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Madeleine Moments: when the past becomes a strategy for the future

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, numerous brands have strategically recalled elements of the past to strengthen the emotional bond with consumers. In particular, nostalgia marketing has emerged as a powerful tool to stimulate consumer engagement and preference. However, the simple evocation of the past may seem regressive or insufficiently relevant in the contemporary context. This thesis explores the effectiveness of integrating nostalgic and innovative elements within branding strategies, analysing how present-self perception and nostalgia activation influence consumers' purchase intention.

After a theoretical review on the concepts of nostalgia, innovation and other variables, the work focuses on three business cases representative of different nostalgic approaches, offering an application overview of narrative strategies related to the 1990s-2000s. The core of the research lies in an experimental study conducted on 214 participants, structured according to a design between subjects with four conditions.

Data analysis, through PROCESS Model 7, reveals that the combination of nostalgia and innovation significantly activate the present self and improves purchase intent via mediated pathways. The results partially support the hypothesis, highlighting the moderating role of innovation and the robustness of nostalgia as an autonomous marketing lever.

Theoretical implications suggest an evolution of the literature on nostalgic consumption, emphasizing the importance of the self as an intermediate psychological mechanism. From a managerial point of view, the results underline the usefulness of reintegrating elements of the past in an innovative way, adjusted according to the different types of goals set, either long term or short-term ones. Finally, the methodological limits of the study and proposed future directions for research in digital perspective are discussed.

CHAPTER 1 - LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Nostalgia element

Within the incessant evolution of the commercial landscape and the increasing complexity of consumer-brand relationships, a well-established trend is emerging: the use of nostalgia as a strategic lever.

Cambridge Dictionary defines "nostalgia" as a feeling of pleasure but also slight sadness when someone thinks about something that happened in the past. This definition shows the connection with a person's emotional and cognitive sphere, allowing decisions and behaviors to be somehow affected. From a company point of view, nostalgia can be a powerful tool driving consumer preferences thanks to its ability to connect with feelings of security, belonging, and positive affect (Hartmann & Brunk, 2019).

This bittersweet emotion has gained a significant spot within advertising marketing techniques, especially during the pandemic and post-pandemic era. As underlined in several articles, including one by BBC, "*Nostalgia marketing is powerful. 'Nowstalgia' might be even more compelling*", published in 2023, the latter period has sped up the nostalgia cycle due to its increasing prevalence during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a rule of thumb, the hits of the day, after falling in the "uncool" hemisphere, seem to re-assume the role of timeworn classics after about 20 years. The length of this process has indeed been shortened, and the main cause was linked to the nature of the situation: the lockdown, the change in routine, the absence of social interaction, etc, which led people to spend more time on social media. Furthermore, the inability to create new positive memories pushed individuals to rely more on old ones, such as videos and photos, which allowed them to connect with other people belonging to the same generation, despite the impossibility of physical social interaction.

Up until now, nostalgia seems to be the reflection of the past on the present. Instead, the latter works as an element of self-continuity: societal and personal shifts are constantly present in human evolution, and nostalgia serves as a bridge between past and present identities.

In the academic field, one part of the studies has explored how nostalgia can be triggered by "tangible" stimuli, such as advertisements or physical objects, and how these nostalgic cues can influence attitude toward the ad, the brand, and the purchase

intention (Muehling et al, 2012). The other part highlights the role of experiential purchase in evoking nostalgia, suggesting that experiences, often connected with meaningful moments in consumers' lives, can evoke stronger emotional memories than material goods, therefore increasing the likelihood of repeating the experience (Puente-Diaz et al, 2021).

The prevailing theme that emerges from these studies is the acknowledgement that nostalgia does not simply represent a passive recollection of the past, however, it is a potent emotional catalyst capable of mobilizing cognitive and motivational processes; therefore, it enhances consumer engagement and reinforces positive brand perceptions. This perspective suggests a shift from a narrow interpretation of nostalgia as a regret; in fact, it reframes the latter as a dynamic "bridge" between past and present self, capable of fostering deeper psychological connections with brands (Singh et al, 2020).

In this regard, the research conducted by Muehling and Pascal (2012) is emblematic. They demonstrate that the employment of advertising messages that evoke nostalgia themes, particularly when they refer to personal memories, can elicit greater self-reflection and increase involvement in processing the advertisement message, as opposed to when it is only idealised and distant. In this case, nostalgia assumes a different shade: the carrier of positive emotions from the advertisement to the brand. Consequently, it stimulates a more favorable attitude not only toward the advertisement but toward the brand and product itself.

Simultaneously, the exploratory study "*The Influence of Evoked Nostalgia on Consumers' responses to advertising: an exploratory study*" conducted by Pascal et al (2002), extends this perspective by introducing a scale dedicated to measuring nostalgia evoked by advertising. The finding of the study indicates a direct correlation between the intensity of nostalgic feelings and positive attitudes toward the advertisement, the brand, and the purchase or re-purchase intention. A close examination of the data reveals that the nostalgic sentiment evoked by well-prepared advertising stimuli does not function in a standalone manner. Rather, it is demonstrated to interact and enhance other psychological processes, including self-referential processes and cognitive information processing. In essence, consumers who encounter advertisements that evoke personal memories or affective connection to the past tend to give greater regard

to the advertisement itself. The latter translates into the establishment of a more profound bond with the brand.

Connected to this, the strategic employment of stimuli, including elements such as retro branding, past advertising themes, and familiar sensory cues, has been demonstrated to elicit positive emotional response and fortify the bond between the brand and consumer. At the same time, this approach has been observed to diminish the propensity for consumers to accumulate wealth (Lasaleta, Sedikides, & Vohn, 2014).

Building on this foundation and as explained in the conceptual framework developed in the paper of Ranaa et al. (2020), the authors identify key antecedents and key outcomes within the field of customer nostalgia. The antecedents are composed on the one hand of individual elements, such as age and personal experiences, and on the other, marketing stimuli, like nostalgic advertisement and product design. The combination of the two categories of antecedents can evoke nostalgic feelings, resulting in outcomes such as emotional attachment, increased brand loyalty, and higher purchase intention. Thus, if exploited correctly, this phenomenon allows brands to establish emotional connections, stimulate customer engagement, and finally benefit from long-term loyalty.

Furthermore, the study conducted by Lasaleta et al. (2014) shows how nostalgia overshadows economic prudence, thus prioritizing social connections and shared experiences by decreasing the desire for money. To test this hypothesis, the researchers conducted six experiments, which demonstrate that individuals experiencing nostalgia exhibit a diminished valuation of money and an increased propensity to allocate a greater portion of their income toward the acquisition of products and services. This phenomenon is possible thanks to nostalgia's ability to shape consumer decision-making preferences, in this case by making money less central compared to shared experience and social relations. Indeed, the purchase of products that evoke cherished memories and social bonds may increase customer spending and, therefore, benefit the company that stimulates this type of emotion.

Adding on top of this, consumers' decisions driven by nostalgia are characterized by the tendency to conform to a group's preferences. In this regard, the study conducted by Fan et al. (2020) shows that nostalgia encourages social belongingness. More specifically, the research investigates the tendency of nostalgic consumers to conform to the prevailing trends instead of seeking uniqueness. Through a series of four

experiments, the authors demonstrate that nostalgia, or the sentimental longing for the past era, amplifies the inclinations toward popular products that are chosen by the majority. This phenomenon occurs because nostalgia reinforces the perception of social connectedness, however, the extent of this phenomenon is influenced by the strength of social ties. When these ties are weak, nostalgia amplifies the inclination to conform; conversely, in situations where the latter are already robust, nostalgia exerts minimal influence on consumption preference.

In this regard, the paper written by Youn and Jin (2017) shows how nostalgia can modify how consumers perceive and interact with the brand on platforms highly affected by other people's opinions. The present study explores the role of nostalgia marketing on social media, highlighting how the latter influences brand perception and purchase intention, but with one key variable: social influence. The effect of nostalgia is amplified when a brand that relies on it for its appeal enjoys strong digital engagement, as indicated by the presence of numerous followers, comments, and interactions. The higher engagement leads to a higher attitude among consumers to interact with the brand. Conversely, if the brand has low social influence, the impact of nostalgia is decreased, limiting its opportunity to create bonds with the consumers and the not-yet ones. The findings highlight that the efficacy of this marketing instrument is contingent upon the prevailing social context and the degree of digital interaction.

This phenomenon is highly seen in the field of fashion, where certain types of clothes reach popularity as fast as they reach dislike, thanks to the possibility of becoming viral on social media. Some examples are leggings with galaxy patterns or the highly hated (at least for now) skinny jeans, differently is instead the story now for the low-waisted ones. This is to say that fashion is the best example of understanding the aforementioned nostalgia cycle.

One of the most popular styles right now is characteristic from the 1990s-2000s fashion hits, which assume cool nostalgic nuances on the social media most used by Millennials (1981-1996) and Generation Z (1997-2023), also referred to as GenZ (Chidiac; Ross, 2022); the latter exploit the main platform such as TikTok and Instagram to push and set trends.

