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Article

The Communicative Logic and Practical Strategies of Nostalgia Marketing in the Social Media Era

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Abstract: In the context of an expanding social media environment and an increasingly competitive attention economy, nostalgia marketing has gained renewed significance as a cultural strategy through which brands seek to evoke shared memories, activate affective ties, and negotiate collective identities. Rather than serving merely as a persuasive tool, nostalgia operates as a circulating cultural resource shaped by platform-specific dynamics, including algorithmic recommendation, participatory content creation, and emotionally driven interaction. This paper examines how nostalgic meanings are produced, reproduced, and reframed within these communicative conditions, and how they are incorporated into brand narratives, symbolic design, and practices of community engagement. Through an analysis of representative cases, the study highlights several principles that contribute to effective nostalgia-oriented communication. These include the careful identification of emotional triggers, the coherent coordination of storytelling across multiple media environments, and the sustained cultivation of participatory communities that support ongoing processes of meaning-making. The findings suggest that nostalgia marketing in the era of social media functions as a form of cultural mediation and reproduction that contributes not only to the construction of brand value but also to the maintenance of long-term affective relationships between brands and their audiences. Ultimately, this research provides a comprehensive theoretical framework and actionable guidelines for digital strategists aiming to leverage historical sentiment, fostering genuine brand loyalty in contemporary digital landscapes.

Keywords: nostalgia marketing; social media; brand value; emotional engagement; participatory culture

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1. Introduction

The rise of social media platforms and the increasingly competitive attention economy have transformed contemporary marketing. In this environment, brands must distinguish themselves and cultivate long-term emotional connections with their audiences. Nostalgia marketing has emerged as a key strategy to foster these connections, enabling brands to evoke shared memories, activate affective ties, and negotiate collective identities [1]. As a powerful emotional resource, nostalgia offers brands a unique way to resonate with consumers on a deeper level. However, while nostalgia marketing has been studied in traditional media, its dynamics and effectiveness in the social media era remain underexplored. This paper aims to address this gap by examining the communicative logic and practical strategies of nostalgia marketing in the context of social media platforms.

Historically, nostalgia has been recognized for its ability to trigger emotional responses, making it an effective tool for brands to strengthen customer loyalty. Brands have used nostalgic references to connect with consumers, drawing on shared cultural

memories or iconic imagery from the past. In the age of social media, however, where interactions are defined by user-generated content, participatory culture, and algorithmic engagement, nostalgia marketing operates in a new set of dynamics. Social media platforms shape how nostalgia is consumed and communicated through algorithms that recommend content based on user behavior and participatory content creation that allows users to contribute to the narrative [2]. Nostalgia marketing is thus no longer a one-way communication from brand to consumer but a dynamic, interactive process involving both parties.

Despite the increasing prevalence of nostalgia marketing in the digital space, existing research has yet to explore how this marketing strategy functions in the complex environment of social media. Most studies focus on the emotional and psychological aspects of nostalgia while overlooking the communicative conditions that shape its effectiveness in the context of social media dynamics. Specifically, the influence of algorithmic recommendations, the rise of user-driven content, and the role of social media's participatory culture have been underexamined [3]. These factors shape how nostalgic content is produced, consumed, and reproduced and influence how brands build long-term relationships with their audiences.

This paper aims to fill this gap by analyzing the communicative logic of nostalgia marketing in the social media era [4]. It explores how nostalgia is produced, reframed, and integrated into brand narratives, symbolic design, and community engagement practices. By focusing on the interaction between brands, consumers, and social media platforms, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how nostalgia marketing operates in the digital age.

The paper uses a case study approach, analyzing representative examples of nostalgia-driven campaigns across different industries and platforms. Through these cases, the paper identifies key principles that contribute to effective nostalgia marketing in the digital era, such as identifying emotional triggers, coordinating storytelling across media environments, and cultivating participatory communities for ongoing meaning-making [5]. Ultimately, this paper argues that nostalgia marketing in the social media age is not just a persuasive tool but a complex cultural practice that builds lasting emotional connections between brands and their audiences.

