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EFFECT OF NOSTALGIA MARKETING ON BRAND LOYALTY AND CONSUMER PERCEPTION: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Nostalgia marketing, the deliberate evocation of fond memories of the past to build emotional connection with brands, has attracted growing attention, yet the evidence remains fragmented across contexts and platforms. This study systematically reviews how nostalgia marketing influences brand loyalty and consumer perception and identifies directions for future research. Following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, the Scopus database was searched in May 2026 using four keyword combinations, yielding 126 records. After filtering for English-language journal articles from ABDC A* and A-ranked journals, and successive title-abstract and full-text screening, 16 articles published between 2011 and 2026 were included and analysed thematically. Nostalgia influences loyalty and perception mainly through emotional response, brand authenticity, brand attachment and self-image congruence. Visually rich social media platforms such as Pinterest and Instagram amplify these effects, particularly where social influence is high, while age, life satisfaction, culture and nostalgia proneness moderate them. Pairing nostalgia with innovation emerged as the most effective brand-revitalisation route, whereas regressive nostalgia can create exclusionary communities that threaten brand equity. The evidence is dominated by Western samples, cross-sectional designs and single-cue stimuli. Future research should address cross-cultural validation, Gen Z digital nostalgia, AI-augmented nostalgia, regressive nostalgia management, longitudinal effects, everyday FMCG and retail sectors, and multi-sensory cue combinations. The review offers managers evidence-based guidance for using nostalgia authentically and strategically.

Keywords: Nostalgia Marketing, Brand Loyalty, Consumer Perception, Brand Authenticity, Social Media, Systematic Literature Review

1 INTRODUCTION

As content grows without limit and consumers have less time to absorb it, brands increasingly turn to the past to secure their future. Nostalgia marketing, the purposeful recall of fond memories, cultural touchpoints and historical styles, has become one of the most emotionally powerful tools available to the modern marketer. Coca-Cola's old-style bottle designs, Nike's retro Air Jordan campaigns and Cadbury's heritage packaging revivals show how the deliberate use of bygone times builds a psychologically strong link between brand and consumer. When HMD Global relaunched the Nokia 3310 at Mobile World Congress in 2017, it kept the Snake game and the familiar look of the original phone, which had sold around 126 million units between 2000 and 2005, while adding a camera and a much longer battery life [1].

Nostalgia does not merely recall old times; it colours them in a warm light, lends them a sense of safety and builds a sense of self around them. As individuals face a radically changed digital world, nostalgic cues can serve as emotional anchors, and brands that evoke them at the right time, through the right medium and in the right style gain a tangible lift in consumer liking, loyalty and behaviour.

Digital expansion, platform fragmentation and the weakening of traditional brand loyalty have transformed marketing. Consumers meet thousands of brand messages every day, and rational product differentiation is increasingly insufficient to influence purchase decisions, so emotional strategies, and nostalgia in particular, have gained prominence. Since the 2010s nostalgia marketing has attracted considerable scholarly and practitioner attention. The field nevertheless remains fragmented: studies have examined single cues, isolated product categories and mainly Western consumer contexts, leaving no integrated understanding of how, when and why nostalgia marketing is most effective. The same emotional pull is visible outside Western markets. When Doordarshan re-telecast the 1980s serial *Ramayan* during India's 2020 lockdown, BARC data showed the highest rating for a Hindi general entertainment show since the council began measuring audiences in 2015 [2]. In 2023, Reliance Consumer Products relaunched Campa Cola, a soft drink popular in India in the 1970s and 1980s, positioning it for older consumers who remember the brand and younger consumers meeting it for the first time [3].

Although nostalgia marketing is widely acknowledged, no comprehensive systematic review has examined how it influences brand loyalty and consumer perception across contexts, platforms and consumer segments. This review addresses that gap through two research questions. RQ1: What advancements have been made in the context, characteristics, theoretical foundations and methodologies of previous research on the role of nostalgia marketing in shaping brand loyalty and consumer perception? RQ2: What future research opportunities can be identified in the area of nostalgia marketing and brand loyalty?