The peculiar characteristic of these two generations is that they have lived their memories alternating between being offline and online, shifting this interaction

completely to the latter during the pandemic. This change, coupled with nostalgia, has generated the huge trend known as "*Y2K[1] nostalgia*" on TikTok. The resurgence of the aesthetic belonging to the years 2000 has brought (again) light on those brands that were popular back in the day: Monella Vagabonda, Juicy Couture, and Fiorucci. These are just a few of the brands able to understand the huge opportunity created and available in the market, whose demand is driven by nostalgia; in fact, the latter have pursued a huge rebranding able to combine their original identity with the trends of the moment.

In this connection, Hartmann and Bruck (2019) further explore the concept of nostalgia marketing by demonstrating how brands can leverage the past to evoke nostalgic emotions and generate a sense of "*re-enchantment*", which is defined as a return to the enchantment and magic association with the memory. The authors of the study propose that nostalgia can be integrated into marketing strategies through three primary channels. The initial strategy is "*re-installation*", which involves the recreation of nostalgic experiences designed to reinforce the consumers' sense of belonging. The second is "*re-enactment*", where brands function as conduits through which individuals incorporate values and practices from the past into their contemporary lives. Lastly, the concept of "re-appropriation" emerges. The latter refers to the process of taking elements from the past, such as vintage brands or styles, and reinterpreting them aesthetically or ironically. In the present, these elements are assigned new meanings, contributing to a continuous reinterpretation of the past.

Similarly, the paper "*The Power of Brand Nostalgia: Contrasting Brand Personality Dimensions and consumer-brand Relationship of Nostalgic and Non-nostalgic Brands*" (Youn and Dodoo, 2021) demonstrates that nostalgic brands foster stronger brand attachment and social media engagement compared to non-nostalgic ones. More in depth, the findings of the study suggest that nostalgic brands are perceived as more sincere, exciting and competent which serve to strengthen the emotional connection between consumer and brand. The sentimental value of a brand has been demonstrated to stimulate strong emotional response, therefore augmenting the level of online engagement, as evidenced by a greater volume of share and comments when compared to non-nostalgic brands. Furthermore, nostalgia has been shown to benefit brand loyalty,

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[1] Y2K: "Y" stands for "*year*" and "K" stands for "*thousands*"

leading consumers to experience distress at the prospect of losing a brand they identify with. Lastly, this suggests that brands that wish to leverage nostalgia in their marketing strategy must prioritize authenticity and the capacity to evoke emotions.

These final papers consistently emphasize the significance of intangibles, such as emotions and feelings. In this context the Puente-Dìaz et al (2021) research is centered on the paradigm of experiential purchasing. Experiential purchase emphasizes consumer experiences such as trips, events or other activities, which involve direct interaction and emotional experience. The latter tend to be more remembered as significant montements, able to trigger a much more intense sense of nostalgia than the purchase of material goods. Results indicate that this effect is mediated by consumer's ability to attribute profound personal significance to their experience. Indeed, consumers reinterpret such events as pivotal moments in their personal histories, therefore enriching their autobiographical memory and reinforcing the emotional connections with these experiences. In this theoretical framework, experience is posited to function not only as a source of immediate happiness, but also as a memory to be cherished. This memory has the power to influence future decisions, translated into repeat purchasing behaviour that in the past offered high symbolic value.

Although the researches have underscored the advantages of nostalgia, in terms of increase of both engagement and purchase intention, it is imperative to cautiously contemplate the potential ramifications of such phenomena.

Although nostalgia has been extensively studied in relation to brand perception and consumer engagement, its relationship to innovation remains underexplored in the academic literature. In fact, most researchers tend to view nostalgia as a static phenomena anchored in the past, without fully exploring its possible interactions with innovative elements within branding strategies. However, this approach limits the understanding of a phenomenon that could be much more dynamic. For example, an interesting direction for further research would be related to how innovation may moderate the effectiveness of nostalgia: the combination of nostalgia and innovative elements may in fact generate more emotional engagement, than the use of nostalgia alone. In this direction, analysing the perception of brands born in the 1990s in today's context could provide relevant insights into how innovation helps to maintain relevance and strengthen their connection with consumers over time.

In conclusion, nostalgia is a multifaceted factor capable of influencing consumers' behavior, emotional attachment, spending patterns, and social alignment. While nostalgia can serve as an effective tool to capture the attention of the Gen Z and Millennials, it is essential to recognize that these generations have grown up in a context strongly shaped by constant innovation. Therefore, the integration of nostalgic elements should be carefully balanced with innovative cues to resonate authenticity with their expectations and experiences.

The following sections delve into the broad concept of innovation, apparently a competitor, but in nowadays world, maybe a cooperator of nostalgia.

1.2 Innovation element

Cambridge Dictionary defines "innovation" as "*a new idea or method*".

Since the world began, innovation has been the fuel in transforming industries and improving the quality of life. Similarly to the nostalgia cycle, which occurs more or less every 20 years, innovation is also punctuated by time. It is enough to look at the time lapses between one industrial revolution and the following one to realize that this period decreases as the number of revolutions increases.

The two main reasons for this accelerated pace of innovation are globalization and technological developments, which have completely disrupted traditional industries and business models, creating new opportunities both in the market and within the job market.

A key characteristic of the contemporary business model is the rapid changes and growth in every aspect. For this reason, being able to evolve allows companies to generate benefits at 360º, inside, outside, and in-between the company. According to many articles, such as those from Forbes or Harvard Business School, innovation fosters creativity and resilience, avoiding stagnation, which can be detrimental in both glimpsing and exploiting new market opportunities. Furthermore, an open approach can be crucial for companies to attract talent, by creating new jobs, which can be challenging but at the same time stimulating, it is possible to enhance job satisfaction and result in a better competitive position on the market. In fact, companies that have embraced innovative strategies are better positioned in the market. As a point of fact,

the research carried out by Henkel highlights that 56% of businesses recognize that innovation is more important now than it has ever been.

Until this point, the concept of innovation has been broad, but this is due to its nature, as visible from the definition: no area, no process, no fields were mentioned. On this topic, it is possible to write endlessly, however, for the aim of this thesis, it would be appropriate to delve into an area of innovation.

Nowadays, the latter word is somehow linked to digitalization and Artificial Intelligence (AI). Every field, also the latter mentioned has both sides of the coin: according to Deloitte's analysis, the right combination of digital transformation can generate a market value of $1.25 trillion, however, its wrong combination can erode it to $1.5 trillion instead. Furthermore, although most companies acknowledge investing in data and analytics as a top priority, only 37% believe that their effort to improve data quality has been effective, thus highlighting an ongoing challenge and an opportunity for improvement. This transition toward digitalization and data-driven approaches is a key component of modern innovation, profoundly influencing business strategy and customer engagement.

Indeed, from a corporate point of view, the subconsciously, early mentioned connection between innovation and digitization lies in the acquisition, analysis, and storage of data, useful to train/exploit Artificial Intelligence as well.

In many articles, data are now compared and referred to as the new gold; in this regard, the article "*How Well Is Data Fueling Your Company's Digital Revolution?*" from Forbes draws a parallel between how coal was the fuel for the industrial revolution, while data feeds today's digital revolution. Additionally, another article from the same journal discusses how implementing digital information on customer behaviors in business models creates even more growth and benefits than the mere analysis of data.

Data that provides information on customers is important for companies because, similarly to products and services, strategies have also become highly customer-centric, especially in marketing areas. To be successful in developing one of these, it is important to know as much as possible about customers' preferences, habits, and lifestyles.

As examined in the article by Kumar et al. (2019), being able to exploit and implement insights deriving from a big data analysis results in a strategy able to augment customer

engagement. More specifically, through a data-driven approach, it is possible to identify gaps created by the traditional engagement methods, which are not able to keep pace with the evolution in the market and cause a fragmented customer experience.

Nowadays, the concept of seamless experience can be a synonym for the omnichannel approach. By understanding the proper audience and integrating data and technology, it is possible to create a personalized, smooth, and convenient experience for the customer; at the same time, the company improves its competitive advantage, sales, and ROI.

The study of S. Verhoef et al. (2019) explores how innovation in omnichannel strategy can shape customer engagement, specifically how digital advancement creates a seamless and highly interactive customer experience. One key takeaway hides in the understanding of customer behaviors in front of an omnichannel environment and how companies can tailor the experience even more in order to drive deeper engagement. However, the authors highlight possible gaps arising from the implementation of new technologies without fully understanding their impact on customer engagement. Possible solutions lie in the development of more data-driven approaches, utilizing insights from customer interactions to refine and personalize omnichannel innovations.

This concept can be extended from technologies to marketing strategies as well. When implementing campaigns to increase engagement, it is important to ensure that the result will be positive, thus increasing not only engagement but also brand awareness and possibly sales.

