humour as a competitive tool in Indian Insurance advertising:** Advertising in the financial services sector - specifically the insurance industry - has traditionally relied on serious, risk-averse, and security-focused messaging. However, as the Indian insurance market has evolved into a highly competitive landscape with 29 general insurance players and over two dozen life insurers, companies are increasingly forced to explore alternative marketing strategies. Within this context, Kanagarathinam, Ramakrishnan Lalitha, and Krishnamacharyulu (2017) investigate an unconventional creative paradigm in a traditionally risk-averse sector: the application of humor in insurance advertising.

2.1.3. CONTEXTUAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC MODERATION

The literature proves that nostalgia does not influence all demographics or product categories uniformly; its success is highly dependent on situational context.

- **Product Context (Public vs. Private):** Message types must match the social nature of the item being sold. Koh (2023) demonstrates that when marketing a *public product* (an item seen or shared with others), personal nostalgia appeals generate substantially higher purchase intentions than generic historical nostalgia appeals.
- **The Aging Demographic:** Older consumers represent a uniquely receptive segment for retro-focused campaigns. Lin and Wang (2025) note that in aging societies, older adults actively look to stay connected with the "good old days" to surface happy memories. Consequently, older adults evaluate advertisements featuring nostalgic appeals much more favorably than non-nostalgic alternatives. Crucially, this relationship is heavily moderated by the individual's self-rated health status and baseline level of happiness.
- **Generational Skepticism:** While older populations may be highly receptive, younger cohorts (such as the 20–30 age group) still display a remarkably positive baseline toward nostalgia marketing. Rasika and Janani (2025) confirm through variance analysis ($p = .359$) that there are no statistically significant generational differences regarding the perceived manipulative intent of retro-campaigns. Consumers across age groups view these strategies as "innovative but rooted in tradition" rather than deceptively exploitative.

2.1.4. STRUCTURAL BARRIERS AND CONSTRAINTS

Despite its undeniable psychological appeal, nostalgia marketing is still constrained by practical economic and operational variables.

- **Price Sensitivity:** Emotional connections do not entirely override financial caution. Empirical findings from Rasika and Janani (2025) show that a substantial portion of consumers (51.1%) state their final decision to buy high-priced nostalgic products is highly conditional, while 26.1% will only purchase if the price premium over a standard product remains small.

- The Innovation and Quality Imperative: Nostalgia acts as an initial driver for consideration, but long-term brand equity requires tangible product performance. The data indicates that ultimate operational success relies on a balanced framework that blends emotional history with strict quality control and modern product innovation.

2.2. COMPREHENSIVE LITERATURE REVIEW

TABLE 2 Literature

Author(s) & Year	Core Objective	Methodology & Sample	Key Findings / Conclusions
Srivastava, Sivakumaran, Maheswarappa, & Paul (2022)	To systematically evaluate existing nostalgia literature, redefine its core traits, analyze advertising dynamics, and propose a comprehensive future research agenda.	Systematic literature review using PRISMA protocols to evaluate 205 foundational journal articles.	Defined nostalgia as an ambivalent emotion focused on past-memory yearning. Outlined a new research roadmap for ad appeals based on four structural themes: self-restoration, continuity, social relationships, and culture. Suggested new moderators like emotional flow, gender identity, and interactivity.
Zhang, Zhou, & Qin (2022)	To uncover the unique driving forces behind group-based collective nostalgia and examine its downstream impact on national brand consciousness.	Conceptual mechanism model tested via empirical questionnaire and statistical path analysis.	Proved that relative deprivation, social alienation, interpersonal alienation, and environmental alienation positively predict collective nostalgia. Found that collective nostalgia strengthens domestic national brand consciousness, mediated by personal, social, and collective identities.
Koh (2023)	To evaluate the joint interaction between nostalgia appeal types and product types on consumer intent, utilizing the Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM).	Controlled online experimental design measuring message processing, mixed thoughts, and mixed emotions.	Discovered that for public products, personal nostalgia-themed ads outperform historical nostalgia ads by driving greater mixed emotions and favorable ad attitudes. Proved the necessity of age-segmented communication strategies rather than relying on generic retro appeals.
Kumar, Yadav, Srivastava, Kumar, Bharti, & Kushwaha (2025)	To examine how advertising-induced nostalgia and internal nostalgia intensity impact consumer desire to purchase fashion items.	Quantitative questionnaire using 18 adjusted scale items across 5 constructs; administered to a purposive sample of 441 ordinary shoppers.	Confirmed that ad-evoked nostalgia directly improves a consumer's brand attitude, nostalgia intensity, and perceived continuity of self. These three internal psychological factors subsequently create a significant positive impact on the final intent to buy fashion items.
Rasika & Janani (2025)	To assess the structural impact of nostalgia marketing on brand reputation and customer loyalty while exploring price sensitivity and potential generational variances.	Quantitative survey (n=180) balanced across genders; analyzed via IBM SPSS using correlations, One-Way ANOVA, and Paired T-Tests.	Found a positive correlation ($r = .311$) between nostalgia intensity and purchase likelihood, heavily driven by childhood reminders (53.3%). Discovered significant price sensitivity, with 51.1% conditioning purchases on premium margins. Showed no generational difference regarding perceived manipulative intent ($p = .359$). Positive perceptions strongly drive reputation ($r = .935$) and loyalty ($r = .744$).
Lin & Wang (2025)	To determine how nostalgic advertising appeals affect older adults' product evaluations and buying behavior within the food sector.	Empirical evaluation of psychological response patterns among older adults in Taiwan's aging society.	Revealed that older consumers evaluate ads with nostalgic themes much more favorably because they trigger positive feelings tied to the "good old days". Proved that an individual's self-rated health status and baseline happiness function as critical moderators in product evaluations.