The objectives are:

- to study how nostalgia marketing affects consumer perception, such as brand authenticity, brand attitude and brand personality, across product categories and media contexts;
- to investigate the link between nostalgia marketing and brand loyalty and map the main mediators (emotional response, brand attachment, self-image congruity) and moderators (demographics, life satisfaction, social influence, cultural context);
- to examine how social media platforms prolong the impact of nostalgia marketing on consumer behaviour and purchase intention;
- to scrutinise the strategic implications of nostalgia marketing, including brand revitalisation, heritage brand management, the nostalgia–innovation balance and the circumstances in which it becomes a brand threat (regressive nostalgia); and
- to detect research gaps and propose a future research agenda covering AI-augmented nostalgia, Gen Z digital nostalgia, cross-cultural applications and multi-sensory cue combinations.

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Research design

This is a qualitative, exploratory study based on secondary research, using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) as its primary method. No primary data were collected. An SLR was chosen because it allows a comprehensive, transparent and reproducible analysis of existing scholarship through documented inclusion and exclusion criteria, which reduces selection bias and strengthens the reliability of the evidence. The search, screening and reporting phases followed the PRISMA 2020 statement (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses), which records the number of documents identified, excluded, assessed and included at each stage. Articles published from 2011 to 2026 were examined, a window that captures both early work on nostalgia marketing [4] and recent developments such as AI-enhanced nostalgia [5] and regressive nostalgia theory [6]. The literature search was completed in May 2026.

2.2 Data source and journal selection

All records were drawn from Scopus, a comprehensive database of peer-reviewed literature in business, management, social sciences and psychology covering over 25,000 journals. Scopus was the sole source because it indexes a wide range of marketing, consumer behaviour, branding and hospitality journals directly related to the topic and offers an ABDC journal-quality filter and a detailed export function for screening. Only peer-reviewed journal articles in English from ABDC A* or A-ranked journals were considered; conference papers, book chapters and grey literature were excluded to ensure methodological soundness and the quality of peer review.

2.3 Search strategy

Identification began with a systematic Scopus keyword search anchored on the term "nostalgia marketing". Four query combinations were run and saved in the Scopus search history (Table 1). Together they returned 126 raw records, the largest set (38 records) being for "consumer perception".

Table 1: Summary of Keyword Search Strings – Scopus Database

S. No.	Search query / keyword combination	Records found
1	(TITLE-ABS-KEY (nostalgia marketing) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (brand loyalty))	18
2	(TITLE-ABS-KEY (nostalgia marketing) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (consumer perception))	38
3	(TITLE-ABS-KEY (nostalgia marketing) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (purchase intention))	23
4	(TITLE-ABS-KEY (nostalgia marketing) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (social media))	47
	Total	126

2.4 Inclusion criteria

Records were carried forward to full-text assessment only if they met all of the following: (i) peer-reviewed journal article in English; (ii) published between 2011 and 2026; (iii) published in an ABDC A* or A-ranked journal; (iv) nostalgia marketing examined as a primary independent, mediating or moderating variable; (v) brand loyalty, brand attitude, consumer perception or purchase intention included as an outcome; and (vi) full text available.