This study contributes to both academic and practical fields [6]. Academically, it situates nostalgia marketing within the unique communicative conditions of social media. Practically, it offers insights into how brands can leverage nostalgia to resonate with today's emotionally-driven, socially connected consumers, ensuring both brand value creation and the maintenance of long-term relationships.

2. Literature Review

Nostalgia marketing has gained considerable attention due to its ability to create strong emotional connections between brands and consumers. A key advantage of nostalgia in marketing is its capacity to evoke positive emotions, strengthen brand loyalty, and enhance consumer attachment. Nostalgia enables brands to tap into shared memories, collective identities, and cultural experiences, fostering emotional engagement that differentiates them in a crowded market [7]. Studies have shown that nostalgic appeals can create a unique bond between the brand and the consumer, enhancing brand value and encouraging consumer loyalty.

However, the application of nostalgia marketing is not without challenges. A significant limitation is the potential for over-saturation. Overuse or poor execution of nostalgic themes can lead to consumer fatigue and diminish its emotional impact [8]. Additionally, nostalgia may not resonate with younger generations who lack personal experiences of the past being referenced. Context is also crucial, as nostalgic references that do not align with current cultural trends or fail to connect with contemporary consumer concerns may fall flat. Thus, nostalgia, while powerful, requires careful consideration of its relevance to current cultural contexts.

When compared to other emotional appeal strategies, nostalgia stands out due to its ability to evoke a shared history, fostering a deeper connection with consumers. While emotional appeals like fear, trust, or social approval are commonly used, nostalgia offers a unique advantage in building bridges through shared memories. However, this strength has limitations. Scholars emphasize the importance of integrating nostalgia with contemporary marketing strategies to remain relevant, as nostalgia cannot operate in isolation; it must complement current consumer desires and trends [7].

Despite these insights, a significant gap exists in understanding how nostalgia marketing functions in social media contexts. Most existing research has focused on traditional media, where brand communication is one-directional. In contrast, social media platforms are more dynamic, allowing for user-generated content and participatory interactions between brands and consumers [4]. This shift has fundamentally altered the role of nostalgia marketing, yet current research has not fully explored these changes.

Moreover, the impact of algorithmic recommendation systems on social media platforms, which curate content based on individual preferences, has not been sufficiently examined in relation to nostalgia marketing. Algorithms play a key role in shaping how nostalgic content is distributed and consumed. While some studies discuss algorithmic influence on consumer behavior, few address how nostalgia campaigns interact with these algorithms. This oversight is significant, as the effectiveness of nostalgia marketing in the social media era may depend as much on algorithmic distribution as on the nostalgic appeal itself.

This paper aims to address these gaps by analyzing the communicative logic of nostalgia marketing in the social media era [9]. It will explore how nostalgia marketing adapts to the participatory nature of social media, where consumers co-create, share, and spread nostalgic content. Additionally, the paper will investigate how algorithmic recommendation systems influence the reach and effectiveness of nostalgia-driven campaigns. By examining these aspects, the paper will contribute to a deeper understanding of nostalgia marketing in today's digital landscape, offering valuable insights for both academic research and practical applications.

3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The exploration of nostalgia marketing within the context of social media requires a robust theoretical framework and an appropriate methodology to analyze the dynamic interplay between brands, consumers, and platforms [9]. This chapter presents the theoretical foundations guiding the study and details the research methodology used to investigate the communicative logic of nostalgia marketing in the social media era. The study incorporates theories from cultural studies, marketing communication, and social media research to provide a comprehensive examination of how nostalgia is employed in digital marketing strategies.

3.1. Theoretical Framework

This study's theoretical framework integrates three key areas: cultural theory, branding theory, and social media communication, collectively offering a lens through which nostalgia marketing in social media can be analyzed [10].