Lately, channels such as social media are being integrated more and more into marketing campaigns, thanks to their ability to engage and reach an audience with one of the highest purchasing power. The efficiency of these campaigns concerns the quality and consistency of contents, which need to excite and engage the intended target.

In the research from M. Sadiq Sohail et al (2020), the data from 242 social media users was employed to analyze the relationship among social media marketing elements, brand trust, and brand loyalty. The findings revealed that features like brand communities, entertainment, interactions, and customization have a significantly positive impact on both brand trust and brand loyalty.

In conclusion, innovation has continuously shaped how companies interact with customers by adapting to new technologies and changing market expectations. As

highlighted until now, digitalization and data-driven strategy have strengthened the concept of innovation within the marketing field. However, while innovation captures attention, the real impact on consumers' actions is the ability to engage them by connecting to their inner emotional and psychological spheres. It is here that customer engagement plays a crucial role; in fact, without the latter, the simple use of innovation can capture momentarily the attention of the audience without locking them in with the interaction and later with the brand itself.

Lastly, it would be interesting to see how an element so connected with the past and static, as nostalgia, could create harmony with an element referred to the future and so dynamic, as innovation. The two, apparently contrasting in their nature, could create a unique customer experience able to engage past and present generations.

1.3 Further elements

Customer engagement is the combination of all the interactions and relationships that a company establishes with its customers, intending to actively involve them and keep them loyal over time. This concept has evolved significantly over the last few years, becoming crucial in modern marketing strategies, as well as the first step through which companies need to pass through to reach more complex goals such as increase sales, ROI and brand loyalty.

Being able to capture the attention of customers and engage them efficiently brings several advantages to the company. First of all, involved customers show a higher level of fidelity to the brand compared to the less involved ones, resulting in repetitive purchases and preferences for the company over the competitors. To support this thesis the paper written by R. Thakur (2019) demonstrates how the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty is strengthened by customer engagement; the author analyzes this relationship within the digital business area, where the ability to lock the customer with the brand is even more important, owing the intangible nature of the business, which automatically lowers the trust in consumers; as experimented in the paper of S.C. Wingreen et al. (2019).

One of the automatic consequences of repeated purchases leads to the second benefit, which is personalization. Thanks to these continuous interactions, companies can capture crucial data on customer preferences, adapting and modifying therefore their

products or services to better appeal to them or to better satisfy their needs. Lastly, this approach results in higher customer satisfaction, which is also the third main benefit arising from customer engagement.

The benefits listed until now are linked to the actions made by the company: if the company puts in place certain actions, the consequent effects will arrive, either positive or negative. However, there is a sphere of other benefits that are indirectly correlated to these actions; namely, clients who become ambassadors of the brand. Such a group is created by customers who are highly satisfied and who are willing to spread word of mouth, both physically and digitally, through social media, online groups, and so on. A clear example of customers on social media is the so-called "UGC", acting as a modern and digital form of word-of-mouth. As explained in a Forbes article, *User-Generated Content (UGC)* is *"original content related to a product or service that is created by individuals and not by the brand itself"*. Moreover, they are so important for companies because they are a social proof of authenticity, thanks to the lack of *"fabrication, embellishment or Photoshop"*, people trust people and not marketers. In this regard, a Stackla survey (2017) discovered that 86% of consumers value authenticity when liking and supporting a brand, in addition, authenticity is perceived to be three times higher in consumer-generated content compared to brand-created content and lastly, 52% of people post on social media at least once a month a product they have purchased. Furthermore, interacting with an approved brand translates into a high level of attachment, leading to a greater tolerance toward errors and disservices, thanks to the role of loyalty, which guides customers' forgiveness more easily.

Notwithstanding, customer engagement presents some challenges and potential disadvantages. The first one is related to expectations; in fact, customers who are highly involved in a brand develop high expectations toward the products, the service, and the customer care offered. If these expectations are not met, the risk of customer dissatisfaction is high, and possibly consequently causing losses.

Moreover, implementing engagement strategies requires all types of resources: human, capital, and technological. The company must be ready to face these possible obstacles and manage and customize large-scale interactions. As mentioned earlier, a crucial resource is customer data; however, the company must be able to ensure privacy to safeguard personal information and draw on regulations.

If there are leading places implementing customer-centric strategies, Italy is not one of them. Despite many companies recognizing the important role of customer engagement, a research by the School of Management at Milan's Politecnico finds that only 8% of Italian firms adopt a customer-centric approach. This highlights the embryonic state of Italian companies regarding efficient customer engagement strategies.

Compared to other states, the main reason for this delay is due to two factors: the first is related to the lack of responsible employees highly focused on customer experience projects; the same research points out that 69% of companies fall into this category. The second one is that only 24% of businesses establish a collaborative relationship with their clients, which is based on constant feedback. Thirdly, huge obstacles are represented by the lack of adequate digital skills and change aversion. An article from Sole24Ore, from 2024, highlights that only 45,8% of the population has basic digital skills, being below the European average and therefore making Italy ranked at 18th place out of the 27 European countries.

Moving from tangible data to academic literature, the topic of customer engagement has been highly studied, highlighting its impact on the brand and consumers. More specifically engagement of customers on social media acts as a crucial element to build loyalty, fidelity and increase purchase intention.

The experiment carried out by A. de Regt et al. (2021) explores how Virtual Reality (VR) can be used as a marketing tool to involve customers in immersive and interactive brand experiences. The results find that VR uniquely engages customers, resulting in the enhancement of brand advocacy, as well as the promotion of positive behaviors toward the brand.

Building on this, the study conducted by A. Martin et al (2020) investigated the effect of social media usage among different segments of customers. Results indicate that the level of engagement on social media differs according to the type of segment, the category relevant to this thesis is fashion-seeking customers, who engage on social media to discover new trends. However, regardless of the category, it is possible to state that engagement on social media positively impacts trust level and purchase intention among customers. Additionally, Forbes' article delves into the concept of emotional branding, which can forge deeper connections between brands and customers. There are four hinges for emotional branding campaigns: storytelling, visual design, consistency,

and authenticity. It is therefore understandable that companies can benefit from marketing strategies that take into account the active participation of the customers.

Alongside, the paper from Chiang et al. (2018) defines "antecedents" as those elements that influence or determine engagement like informativeness, entertainment, credibility, and interactivity; it defines instead "consequences" as those factors that are affected by the first ones, such as brand trust, purchase intention, and brand loyalty. The regression analyses the relation between these two categories, concluding that informativeness, entertainment, and credibility positively influence customer involvement, which, in turn, is positively associated with brand trust, purchase intention, and brand loyalty.

Another pivotal study by S. Barta et al. (2023) delves into the effectiveness of humor and followers' hedonic experiences by investigating four influencers' account characteristics on TikTok: originality, quality, quantity, and humor. This research underscores the importance of creating original content, which leads to greater enjoyment and satisfaction; by the same token, humor indirectly boosts message effectiveness, resulting in a higher level of engagement and responsiveness. Especially these two characteristics combined have a more substantial impact on engagement and enjoyment.

Taken together, these studies contribute to a nuanced understanding of customer engagement and all its affected spheres, underscoring its advantages and disadvantages as well. While brand-consumer is undoubtedly strengthened, a strategic and balanced approach is needed as well.

Overall, customer engagement is a crucial tool for companies that desire to compete efficiently in the modern market. Brands must tailor their engagement strategies to align with customers' needs and expectations, ensuring that digital interactions translate into meaningful, long-lasting consumer relationships able to generate and capture value within the market.

In conclusion, the review of the literature allowed to outline the main theoretical concepts underlying this work, highlighting the central role of nostalgia as a communicative and psychological lever in the relationship between consumer and brand. Although the concept of innovation has been explored for the themes of artificial intelligence and data exploitation, it is worth noting that for the specific purpose of this

experimental research, the direct implementation of these technologies is not feasible. Therefore in this study, the innovative element is symbolically represented by the introduction of the smartphone, a highly significant technological object for the contemporary context, but absent in the nineties. Furthermore, the reflection on the centrality of data finds concreteness in the use of analytical tools, such as SPSS, that allow to transform the responses of the participants into, apparently static numbers, however full of meanings and capable of guiding strategic decisions.

Finally, customer engagement provided a fundamental conceptual basis for understanding the psychological mechanisms underlying consumer behaviour. In fact, the intention to buy can be read as a consequence of emotional and cognitive involvement generated by the interaction with the brand. The latter confirms the relevance of customer engagement as an essential prerequisite to stimulate concrete behaviours in the consumer.

The insights collected until now lay the foundations for analyzing purchase intention through two seemingly opposite but actually complementary forces: nostalgia and innovation.

"Sure! Alice, here is your summary for …" It may seem the beginning of an AI-generated response, and yet, the reader recognizes it with the same familiarity with which it is recalled a puppy's first bark in *Nintendogs*. This simple parallel highlights the purpose of this analysis: on the one hand, the emotion attached to past memories can reinforce emotional attachment and loyalty to a brand. On the other hand, the ability to come up with new, immersive, and personalized solutions allows companies to remain relevant in an ever-changing market.