2.5 Screening process (PRISMA 2020)

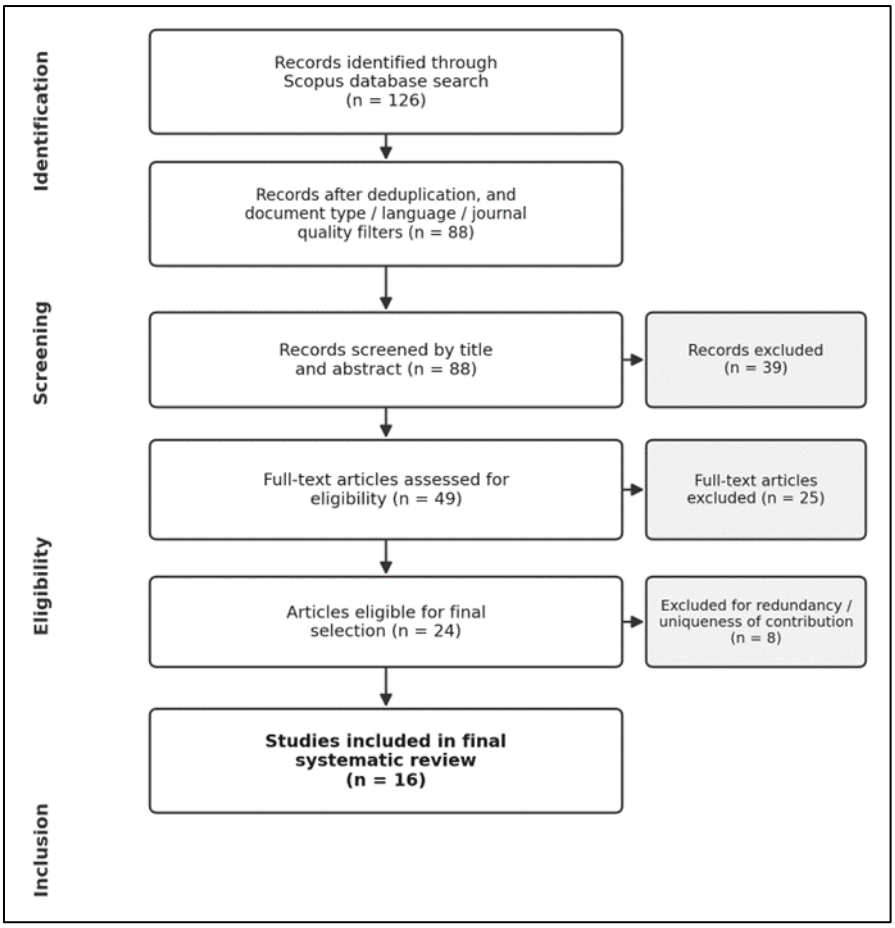


Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Systematic Review

The four PRISMA stages are illustrated in Figure 1. In *Identification*, the 126 records were deduplicated and filtered by document type (journal articles), language (English) and ABDC A*/A journal quality, leaving 88 unique, eligible records. In *Screening*, all 88 records were screened by title and abstract; 39 were excluded because they did not examine

nostalgia marketing as a primary variable, lacked consumer-behaviour or brand-related outcomes, or appeared in ABDC C-grade or unranked journals, leaving 49. In *Eligibility*, the 49 records underwent full-text assessment against a checklist covering direct relevance, methodological rigour and full-text availability; 25 were excluded, leaving 24. In *Inclusion*, 16 articles were selected from the 24 on three further criteria: direct relevance to brand loyalty and/or consumer perception as outcomes of nostalgia marketing; theoretical and methodological contribution; and uniqueness of contribution, preferring the most rigorous and recent study where substantially similar studies existed.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Theoretical foundations and brand-relationship outcomes

Fritz et al. [7] placed the nostalgia–authenticity–purchase chain at the centre of nostalgia marketing theory. In a structural equation modelling (SEM) study of 509 German consumers, brand nostalgia was a key antecedent of brand authenticity ($\beta = 0.61$, $p < 0.001$), which led to stronger brand–consumer relationships ($R^2 = 0.54$), higher perceived quality and greater purchase intention. This positions nostalgia as a lever for long-term brand equity rather than a short-term persuasion technique. Youn and Dodoo [8] showed that nostalgic brands score higher than non-nostalgic brands on sincerity ($\beta = 0.58$) and excitement ($\beta = 0.44$), two dimensions of brand personality, and drive higher brand attachment ($R^2 = 0.49$), relationship quality and self-brand connection. Phau and Marchegiani [4] tested varying levels of historical nostalgia in print advertisements with Australian consumers and found that greater nostalgia intensity produced more positive brand attitudes ($t = 4.21$, $p < 0.001$) and higher purchase intentions ($t = 3.87$, $p < 0.001$) through both cognitive and affective pathways. In Taiwan's heritage hotel sector ($n = 412$), Teng et al. [9] found that service authenticity predicts brand resonance ($\beta = 0.55$) through self-image congruity ($\beta = 0.39$) and memorable customer experience ($\beta = 0.47$) as parallel mediators, extending the theory to services and showing that nostalgia creates experiential value that sustains loyalty beyond the purchase moment.