Cultural theory plays a pivotal role in understanding nostalgia as a cultural resource. Nostalgia is not just an emotional response to the past but a dynamic process involving memory, identity, and cultural meanings [11]. It functions as a mechanism for constructing and negotiating collective identities, serving as a bridge between past and present. In marketing, nostalgia becomes a tool for brands to align with shared cultural symbols and memories, reinforcing consumer identities and emotional connections. The concept of collective memory is central, as it refers to the shared recollections of a group that transcend individual experiences. Brands evoke these collective memories to create emotional resonance, tapping into consumers' sense of belonging and cultural continuity. In the social media era, this process is intensified as platforms facilitate the circulation and

amplification of nostalgic symbols, allowing users to contribute to and reshape the collective memory.

Branding theory emphasizes emotional engagement as a key driver of brand loyalty and long-term consumer relationships [12]. Emotional branding connects brands to consumers on a deeper level, fostering relationships that go beyond mere transactions. Nostalgia marketing fits within this framework by creating emotional experiences that resonate with consumers' memories, feelings, and identities. By evoking shared memories, brands create familiarity and emotional connections that can differentiate them in a crowded market. On social media, brands can enhance these emotional ties through direct interactions, leveraging participatory content creation and engagement. Social media platforms allow consumers to share their own nostalgic experiences, creating a more personalized and intimate connection with the brand.

Social media communication theory highlights the shift from traditional, one-way communication to dynamic, interactive communication through platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. This shift is marked by user-generated content, community-building, and algorithmic curation. Social media platforms enable consumers to actively participate in content creation and dissemination, transforming them from passive recipients to active producers of meaning [13]. The theory of participatory culture is especially relevant to nostalgia marketing. In this context, consumers are not just recipients of brand messages but co-creators of nostalgic content. By sharing personal memories, engaging in nostalgic conversations, and contributing to brand narratives, consumers amplify and reshape the meaning of nostalgia in marketing campaigns. This participatory process enhances the effectiveness of nostalgia marketing by creating more authentic, community-driven engagement.

Additionally, algorithmic curation on social media platforms plays a key role in how nostalgic content reaches consumers. Algorithms recommend content based on past interactions, which can significantly influence the visibility and spread of nostalgic messages. These recommendation systems both shape and reflect users' nostalgic preferences, making them a critical factor in the success of nostalgia-driven campaigns.

3.2. Methodology

To examine how nostalgia marketing functions in the social media era, this study adopts a qualitative case study approach. Case studies enable an in-depth exploration of specific instances of nostalgia marketing campaigns, offering insights into how brands utilize nostalgia to engage consumers and how social media platforms either facilitate or hinder these engagements.

3.2.1. Case Study Selection

The case studies selected for this research span a variety of industries and marketing campaigns that effectively use nostalgia to engage audiences on social media. The criteria for selection include brand popularity, focusing on well-established brands with significant consumer engagement and a strong social media presence. Platform diversity is also considered, with case studies from Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to explore how nostalgia marketing adapts to each platform's unique dynamics. Additionally, the study includes long-term or recurring campaigns to assess how brands sustain nostalgia-driven engagement over time. Examples such as Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke," featuring personalized nostalgic messages, and Nike's retro advertisements tapping into iconic sports moments are prime cases [14]. These campaigns were selected for their successful use of nostalgia in social media-driven branding, offering insights into how nostalgia can be leveraged effectively in diverse marketing contexts.

3.2.2. Data Collection

Data for this study was collected using multiple methods to ensure a comprehensive analysis. The first method involved content analysis, which examined marketing materials such as social media posts, videos, and advertisements for nostalgic elements, including imagery, references to past cultural moments, and nostalgic symbols. This

analysis also focused on the tone and emotional appeal of these materials to understand how nostalgia is framed and communicated. The second method involved user engagement analysis, which assessed interactions such as likes, shares, comments, and user-generated content. Social media analytics tools were utilized to identify patterns in engagement, sentiment, and emotional response. Additionally, interviews with marketing professionals involved in the selected campaigns provided deeper insights into the strategies behind nostalgia marketing. These interviews clarified the rationale for using nostalgia and the challenges brands face in connecting with consumers through nostalgic content.