The next chapter will dive into 1990s memories, proposing three case studies: one related to intangible nostalgia in the field of television, the second is related to an example of tangible nostalgia, and the last one highlights a failed attempt to use this emotion as a strategic lever.

CHAPTER 2 - COMPANIES BRING US BACK IN THE 1990s & 2000s

The use of nostalgia as a strategic lever in marketing has experienced a significant resurgence in recent years, manifesting itself as a powerful tool to connect consumers and brands on a deep emotional level. Despite its recently increased popularity, the use of the latter techniques dates back to 2002. Already back in the days, the paper of Vincent J. Pascal et al. highlights the growing desire of consumers to recapture the past, as well as the example of Coca-Cola bringing back the green-tinted Coke bottles, typical of the 1950s-60s.

This chapter aims to explore a series of emblematic case studies of how various companies, products, and entertainment productions have integrated elements of the past in their marketing strategies, achieving remarkable results in terms of customer engagement, brand reinforcement, and commercial success.

As pointed out by Ipsos and Effie's report (2024), nostalgia is not simply a revocation of the past, but a dynamic and personal sentiment which echoes consumers' personal and collective memories. In a context marked by economic crisis, geopolitical tensions, and accelerated technological changes, recalling times perceived as simpler and more reassuring acquires extraordinary communicative power. Brands like Adidas, Nintendo, or McDonald's have been able to exploit this tool, reducing the gap between generations by making the new ones approach iconic products from the previous ones.

This trend fits perfectly in the larger picture outlined by the Ipsos Global Trends Report (2023), which identifies the desire for authenticity, security, and emotional connection as some of the main drivers of today's consumer choices. In such a scenario, nostalgia takes on a key role, offering brands a universal yet adaptable language that can speak as much to those who have directly experienced a certain era as to those who have only been spectators through testimonies.

Confirming this cross-generational nature of the phenomenon is the academic research (Vargas et al, 2025) conducted on the impact of nostalgia on the purchasing behaviour of Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z. The study shows how each group reacts differently to nostalgic stimuli, but converges on the fact that, if used in the right way, strengthen the affective bond with brands. The skill lies in being able to understand which symbols, aesthetics, or narratives are significant for each generation.

Moving the focus to a more corporate perspective, Deloitte Latinoamerica's report on "nostalgia industry" highlights how companies are structuring real strategies to capitalize on the widespread desire to return to the past. Relaunching iconic products, reviving retro design, or using campaigns that repurpose vintage jingles, logos, and visuals are just some of the tactics employed. In this regard, a recent example is Pepsi, which revived its 1990s logo to celebrate its history in an operation that was well received by its consumers.

Moving to North America, McKinsey & Company's analysis reveals a surprising element. Among younger generations, especially Gen Z, a strong interest emerges in the eras that they have not experienced directly, such as the 1980s and 1990s. More specifically, there is a strong attraction toward the aesthetics of VHS, Walkman, and disposable cameras. The interesting part is that this lure does not come from personal experiences, but from a cultural fascination which allows brands to build a sense of identity and belonging for digital-native consumers as well. Therefore, this is a clear example of how nostalgia can be transmitted and reinterpreted even across generations that have only indirect knowledge of it.

In the British context, The Financial Times has documented the variety of this phenomenon, observing its spread across very different sectors: from food & beverage, with the return of classic recipes, to fashion, which is increasingly oriented toward reinterpreting styles of the past, to technology. All this testifies to how nostalgia is not limited to a specific sphere, but represents a transversal dynamics that shapes contemporary consumer behaviour.

Lastly, in Italy, Sole24Ore also gave an important space to this issue. In the article "La storia siamo noi" (translated: *"We are the history"*), it points out that vintage marketing is not limited to pure nostalgic re-representation, instead, it is effective only when it manages to reinterpret the past with a modern look. In this sense, the narratives constructed by brands become bridges between eras, capable of generating authenticity and engagement. In another article of the same newspaper, it is shown how companies rooted in collective memories manage not only to survive but to reinvent themselves, combining heritage and innovation to meet the needs of an increasingly fluid and fragmented market.

In conclusion, the analysis of these contributions highlights how nostalgia, aside from being a passing trend, takes the form of a multifaceted and structured marketing strategy capable of generating value in both symbolic and commercial terms.

In the following subchapters, concrete case studies will be presented to describe how the theoretical principles explained until this point, find concreteness in creative and strategic choices of brands.

2.1: Intangible nostalgia: *"Hanno Ucciso l'Uomo Ragno - La leggendaria storia degli 883"* - Sky Original

The Sky Original TV series "Hanno Ucciso l'Uomo Ragno - La leggendaria storia degli 883" represents a case point of how television can act as a tool for the rediscovery of cultural phenomena of the past, revitalising interest in icons and generating significant impact on both audience and music rankings.

This Sky Original TV series is dedicated to the story of the pop-rock band 883, an iconic band during the 1990s in Italy, able to mark the imagination of a generation profoundly.

The band 883 was born from the meeting between Max Pezzali and Mauro Repetto during the last high school years in Pavia. They represent an authentic and direct voice of the Italian province, telling stories of friendship, teenage love, dreams, and disillusionment in a simple and immediate language. Their success exploded in the early 1990s, and it was rooted in a music scene dominated by fresh pop-rock sounds and lyrics that reflected the ordinary normality of young people.

It is noteworthy that 883 embodied the spirit of a generation, as evidenced by their simple yet profound songs, which could authentically depict everyday life. The distinguishing characteristic was their ability to maintain authenticity in their compositions, which enables them to capture the genuine reality of youth without filters.

In this regard, their debut album "Hanno Ucciso l'Uomo Ragno", released in 1992, became an emblematic expression of a generation that felt at the same time disillusioned and eager to dream and find their own identity. In an interview with Rolling Stone Italia, Max Pezzali described those years as a time when "*we were naïve, unlucky, a bit borderline but idealistic*", emphasizing how their music reflected the experiences of a

youth who lived in the Italian province, far from the spotlight yet full of authentic stories to tell.

Parallel to this, the Sky Original TV series under the direction of Sydney Sibilia functions as a profoundly evocative nostalgia operation, a campaign aimed at evoking emotions and memories associated with that period and that music. The series employs a narrative approach, recounting the genesis and the ascendance of 883, intending to evoke a profound emotional response in individuals who have personally experienced the era depicted, awakening the memory of a carefree and hope-filled era. The tone of the series was deliberately authentic and accessible, reflecting the simplicity and the sincerity that have always distinguished the music of 883. Furthermore, the use of the band's iconic songs as a soundtrack, as well as the attention to scenery and costume details, helps recreate the atmosphere of the 1990s, immersing the viewer in a true musical and cultural "amarcord".

The promotional and communication strategies were meticulously designed to resonate with a diverse audience. On the one hand, it was aimed at the historical fans of the 883, eager to relive the moments that marked their youth; on the other hand, it was directed to late millennials and younger generations intrigued by the history of a musical phenomenon that has left an indelible mark on the Italian pop culture.

The sponsorship of the Sky Original TV series adopted a multichannel strategy, involving both traditional media such as Sky TG24, Sky SPORT, and Sky's official website, and digital platforms, especially social media. Among these, Instagram played a central role, thanks to the collaborations with the influencers of "*Milano da Scrocco*", a widely followed page that primarily targets a youth and urban audience.

The choice of "*Milano da Scrocco*" as an influencer partner was particularly appropriate for three primary reasons. Firstly, the page is known for offering advice on free events and cultural initiatives, especially within the Milan area, whose target is primarily young adults, students, and workers; this allows for to spread of awareness. Subsequently, the audience of this page coincides with the target audience of the series itself: Millennials and Gen Z. Lastly, the informal and ironic tone of "*Milano da Scrocco*" aligns perfectly with the style of this series, which authentically narrates the story of Max Pezzali and Mauro Repetto. The Instagram platform was determined to be optimal for achieving the desired audience reach. According to an analysis by Sprout

Social, in 2025, Instagram is expected to be one of the preferred social media platforms for Gen Z and Millennials, with 60% of users under the age of 35, and a notable presence among the 18-24 age group.

In addition to conventional and digital communication tools, a 90s-theme event was organised in Milan for the debut of the series. This event offered fans and non-fans alike the opportunity to immerse themselves in the atmosphere of the era through the reconstructions of 883's iconic locations.

To access the event, one was required to pass through the doors of Max Pezzali's parents' flower shop. Once inside, one found oneself situated at the center of the Celebrità[2]'s dancefloor, becoming immortal thanks to the renowned 883 song.