2.3. GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Research conducted across different geographies reveals varying levels of receptivity:

- South Asia (Pakistan and Sri Lanka): Studies on tea and ice cream brands in Pakistan confirm that positive emotional appeals like love and excitement significantly impact buying behavior. In Sri Lanka, research on the soft drink industry showed a positive correlation between emotional ads and consumer purchase intentions.

- India: A 2025 study found that happiness is the most common emotion evoked, with 72% of respondents experiencing it through ads. Iconic Indian brands like Dove, Google, and Coca-Cola have successfully manipulated and stimulated consumer decision-making through emotional narratives.
- Southeast Asia (Thailand and Vietnam): In Thailand, emotional marketing is increasingly used in the electric vehicle sector to foster long-term customer loyalty. In Vietnam, positive emotional appeals in social advertising were found to strengthen consumer attitudes significantly.

2.4. IDENTIFICATION OF RESEARCH GAPS

When synthesized, the collective research points to several critical themes that outline a clear path forward for future study:

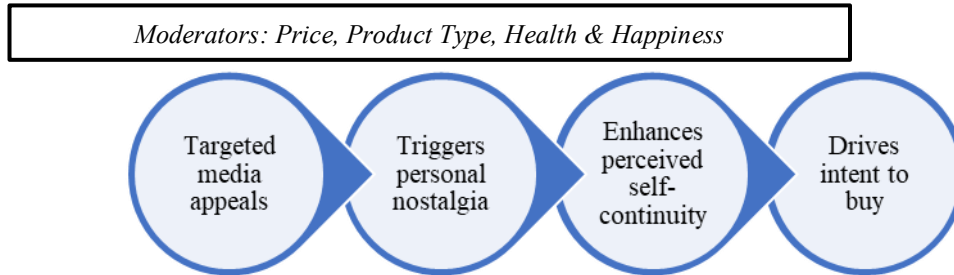


FIGURE 1 Brand Consciousness

- Reconciliation of Personal vs. Collective Demands: Current literature separates individual autobiographical triggers (Kumar et al., 2025; Rasika & Janani, 2025) from group-based macro-alienation triggers (Zhang et al., 2022). Future research should explore how brands can construct a unified campaign that simultaneously satisfies a person's desire for personal self-continuity while tapping into broader, collective national identity movements.
- Dynamic Boundary Conditions of Price vs. Emotion: While Rasika and Janani (2025) highlight real-world price sensitivity constraints, research has yet to pinpoint the exact tipping point where nostalgic emotional utility fails to justify a high financial premium. Future studies should employ discrete choice experiments to measure the exact economic value that consumers place on nostalgic branding across various product tiers.
- The Holistic Health-Nostalgia Nexus: As explored by Lin and Wang (2025), a consumer's physical well-being and baseline happiness directly alter how they perceive nostalgic messages. This introduces an important avenue for future study: examining how wellness trends, medical contexts, and varying lifecycle stages change a consumer's psychological reliance on retro-branding across different commercial sectors.

3. CONCLUSION

Nostalgia marketing has successfully transitioned from a simple emotional novelty into a highly structured, strategic tool for corporate communication. By reconnecting consumers with autobiographical or shared cultural histories, brands across industries can substantially elevate memory retention, secure consumer trust, and improve overall brand reputation. However, the literature highlights that emotional resonance cannot fully shield a brand from market realities. While consumers consistently demonstrate a high psychological affinity for retro-campaigns, their ultimate purchase conversion remains strictly bounded by practical economic constraints and sensitive price premiums. For contemporary brands to fully tap into this power, they must move away from generic nostalgia. The future of the field depends on a balanced framework - one that seamlessly pairs emotional, authentic storytelling with strict quality control, careful price matching, and continuous modern product innovation.

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