3.2 Moderators, social media and emerging technology

Khoshghadam et al. [10] ran two between-subjects experiments using nostalgic and non-nostalgic music as advertising stimuli. Nostalgic advertising enhanced brand attitude (Cohen's $d = 0.38$) and purchase intention ($d = 0.44$), and life satisfaction was a key moderator: less satisfied consumers responded more strongly, using nostalgic experiences as emotional compensation, which has clear potential for audience targeting. Youn and Jin [11] were among the first to test nostalgia marketing on social media. In a 2×2 experiment on Pinterest, nostalgic content improved brand attitude and purchase intention ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < 0.001$), and social influence acted as a positive moderator (interaction $\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.05$). Wang [12] found that nostalgic Instagram posts reduced perceived travel barriers ($\beta = -0.41$) and increased travel intentions ($\beta = 0.52$) among 318 participants, again with social influence as an amplifying moderator (interaction $\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.05$), confirming the platform–social influence interaction on a different platform and product category. Wilson-Nash and Pavlopoulou [13] interviewed 24 consumers aged 55 and above and found that nostalgic brand consumption on social media drives positive electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and a sense of belonging (89% of participants), identifying an underexploited "silver economy" market. Rehman et al. [5] examined AI and nostalgia in hospitality: nostalgia proneness raised purchase intention ($\beta = 0.47$) through emotional arousal ($\beta = 0.52$) and brand attachment ($\beta = 0.61$) as sequential mediators, and AI-powered nostalgic content amplified these effects, suggesting that technology may enhance rather than reduce perceived genuineness.

3.3 Visual and sensory cues across sectors

Kulczynski and Hook [14] introduced the concept of anemoia, nostalgia for a time one has not lived through, in a study of vintage typography (847 participants). Old typefaces triggered anemoia ($\beta = 0.43$), boosting brand attitude and willingness to pay ($\beta = 0.38$), but also lowered perceived product safety in pharmaceutical and health categories. Zhou et al. [15] showed across experiments with 674 Chinese consumers that nostalgic food labels increased purchase intention ($d = 0.61$) and actual consumption ($d = 0.53$), a direct stimulus-to-behaviour link with implications for fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) brands. Schibik et al. [16] found in an experiment with 294 participants that retro imagery evoked nostalgia ($d = 0.67$) and travel intention ($d = 0.58$) more strongly than contemporary imagery, particularly among nostalgia-prone segments. Schibik et al. [17] validated a "consumer pastness" scale with 402 US consumers; pastness was linked to nostalgia ($\beta = 0.56$) and purchase intention ($\beta = 0.48$) for vintage products, with scarcity strengthening the latter (interaction $\beta = 0.19$). In sport marketing ($n = 389$), Cho et al. [18] showed that sport nostalgia predicts attitude toward sponsor brands ($\beta = 0.43$) and purchase intention ($\beta = 0.38$), with team identification fully mediating the first relationship (indirect effect $\beta = 0.29$).

3.4 Strategic management and brand risk

Using fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) of 18 Chinese time-honoured brands, Li et al. [19] found that combining nostalgia with innovation yields the most effective brand-revitalisation configuration (coverage = 0.64, consistency = 0.89); firms with a dual nostalgic-and-modern identity outperformed those relying on nostalgia alone.