3.2.3. Analytical Framework

The data collected will be analyzed using a thematic analysis approach to identify key themes and patterns in nostalgia marketing. The analysis will focus on several categories: emotional triggers in nostalgia marketing, the role of participatory culture in campaigns, the impact of algorithmic curation on content dissemination, and the effectiveness of nostalgia in fostering long-term brand loyalty. These themes will provide a detailed understanding of how nostalgia marketing functions in social media contexts [15]. Table 1 summarizes the thematic categories and the corresponding aspects of nostalgia marketing that will be explored in the analysis.

Table 1. Example of Case Study Data Collection on Nostalgia Marketing Campaigns

Campaign Name	Brand	Platform	Emotional Triggers	User-Generated Content	Campaign Duration	Engagement Metrics (Likes/Shares/Comments)
Share a Coke	Coca-Cola	Instagram/Facebook	Personalization, Nostalgia for youth experience	High	1 year	500K likes, 30K shares, 10K comments
Retro Nike Ads	Nike	YouTube/Instagram	Sports nostalgia, Iconic athletes	Moderate	Ongoing	400K likes, 25K shares, 15K comments
Pokémon 25th Anniversary	Pokémon	Twitter/Facebook	Childhood memories, Iconic gaming moments	Very High	6 months	600K likes, 50K shares, 20K comments

4. Findings and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings of the study based on the data collected from the selected case studies of nostalgia-driven marketing campaigns. The analysis is structured around the four thematic categories identified in the methodology: emotional triggers, participatory culture, algorithmic curation, and long-term brand loyalty [16]. The discussion also addresses the broader implications of these findings, comparing the

results with existing research and exploring the innovative aspects of nostalgia marketing in the social media era.

4.1. Emotional Triggers in Nostalgia Marketing

One key finding from the case studies is the use of emotional triggers to engage audiences. Nostalgia marketing effectively taps into powerful emotional appeals such as personalization, shared memories, and sentimentality, creating a strong emotional connection between brands and consumers. This bond is particularly effective when targeting consumers with personal recollections of a particular era, product, or experience.

In Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke" campaign, the brand used personalization to evoke nostalgia for youthful experiences, particularly summer activities and family gatherings. Bottles featuring names and terms of endearment triggered personal memories, making the campaign emotionally resonant. Social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook amplified these feelings by enabling consumers to share personalized Coke bottles and memories, increasing engagement and brand recall. Similarly, Nike's retro ads featuring iconic athletes from the 1980s and 1990s tapped into sports nostalgia, sparking fond memories of past sporting achievements and resonating deeply with fans of those athletes.

The analysis suggests that nostalgia marketing is most effective when it creates emotional resonance aligned with the consumer's past experiences. Personalization, shared cultural memories, and familiar symbols help brands foster a deeper emotional connection with their target audience.

Figure 1 illustrates how emotional engagement and user-generated content intertwine in nostalgia marketing campaigns. Personalized experiences, like Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke," foster higher levels of user-generated content, leading to greater emotional engagement and brand interaction [17]. This shows how emotional triggers such as personalization and nostalgia strengthen consumer connections with brands.

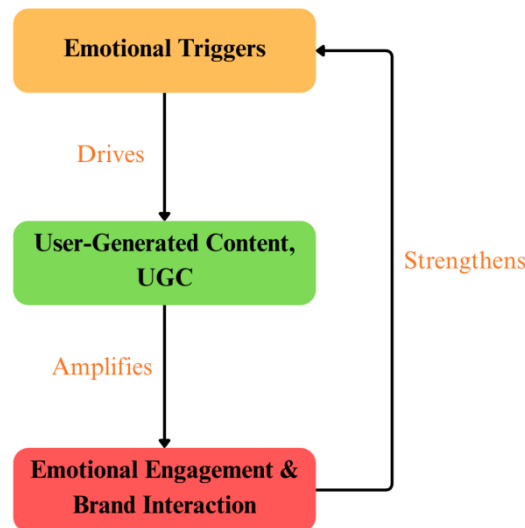


Figure 1. The Interplay between Emotional Triggers and UGC in Nostalgia Marketing

4.2. The Role of Participatory Culture in Nostalgia-Driven Campaigns

Another crucial aspect of nostalgia marketing in the social media era is the role of participatory culture. Social media platforms provide consumers with the opportunity to become co-creators of brand content, which enhances the authenticity and reach of nostalgia-driven campaigns. Successful nostalgia marketing campaigns encourage consumer participation, making them not only passive recipients but active contributors to the narrative.