In this space, participants had the opportunity to engage in karaoke, performing the band's hits, or to amuse themselves in the Jolly Blue, an iconic arcade that had been meticulously recreated for the occasion and featured numerous arcade and pinball machines from the era. The 90s focus was also pivotal in the brands that made the events possible, some of which were: PepsiCo, Big Babol, Chupa Chups, Nintendo Italia, BasicNet (Kappa), and Mirato (Malizia).

The results achieved by the series have been significant.

According to the report from Vogie Italia, the series "Hanno Ucciso l'Uomo Ragno - La Leggendaria storia degli 883" averaged 1.3 million viewers per week, becoming the most-watched Sky Original debut series in the last eight years. The success has also been reflected on the music streaming platform, as evidenced by Spotify Italia's reports of an increase in 883's songs being streamed. Tracks such as "Sei un mito" have achieved platinum status, and "Bella vera" has reached gold status.

The series has been met with favorable reviews from the critics, who have characterised it as a sincere and engaging tribute to an era and musical duo that made the history of Italian music. The ability to narrate the story of 883 with authenticity and irony was particularly appreciated, as was a decision to maintain a light and accessible tone, consistent with the spirit of the band.

The success of the series was also confirmed with the announcement of the second season titles as the band's second album, "Nord Sud Ovest Est", which will continue to

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[2] Celebrità: Historic Pavia disco during the 1980s-90s, became popular thanks to the song "La regina del Celebrità" (translated: "The queen of Celebrità") of the 883 band.

tell the story of the 883, further strengthening the bond between the audience and the band.

The conclusion, the series serves as a prime example of how nostalgia can be used authentically and effectively to establish an emotional bridge between generations. The series does not simply recount the narrative of a musical group; rather, it functions as an emotional manifesto of the 1990s, which restores the insecurities, contradictions, and aspirations of a generation that, despite the absence of digital resources, shares with today's youth a profound search for identity and belonging. The success of the series shows how nostalgia, as a sincere narrative of shared emotions, can generate engagement, intergenerational dialogue, and a sense of cultural community. Telling the story of the 883, therefore, has also meant telling a part of today's youth, showing that certain fragilities, passions, and dreams are timeless.

Picture 1: Poster for the launching event of the Sky Original TV series "Hanno Ucciso l'Uomo Ragno - La leggendaria storia degli 883"

2.2: Tangible nostalgia: *40th anniversary of Happy Meal & Collector's Edition Cups* **- McDonald's**

As evidenced in both academic literature and the newspaper, the present era is characterised by accelerated and incessant transformations. In such a setting, the memory of the past assumes a reassuring and familiar role, providing an emotional anchor.

In this context, McDonald's, the global leader in the fast-food industry, has strategically identified and addressed this need by leveraging two significant initiatives: the 40th anniversary of the Happy Meal and the recent Collector's Cup campaign, which draws inspiration from the iconic franchises of the 1990s and 2000s. These cases illustrate how nostalgia can be incorporated into a brand engagement strategy, thereby evoking positive memories and fortifying intergenerational bonds with McDonald's.

40th Anniversary of the Happy Meal

The Happy Meal, which was first introduced in 1979, is not simply a meal for children; it is a treasure chest of memories for entire generations. The colorful carton, the promise of a surprise within, and the excitement of discovering which toy would accompany the chicken nuggets or hamburgers are elements that have become firmly embedded in the collective imagination.

In 2019, McDonald's commemorated the 40-year milestone of one of its most popular products: the Happy Meal. In celebration of this achievement, the company initiated a global campaign of significant symbolic value, reintroducing 17 of the most iconic toys distributed between the 1980s and the early 2000s, which included Tamagotchi, Power Rangers, My Little Pony, Furby, and the renowned Hamburglar.

This operation, called *"Surprise Happy Meal",* was executed in over 90 countries for a limited period, evoking an enthusiastic response from both children and adults who had previously experienced those games during their own childhood. The nostalgic element was given a central focus, with the company addressing adults who have been customers in the past and who now find themselves in a position to make purchasing decisions for their own children. By doing so, the fast-food leader began a process of affective remembrance, repositioning a childhood product as a vehicle of emotion for a generation that grew up with it.

Beyond the emotional aspect, the campaign exhibited a robust strategic element. In a market where brands increasingly compete based on experience, McDonald's offered a tangible opportunity to relive moments from the past, incentivising restaurant visits and encouraging sharing on social media. Indeed, a significant number of consumers documented their experiences, thereby contributing to the viral spread of the campaign. As a waterfall effect, nostalgia evolved from an individual sentiment to a collective experience, therefore reinforcing the brand status as an integral element of the shared cultural memory.

In conclusion, this campaign demonstrated how the experience associated with a simple object, such as a toy, can act as a powerful catalyst for emotions, creating a bridge between the past and the present and strengthening the emotional bond between McDonald's and its customers.

Picture 2: The famous Happy Meal box with some of the possible surprises from the 1990s-2000s

Collector's Edition Cups campaign

In 2024, McDoldald's has once again employed nostalgia as a marketing strategy with the launch of its "*Collector's Cups*", a collectible series celebrating beloved characters and franchises from the 1990s and 2000s. The initiative is part of "*Collectors Meal*", a dedicated meal which includes one of the cups featuring characters such as Barbie, Shrek, the Beanie Babies, the Minions, and other stars of pop culture that marked the childhood and adolescence of millions. Unlike the Happy Meal celebration, McDonald's has opted to pay tribute not to its own products or historical mascots, but rather to a cultural phenomenon and iconic objects that have left an indelible mark on

the past decades. Examples are Barbie, with its decades-long history, the Beanie Babies, which enjoyed a surge in popularity in the 1990s, or again, Shrek and the Minions, which have appeared in more recent movies, representing a milestone in the evolution of toys and entertainment for children and young people.

From a strategic perspective, the initiative aligns coherently with the logic of experimental marketing. Therefore, the act of purchasing becomes an emotional experience, linked with personal memories and a shared visual culture. Through the Collectible Cups initiative, McDonald's is able to establish connections with a broader cultural phenomenon that, while not inherently associated with the brand, profoundly resonates with its audience.

Furthermore, the act of collecting these glasses signifies more than simply the acquisition of a McDonald's branded item; rather, the campaign captures the increasing value attributed to physical objects in an era that is predominantly digital.

The approach to nostalgia lies in their ability to evoke authentic emotions through glasses that assume the value of "souvenirs of the past", tangible symbols of an emotional connection to the fast-food chain. The act of rediscovering a childhood toy or an image associated with a carefree era can evoke positive sentiments, therefore fortifying the emotional connection with the brand that facilitated this "return to the future".

Once again, McDonald's marketing strategy targets not only younger consumers but also adults who are now part of the Millennial generation. The objective is therefore to evoke memories associated with a pre-digital era, which is perceived as more authentic and reassuring. Collecting glasses becomes a ritualistic practice, characterised by the purchase of an object and the re-establishment of a past habit.

Initiatives like the latter have been shown to stimulate robust word-of-mouth and sharing mechanisms on social media platforms. Images of vintage toys or clothes often become the subject of viral content, generating a media buzz that extends well beyond the scope of a conventional advertising campaign. Users assume the role of brand ambassadors, disseminating their personal experience and extending the invitation to others to partake in this nostalgic exploration.

The two cases analysed show how nostalgia can be a strategic lever to strengthen engagement with the brand. McDonald's has effectively positioned itself as a cultural entity, transcending its commercial nature and evoking strong emotional responses and nostalgic memories among its customers. The Happy Meal and Collector's cups do not simply function as products, but as memory devices that facilitate intergenerational and intercultural dialogue.

In both cases, nostalgia is not employed passively, but as an active and participatory element. It is not simply a matter of recall, rather, consumers are encouraged to relive, collect, and share. This active dimension serves to transform memory into experience, therefore creating new forms of interaction between past and present and between brand and audience.

In conclusion, McDonald's demonstrates the potential for reinterpreting the past to generate value in the present. The fast-food giant has strategically employed marketing operations rooted in nostalgia to foster continuity in its relationship with consumers, while also updating its identity without giving up on its emotional legacy. This nostalgia proves to be a potent tool for fostering enduring and significant relationship with consumers, effectively transforming a simple meal into a true journey through time.

Picture 3: McDonald's Collector's Edition Cups

2.3: Nostalgia failure: "*Child of the 90s*" campaign - Microsoft

In the contemporary digital landscape, few brands have experienced such a marked rise and fall as Internet Explorer (IE). Microsoft Internet Explorer was released in 1995 with the launch of Windows 95. It rapidly emerged as the preferred browser of millions of users, largely due to its seamless integration with the world's most prevalent operating system.

During the years at the turn of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Internet Explorer dominated the browser landscape unchallenged, achieving a market share exceeding 90%. Despite so, the advent of new competitors, including Mozilla Firefox, Google Chrome, and Safari, gradually eroded its dominance, leading IE to be associated with concepts like slowness and obsolescence. These new contenders frequently exhibited superior performance, greater adherence to web standards, and a richer ecosystem of extensions, relegating IE to an increasingly unfavorable position in terms of perception and functionality.