Preece et al. [6], in a netnography of James Bond fan communities, offered a cautionary contribution: "regressive nostalgia", an attachment that resists brand modernisation, can create exclusionary brand communities that harm brand equity, inclusivity and commercial viability, a warning for brands undergoing identity change.

3.5 Publication trends

Figure 2 shows the year-wise distribution of the 16 reviewed articles across 2011–2026. Research has grown markedly, with 11 of the 16 articles (69%) published from 2021 onwards. This is likely driven by post-pandemic nostalgia, the rise of social media as a nostalgia channel and the emergence of new constructs such as anemoia [14] and regressive nostalgia [6].

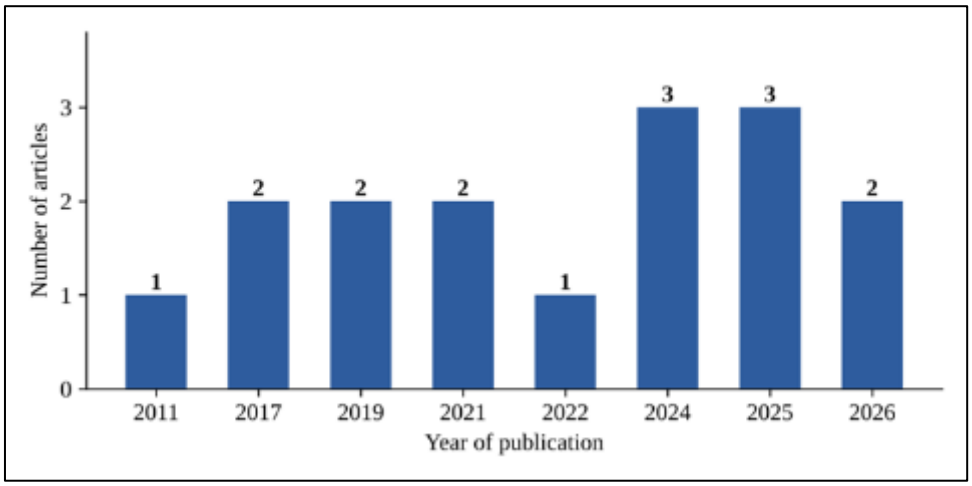


Figure 2: Year-wise Distribution of the Reviewed Articles (2011–2026)

3.6 Research methods

Quantitative designs dominate (Figure 3): 11 studies (68.8%) are quantitative, 3 (18.8%) qualitative and 2 (12.5%) mixed-methods. The reliance on SEM, between-subjects experiments and fsQCA shows a strong focus on establishing causal evidence for nostalgia mechanisms, while qualitative studies [6,13] contribute contextual insight and new constructs.

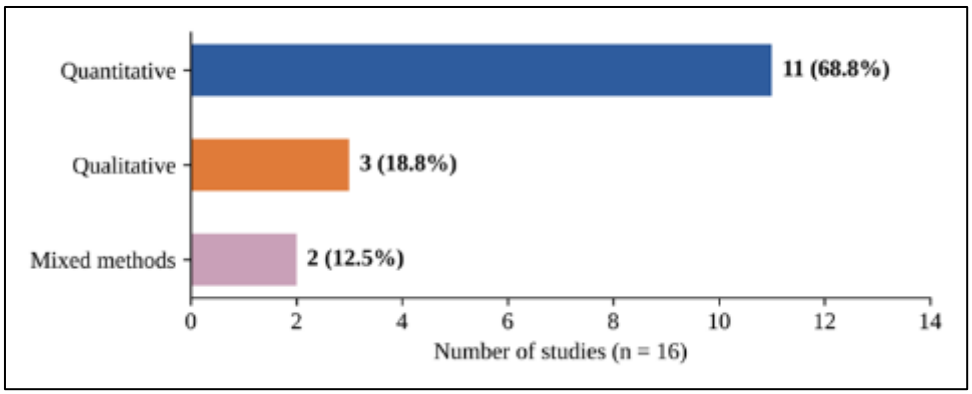


Figure 3: Research Methods Used in the Reviewed Studies (n = 16)

3.7 Thematic synthesis

Five themes recur across the 16 articles (Table 2).