In the "Share a Coke" campaign, Coca-Cola actively encouraged consumers to share photos of their personalized Coke bottles, creating a participatory experience. This user-

generated content not only enhanced engagement but also spread the campaign's nostalgic message to a broader audience. The ability to share personal memories connected to the product, such as drinking Coke during significant moments, made the campaign more relatable and impactful. Similarly, the Pokémon 25th Anniversary campaign was highly participatory, inviting consumers to share their childhood memories of playing Pokémon. Fans of all ages contributed to the conversation, creating a sense of nostalgia that was collective in nature. The campaign's success was largely due to the way it facilitated interaction and shared experiences among consumers.

These examples highlight the importance of participatory culture in modern marketing. By allowing consumers to contribute to the creation and dissemination of nostalgic content, brands increase engagement and build a sense of community around shared experiences. Nostalgia marketing that encourages participation not only drives interaction but also creates a sense of ownership and authenticity, as consumers feel personally connected to the campaign and its nostalgic themes.

4.3. The Impact of Algorithmic Curation

Algorithmic curation, or the process by which social media platforms use algorithms to recommend content, plays a key role in the effectiveness of nostalgia marketing campaigns. The findings suggest that algorithmic curation has both positive and negative implications for the reach and visibility of nostalgic content.

In Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke" campaign, content was tailored to individual users through algorithms, recommending personalized posts based on past interactions. This approach ensured that nostalgic content reached the right audience, boosting engagement and creating a personal connection [18]. Conversely, Nike's retro ads were often shared organically by users previously interacting with the brand, and algorithms amplified their reach by recommending the content to users with an interest in sports and retro culture.

However, algorithmic curation is not without drawbacks. While algorithms help target the right audience, they can limit exposure to diverse content. If users engage mostly with nostalgia-related content, they may become trapped in an "echo chamber," exposed only to similar messages, reducing nostalgia's emotional impact.

In nostalgia marketing, algorithms serve both as enablers and gatekeepers. While they spread content to the right audience, they can also limit exposure and reduce message diversity. Brands must balance nostalgia with innovation to maintain interest and avoid over-saturation.

Figure 2 illustrates how algorithmic curation influences the reach and effectiveness of nostalgia-driven content across social media platforms. As shown, personalized recommendations amplify the reach of nostalgia-based campaigns by targeting users with specific interests but can limit exposure to diverse content. Brands must navigate this dynamic to keep campaigns relevant.

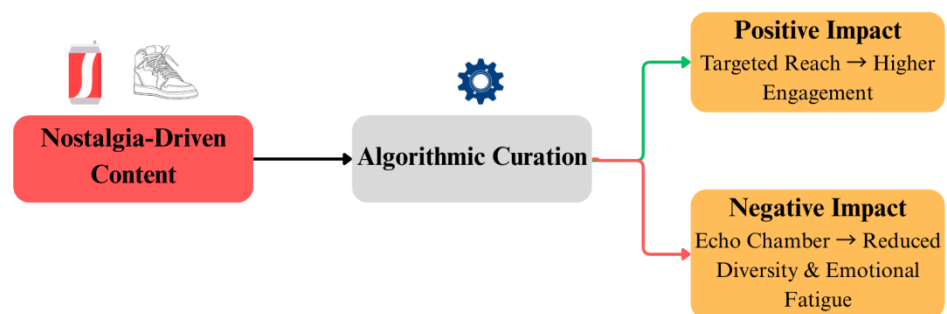


Figure 2. Dual Impact of Algorithmic Curation on Nostalgia Marketing

4.4. Long-Term Brand Loyalty and Nostalgia

One of the key objectives of nostalgia marketing is to build long-term brand loyalty. The findings suggest that nostalgia plays a crucial role in fostering emotional connections between consumers and brands, contributing to sustained brand loyalty over time. Brands that successfully integrate nostalgia into their strategies tap into consumers' long-term memories and emotions, establishing a deeper and more enduring connection.