Notwithstanding this gradual erosion of market share, Internet Explorer persisted in being preinstalled on Windows systems for an extended period, however, sustaining a progressively diminishing user base. Subsequently, Microsoft's strategic focus leaned toward its successor, Microsoft Edge, which was introduced with the Windows 10 operating system in 2015. Despite the official discontinuation of support for most versions of Internet Explorer in 2022, an IE function was still integrated into Microsoft Edge to ensure compatibility with older websites and business applications.

Faced with this unfavorable reputation and gradual decline, Microsoft confronted a multifaceted challenge: the revitalisation of a product widely perceived as a relic of the past. It was within this paradigm that the "*Child of the '90s*" campaign, a promotional initiative for Internet Explorer 10, was initiated in 2013. The objective was not simply to reintroduce a product, but rather to revive an emotional connection with a generation of users who had been familiar with the browser during its prime, only to subsequently discontinue its use. Rather than emphasizing performance, speed, or innovation, qualities in which competitors had become dominant, Microsoft adopted a markedly divergent approach: evoking nostalgia.

The advertising campaign embarks on a journey into the emotional territory of nostalgia, the name of which, "Child of the 90s", already stimulates memories. This

initiative was directed to individuals who experienced their childhood and adolescence in the decade symbolized by distinctive pop culture, pioneering technological innovations, and palpable optimism toward the digital future.

In a span of less than two minutes, the viewer is instantaneously transported to a bygone era characterized by the Tamagotchi, floppy disks, YO-YO, shoes with lights, and water guns. As previously stated, the objective of this project is to evoke nostalgic sentiments associated with childhood for individuals born in the late 1980s and 1990s. To this extent, meticulous attention is paid to the selection of objects and references. This experience is further enhanced by a soundtrack that draws from the pop hits of that era, contributing to an atmosphere that is both evocative and engaging. The video's narrative culmination featured the introduction of Internet Explorer as the gateway to this new digital world, suggesting that it is not simply a browser, but rather a companion that has accompanied users since the early days of the Internet. This companion was identified as a key element in their growth and discovery of the online world.

Furthermore, the tone of the video is characterised by an affectionate and auto-critical quality, accompanied by a narrator's voice that guides the viewer through the nostalgic journey. The video concludes with a concise yet impactful phrase: "*You grew up. So did we. Reconnect with the new Internet Explorer*". The latter is not just a slogan, but an initiative to reevaluate the brand through the lens of an affective key.

As articulated by the B2B marketing agency Column Five Media, which collaborated with the company on the campaign, the primary objective was not so much to showcase the browser's functionalities as to establish an emotional connection with the audience. The campaign strategically employed nostalgia as a potent tool to reposition the brand in consumers' minds, aiming to overcome the prevailing negative perceptions accumulated over time and awaken a sense of familiarity and affection.

The communication strategy that was meticulously orchestrated for the "Child of the '90s" campaign was developed across multiple channels to maximise the reach and engagement of the target audience. The marketing agency opted for a video as the primary mode of communication, the latter was distributed through online platforms, such as YouTube and other social media. The selection of video format was a deliberate decision as it was recognized that this tool possesses the capacity to elicit emotions and evoke memories more effectively than textual or static content. The video was an

imminent success, achieving over 4 million views on YouTube within the first week of publication, and over 50 million in the long term. In addition to this, the campaign was nominated for the Webby Award and provoked significant discussion on social media, oscillating between enthusiasm and skepticism.

Furthermore, social media platforms played a pivotal role in the viral propagation of the video. The campaign actively encouraged users to share their memories related to the 1990s through the use of the hashtag "*#ChildOfThe'90s*", therefore creating an online dialogue and exponentially amplifying the reach of the message. This user-generated content tactic effectively transforms passive users into active participants, who enhance engagement and foster a sense of community around the brand.

Moreover, the decision to employ a nostalgic tone can be considered a calculated risk. While it presents the potential to profoundly connect with the target audience by fostering a robust emotional bond, it also reveals the risk of being perceived as a sentimental attempt to hold on to the past. However, Microsoft and the agency Column Five Media paid a lot of attention to every detail in order to avoid these drawbacks, focusing instead on the delivery of an authentic and heartfelt evocation of the 1990s. As previously stated, the communication strategy incorporates self-mockery elements: the video implicitly acknowledges the technological evolutions of the "rudimentary" tools of the 1990s to Internet Explorer. The latter acknowledges its origin without rejecting the notion of advancement, contributing to the delivery of an authentic and credible message.

Generally speaking, the outcomes of this nostalgic campaign were heterogeneous. On the one hand, it shows a substantial impact on awareness and engagement, thanks to the millions of views of the video on YouTube as well as the high volumes of conversations generated through the hashtag. This has satisfied the objective of making Internet Explorer's brand more humanised, closer to a more positive and familiar image, as well as pushing it away from the previous associations of "outdated software".

On the other hand, the impact on Internet Explorer's market share was very insignificant, not even comparable. Furthermore, the campaign has been met with criticism, as certain people have expressed dissatisfaction with its perceived inadequacy to address salient issues, including slowness and the absence of contemporary features.

For this side of the audience, the campaign was a superficial attempt to divert attention from the product's perceived shortcomings.
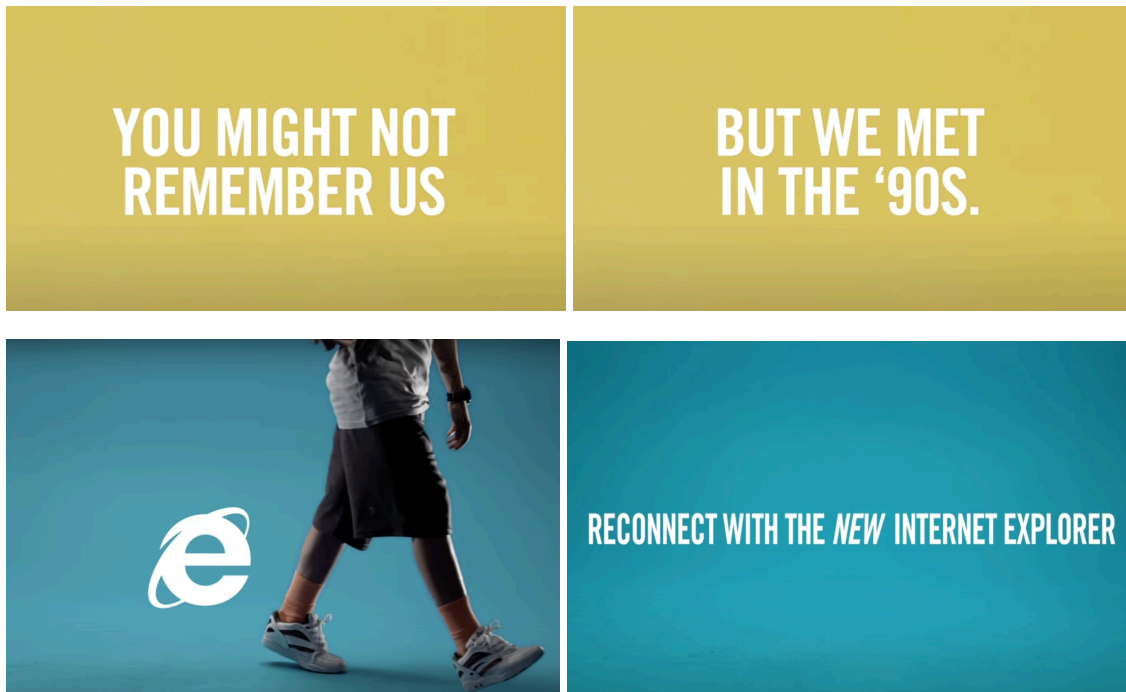
Picture 4: Beginning and End images of the Microsoft's campaign "Child of the 90s"

In conclusion, nostalgia has been demonstrated to be a potent catalyst in rekindling interest in Internet Explorer. However, it has not been sufficient to guarantee a reversal of the browser's declining trend over time. The fundamental lesson to be learnt from this case study is that, in industries such as browsers, which are characterised by a strong commitment to continuous innovation and technical performance, a retrospective focus can potentially revive interest; however, it should be noted that this approach does not necessarily guarantee an improvement in the quality of the product.

The "Child of the '90s" campaign was capable of attracting attention and eliciting excitement, however, a substantial improvement was not present in the browser itself, therefore, users found no compelling reasons to return to the browser.

It is imperative to acknowledge that a marketing strategy, despite its creativity and uniqueness, may not be sufficient to surmount a product's inherent limitations. In the particular case of Internet Explorer, performance concerns and formidable competition continued to exert a negative influence on its popularity.