Taken together, the themes show a consistent emotional–cognitive pathway: emotional response and self-image congruence convert nostalgic cues into brand authenticity, attachment and loyalty. Social media, especially visually oriented platforms, amplifies this pathway rather than driving it independently, while typography, packaging and imagery act as triggering stimuli. The fifth theme is a necessary counterweight: the mechanisms that make nostalgia persuasive can, if overused, harden into resistance to change. Overall, the literature indicates that nostalgia marketing generally improves brand perception, strengthens perceived authenticity and enhances willingness to purchase, but its strategic value depends on pairing nostalgic cues with a forward-looking brand identity. Brand loyalty driven by

nostalgia is largely mediated by brand attachment (R^2 = 0.49) [8], and effects reach actual consumption as well as intention [15]. Moderators such as age, life satisfaction, cultural background and nostalgia proneness alter the strength and direction of effects, which supports targeted rather than generic campaigns.

Table 2: Thematic Summary of Key Findings from the 16 Reviewed Studies

Theme	Key findings	Selected studies
Emotion and brand credibility	Nostalgia raises perceived brand authenticity (β = 0.61), which drives stronger brand–consumer relationships (R^2 = 0.54). Emotional response is the dominant mediator linking nostalgia to loyalty outcomes across 14 of the 16 papers and also mediates the path to purchase intention (β = 0.52).	[5,7]
Self-image congruence and brand connection	Nostalgia builds self-image congruence, the alignment between a consumer's self-perception and a brand's (often older) image, explaining loyalty outcomes (β = 0.39–0.58). Self-image congruence and memorable experience act as parallel mediators of attachment, relationship quality and brand resonance.	[8,9]
Social media amplification	Visually rich platforms, particularly Pinterest and Instagram, are the main channels for nostalgic branded content, and social influence amplifies its persuasive effect (interaction β = 0.21–0.27). Nostalgic engagement drives positive eWOM and belonging, particularly among consumers aged 55+.	[11–13]
Visual and sensory stimuli	Vintage typography and retro cues trigger anemoia and raise brand attitude and willingness to pay (β = 0.38–0.43). Nostalgic packaging raises purchase intention and actual consumption (d = 0.53–0.61); retro imagery outperforms contemporary imagery in destination marketing (d = 0.58–0.67).	[14–16]
Regressive nostalgia as a brand threat	Over-reliance on nostalgia can produce resistance to modernisation and exclusionary brand communities that limit the ability to attract new segments and may harm brand equity.	[6]

3.8 Illustrations from practice

Real brand decisions reflect these themes. The Nokia 3310 relaunch [1] turned affection for the original phone into brand appeal, and Campa Cola [3] shows heritage speaking to older and younger consumers at once. Burger King's retro logo [20] is an example of a visual cue acting as a triggering stimulus. Coca-Cola's 1985 formula change, reversed within 79 days after public backlash [21], shows how strongly consumers can resist changes to a brand they are attached to, a risk linked to regressive nostalgia.

3.9 Managerial implications

- **Use genuine nostalgic elements.** Authentic heritage imagery, original designs and founder stories work best; forced nostalgia undermines the authenticity that makes it effective [7]. Campa Cola's relaunch retained its original "The Great Indian Taste" line [3].
- **Prioritise Instagram and Pinterest** with platform-native content that exploits their visual appeal, shareability and community engagement [11,12].
- **Segment by life satisfaction and nostalgia proneness** [10]; for younger consumers with no memory of the era, anemoia-based vintage appeals are more effective [14].
- **Balance nostalgia with innovation.** Heritage brands perform best when nostalgic identity is merged with contemporary relevance [19], as the Nokia 3310 did by keeping Snake while adding a camera [1].
- **Monitor for regressive nostalgia** in social media communities and frame evolution as continuity with heritage [6]; the New Coke episode shows the cost of misjudging attachment [21].
- **Invest in multi-sensory creative with care.** Music, vintage typography and retro packaging evoke strong feelings, but in health and pharmaceutical categories vintage cues can lower perceived safety [14].
- **Build AI-aided nostalgia capability.** AI can personalise nostalgic content to consumer history, culture and platform behaviour, and early evidence suggests it can enhance rather than dilute authenticity [5].