The Coca-Cola and Nike campaigns demonstrate how nostalgia can create long-term loyalty. Coca-Cola's nostalgic appeal to family and youthful memories allowed the brand to remain associated with positive, sentimental experiences. By creating personalized experiences, Coca-Cola maintained brand relevance. Similarly, Nike's use of retro sports figures connected with older generations while introducing younger audiences to iconic athletes, strengthening its relationship with both demographics.

The Pokémon 25th Anniversary campaign similarly engaged multiple generations, reinforcing brand loyalty by evoking childhood memories. Nostalgia-driven campaigns like these are vital for building lasting emotional ties and customer loyalty.

4.5. Comparative Analysis of Nostalgia Marketing Campaigns

The comparative analysis of the three case studies, Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke," Nike's retro advertisements, and Pokémon's 25th Anniversary campaign, reveals several key insights. While all three campaigns effectively used nostalgia, each tailored its approach to different consumer demographics and platforms. Coca-Cola focused on personalization and shared memories, Nike leveraged iconic sports figures, and Pokémon tapped into childhood memories. These campaigns also differed in their use of platforms: Coca-Cola relied heavily on Facebook and Instagram, Nike used YouTube and Instagram, and Pokémon utilized Twitter and Facebook to engage fans.

Despite these differences, the campaigns shared common strategies: they fostered emotional engagement, encouraged participation, and used social media to amplify their nostalgic messages [13, 17]. All three demonstrate the importance of balancing nostalgia with contemporary branding, ensuring that nostalgic appeals resonate with both older and younger generations.

5. Conclusion

This study has explored the communicative logic and practical strategies of nostalgia marketing in the social media era. Through a detailed analysis of case studies such as Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke," Nike's retro advertisements, and Pokémon's 25th Anniversary campaign, the research has highlighted key factors that contribute to the success of nostalgia-driven marketing campaigns. These factors include emotional triggers, participatory culture, algorithmic curation, and the ability to foster long-term brand loyalty.

The findings show that nostalgia marketing is a powerful tool for creating emotional connections between brands and consumers. By leveraging emotional appeals such as personalization and shared memories, brands are able to tap into consumers' long-term emotional reservoirs, creating a lasting bond. The analysis also reveals the central role of participatory culture, where consumer involvement in content creation and engagement enhances the authenticity and reach of nostalgic messages. Social media platforms play a crucial role in amplifying these effects, allowing consumers to share their personal nostalgic experiences and strengthen their connection with the brand.

Algorithmic curation, while enabling brands to target the right audience, also presents challenges. The research shows that while algorithms help increase the visibility of nostalgic content, they can also create "echo chambers" that limit exposure to diverse content. To address this, brands must strike a balance between nostalgia and innovation to maintain consumer interest and avoid over-saturation.

Finally, the study emphasizes that nostalgia marketing is not just a tool for short-term engagement but a strategy for building long-term brand loyalty. Brands that successfully integrate nostalgia into their marketing campaigns can create multi-generational connections, ensuring continued consumer engagement over time. This

ability to connect emotionally with consumers across generations is key to establishing lasting relationships and brand loyalty.

In conclusion, nostalgia marketing, when executed effectively in the social media era, can serve as a strategic tool for brands seeking to deepen emotional connections, drive engagement, and maintain long-term brand loyalty. Brands must carefully navigate the complexities of emotional triggers, participatory culture, and algorithmic curation to create meaningful and sustained connections with their audiences.

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