CHAPTER 3 - MAIN STUDY

3.1 Overview of the study

In recent years, there has been a pervasive resurgence of aesthetic products, and cultural symbols associated with the 1990s and 2000s, a phenomenon evident in various fields: from fashion to music, toys and tv entertainment. Television series reboots, "Y2K style"-inspired clothing collections, revivals of vintage technology products and even pixelated graphics collectively evoke a sense of familiarity, security and a sense of belonging. The resurgence is neither coincidential nor an isolate phenomenon, rather, it is a part of a broader context in which companies are responding to a growing need for emotional reassurance among consuemrs, particulrly during periods of economic, social or technological unceritinty.

Consequently an increasing number of brands are strategically leveraging nostalgia as a key element in their communication branding effort. This approach, which has gained significant traction in marketing literature, is characterised by its evocative poert and capacity to elicit profound emotional engagement with the brand. However the employment of nostalgia is often anchored in a static concept of the past, in which an effort is made to meticulously recreate an era, an aesthetic and an atmosphere without necessarily updating it or integrating it with contemporary elements. This approach, however risks relegating nostalgia to a simply commemorative or regressive function, instead of a real long-lasting tool to be implemented within marketing strategies.

The present study begins on the critical reflection of this theoretical limitation and proposes a conceptual evolution of nostalgic feeling: what if nostalgia could be considered dynamic by juxtaposing it with elements of innovation? In other words, is it possible to stimulate positive memories of the past and concomitantly projects those memories into the presents or even future? This fundamental question underlies the research conducted in the following study. The hypothesis explored is that the integration of nostalgia and innovation can generate a more active and creative form of engagement, which results into a higher purchase intention of the consumers, rather than the simple present of a nostalgic stimuli.

In this regards, the present study utilises an experimental design that encompasses four conditions: nostalgia and innovation; nostalgia only; innovation only; neither. This

design aims to investigate the influence on different communicative strategies on customer purchase intention. Furthermore, the research delves into two additional dimensions: the connection to self, both past and the present, evoked by communication, which have the potential to influence consumers' susceptibility to specific type of stimuli.

3.2 Research Question & Model

The existing literature on nostalgia, while acknowledging its strong evocative power, tends to portray it as a static emotion, closely anchored in the past. A considerable number of studies have demonstrated that nostalgic stimuli can elicit more favorable attitudes toward brands, elevate perceptions of value and even increase propensity to purchase. Nevertheless, an approach that is exclusively oriented towards the reclamation of the past may result in the restriction of the strategic scope of nostalgia. This is due to the failure to exploit the potential of this sentiment to engage with the consumer's present.

Therefore the present study adopts an alternative perspective, focusing on the exploration of whether nostalgia can be rendered more effective and dynamic when couples with elements of innovation. The idea is that a communicative stimulus that recalls the imaginary of the 1990s, such as a brand, can not only reactivate effective memories of the past, but also resonate with the consumer's current self when accompanied by contemporary and innovative elements, such as a phone. Consequently, nostalgia functions not merely as a recollection of the past, rather it is reinterpreted in a contemporary context, serving as a "bridge" that connects memory and modernity.

Research Question:

Could the combination of a nostalgic '90s brand and an element of innovation influence the activation of the present self and, consequently, the purchase intention?
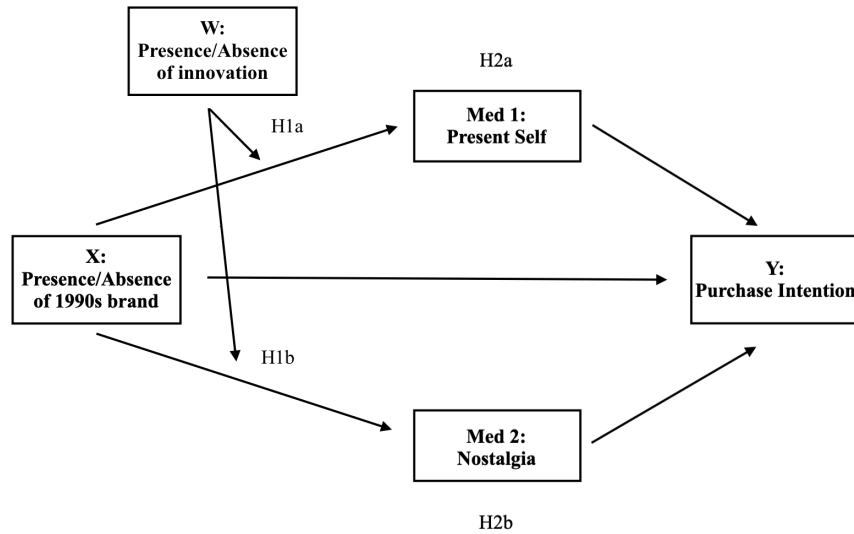
Picture 5: Research Model

From a theoretical standpoint, the conceptual framework is structured around a dummy independent variable (X), representing the presence or absence of a 1990s brand. The primary outcome of interest is the purchase intention, defined as the dependent variable (Y). This relationship is hypothesised to be mediated by two distinct psychological constructs: on one hand, the individual's present self (Med1), reflecting the degree to which the brand resonates with the induals current identity. This pathway is further moderated by the presence or absence of an innovative element (W). On the other hand, nostalgia (Med2), is identified as a factor in the brand's capacity to evoke emotional connections to the past.

H1a: *Technological innovation moderates the effect of the '90s brand on the present self, such that the presence of innovation strengthen the positive association between the nostalgic brand and the activation of consumer's present self.*

H1b: *The presence of a 1990s brand positively influences the level on nostalgia experienced by consumers, regardless of the presence of technological innovation.*

H2a. *The indirect effect of the 1990s brand on purchase intention through the present self is conditional on the presence of technological innovation, such that the mediation is stronger when innovation is present.*

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H2b. *Nostalgia mediates the relationship between the presence of the '90s brand and purchase intention, regardless of the presence of technological innovation.*

3.3 Brand selection and justification for the Independent Variable

To analytically select the iconic brand belonging to the 1990s-2000s to be used as protagonist of the independent variable in the experimental study, a methodological framework was developed based on qualitative criteria obtainable through public, free, and reliable sources available online. The primary objective of this study was to identify a brand that possesses a robust historical and cultural connotation related to the past, yet is currently undergoing a phase of rediscovery and renewed interest from the market, aligning with the contemporary trend of "nostalgic revival".

Several articles belonging to the fashion and communication industry, such as Vogue Italia, Stylight, ELLE and Accademia Marangoni were taken into consideration to identify an initial set of eight brand. The latter have experienced a resurgent popularity within the fashion industry in recent years, by virtue of their symbolic value and renewd market positioning.

In a subsequent step, the resulting shortlist was anlysed using three digital tools capable of providing indirect but meaningful metrics on the selected brands' current notoriety and level of engagement by the public. These tools enabled a comparative assessment of the brands' actual relevance in the contemporary landscape, facilitating a final choice based on qualitative insights and empirical evidence.

The digital tools used are the following:

    a. *Google Trends*: this first tool has been employed to analyse the evolution of brand search interest over time, with a time range from 2004 to the present and with a geographic focus on Italy. The selection critiria is based on the peaks of the graphs: a significant peak between the period 2004-2010, which reflects their original notoriety; then a declining phase in the subsequent years to finally see a rise in interest starting indicatively from 2022. This trend reflects a cycle of notoriety consistent with a dynamic of nostalgic rediscovery.

    b. *Social Blade*: the second tool has been used to monitor the growth in the numer of followers on Instagram over the medium term, the last 12-18 months. Steady growth was considered a positive indicator of current interest and the brand's

ability to attract an active online community. Brands with stagnant or decreasing trends were excluded from the final selection.

c. Not Just Analytics: the last tool aims at detecting the engagement rate of Instagram profiles of considered brands. This indicator represents the average level of user interaction, basically likes, comments, and shares, in relation to the profile size. In this case, brands with an engagement rate qual to or higher than the average of their segment were considered relevant, since it indicates an active and meaningful relationship with the audience.