- **Research local context before global launch.** Collective, culture-specific memory, as in the reception of the *Ramayan* re-telecast [2], means the Western focus on individual memory cannot be assumed to apply in India, Southeast Asia or Sub-Saharan Africa.

3.10 Future research agenda (RQ2)

Seven opportunities emerge from the reviewed articles.

- **Cross-cultural validation.** Most studies use Western samples; collective nostalgia in Asian, African and Latin American markets, particularly Indian "desi nostalgia", is an untapped area [2,3].
- **Gen Z digital nostalgia.** Little is known about Gen Z's nostalgia for the early internet era (Y2K aesthetics, vaporwave, flip-phone culture) or how short-form video delivers nostalgic stimuli to consumers with no personal memory of it.
- **AI-augmented nostalgia.** Only one reviewed article [5] addresses it; studies should test whether AI-generated nostalgic content is seen as authentic or manipulative and its effect on trust and long-term purchase intention.
- **Regressive nostalgia management.** Frameworks for detecting, monitoring and managing exclusionary nostalgic communities are urgently needed for legacy brands in transition.
- **Longitudinal effects.** All 16 studies are cross-sectional; panel studies over 12–24 months of sustained exposure are needed to establish causality and return on investment.
- **FMCG and retail sectors.** Research concentrates on hospitality, travel and food packaging; everyday FMCG, fashion retail and technology need systematic study.
- **Combined multi-sensory nostalgia.** All 16 studies isolate single cues; the synergy of audio-visual and scent-and-packaging combinations remains untested.

Limitations

First, the review relies solely on published peer-reviewed secondary sources, so its findings are inferences rather than direct causal evidence. Second, using Scopus alone may introduce selection bias, since relevant studies may sit in Web of Science, PsycINFO or EBSCO. Third, restricting the search to ABDC A* and A journals may exclude relevant work in ABDC B or unlisted journals. Fourth, most reviewed studies used Western samples, limiting applicability to Asian, African and Latin American markets. Fifth, publication bias may overstate the effectiveness of nostalgia marketing. Finally, rapid change in digital platforms, such as the rise of TikTok and AI-generated content, means some findings may date quickly.

4 CONCLUSION

This review of 16 ABDC A* and A-ranked articles confirms that nostalgia marketing is a potent and multi-faceted influence on brand loyalty and consumer perception in today's digital marketplace, but only when it is authentic, contextually relevant and does not overshadow a forward-looking brand identity. The nostalgia–authenticity–purchase sequence [7] is the central framework, emotional response is the dominant mediator, and social influence, life satisfaction and platform context are the main moderators.

On RQ1, research has advanced in context (from print advertising [4] to social media, hospitality, sport, tourism and vintage retail across 11 countries), in characteristics (anemoia, regressive nostalgia and AI-augmented nostalgia), in theory (from simple attitude–behaviour frameworks to sequential mediation, fsQCA configurations and multi-theory integration) and in methodology (SEM and experiments dominate, with qualitative work an emerging complement). Against the five objectives, nostalgia consistently enhances authenticity, attitude, attachment and purchase intention, with four main mediating pathways (emotional response, brand attachment, self-image congruity and memorable experience); social influence amplifies its effect on visually oriented platforms; combining nostalgia with innovation is the most effective revitalisation strategy, though regressive nostalgia is an underappreciated threat; and seven research gaps define the agenda for future work (RQ2).

STATEMENTS ON COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The author declares that there are no financial or non-financial conflicts of interest relevant to this work.

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