The brands analysed are:

Fiorucci:
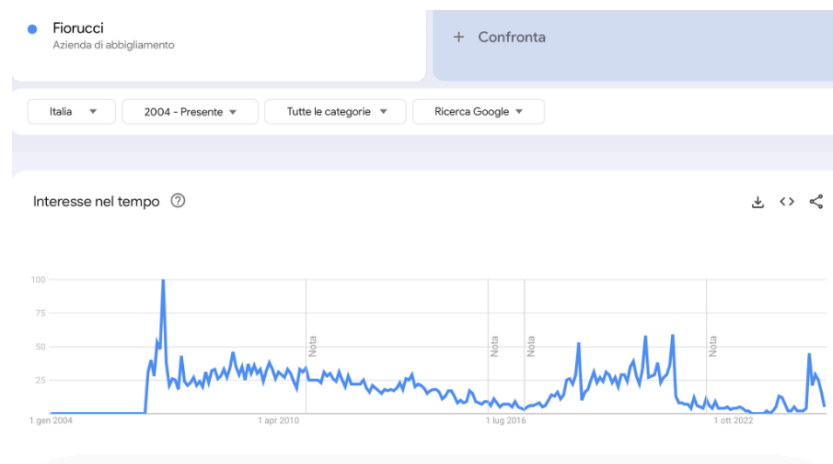
Picture 6: Google Trends for Fiorucci brand

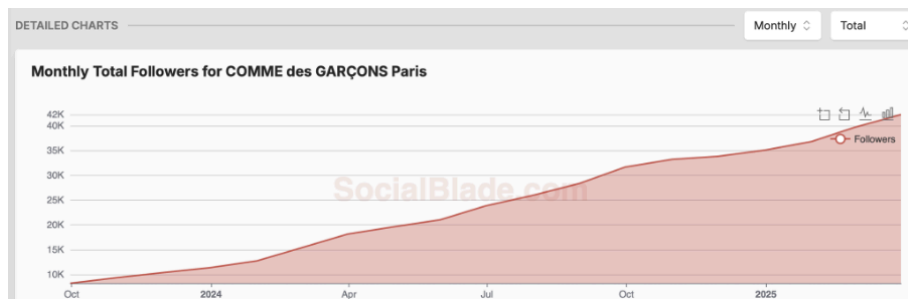*Picture 7: Social Blade for Fiorucci brand*

Not Just Analytics engagement rate: 0.15%. The ideal rate for a brand having more than 100.000 followers is 1.7%, therefore 1.55% below the average.
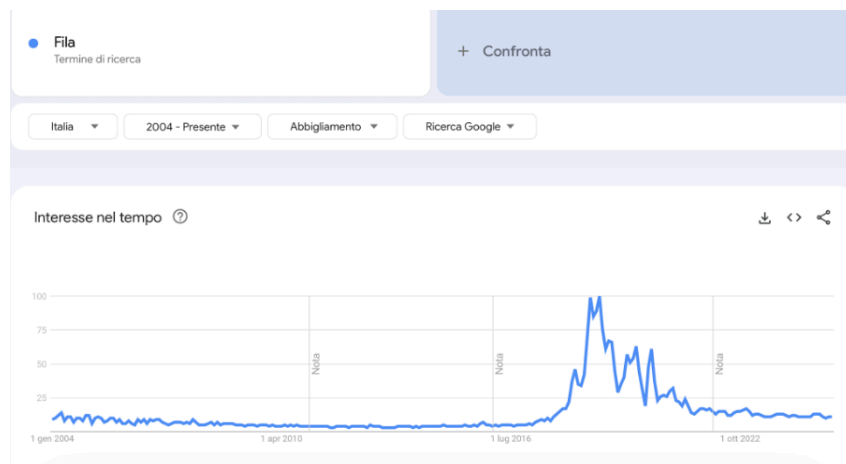
COMMES des GARÇON
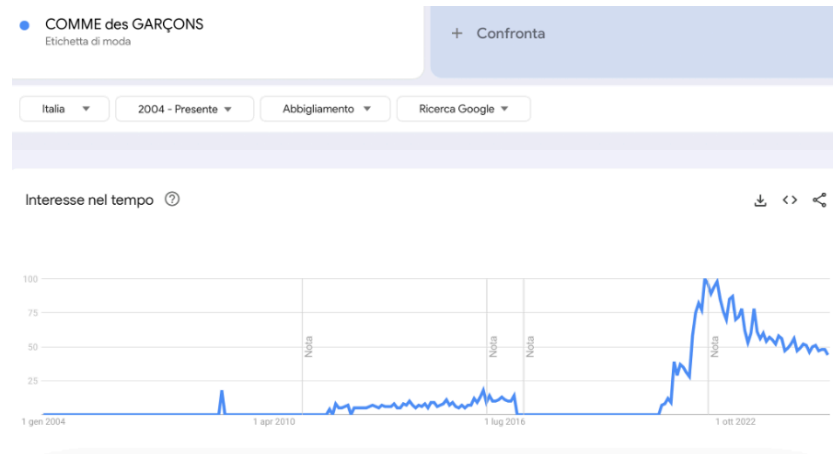
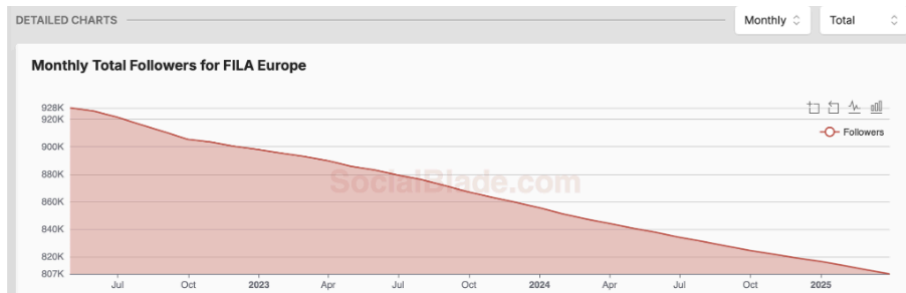*Picture 8: Google Trends for Commes des Garçon brand*

Picture 9: Social Blade for Commes des Garçon brand

Not Just Analytics engagement rate: 1.69%. The ideal rate for a brand having between 10.000 and 100.000 followers is 2.4%, therefore 0.71% below the average
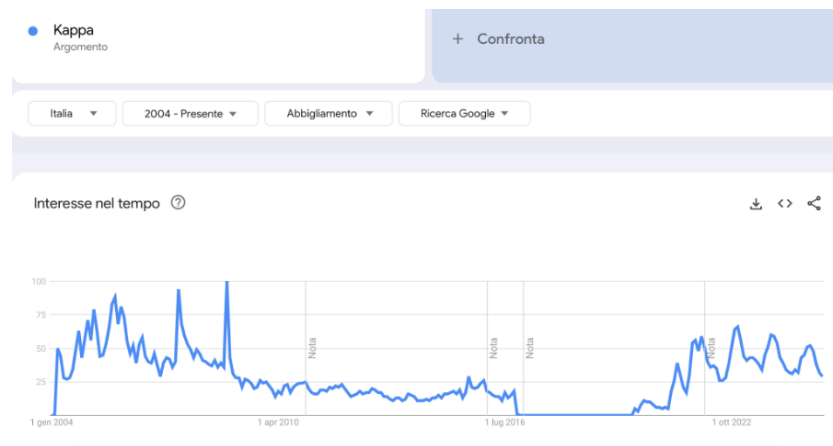
Fila:

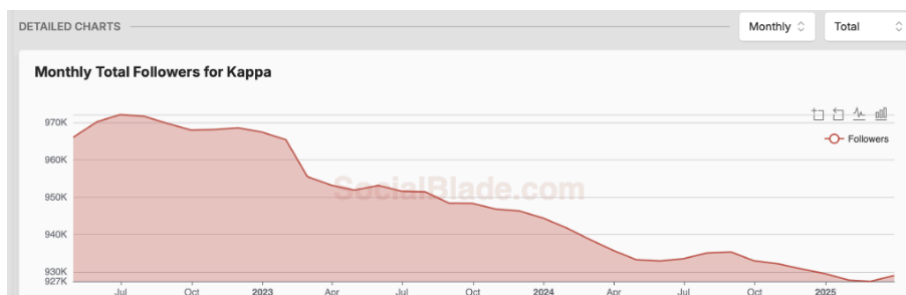*Picture 10: Google Trends for Fila Brand*

Picture 11: Social Blade for Fila brand

Not Just Analytics engagement rate: 0.07%. The ideal rate for a brand having more than 100.000 followers is 1.7%, therefore 1.63% below the average.
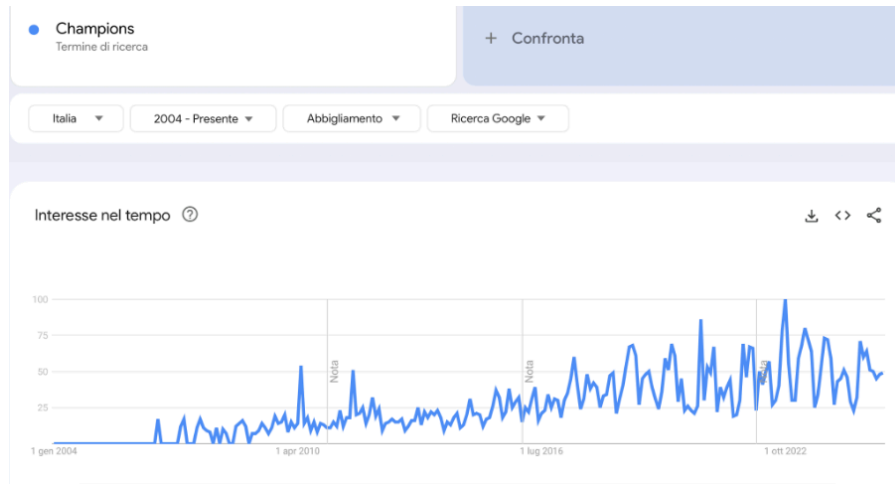
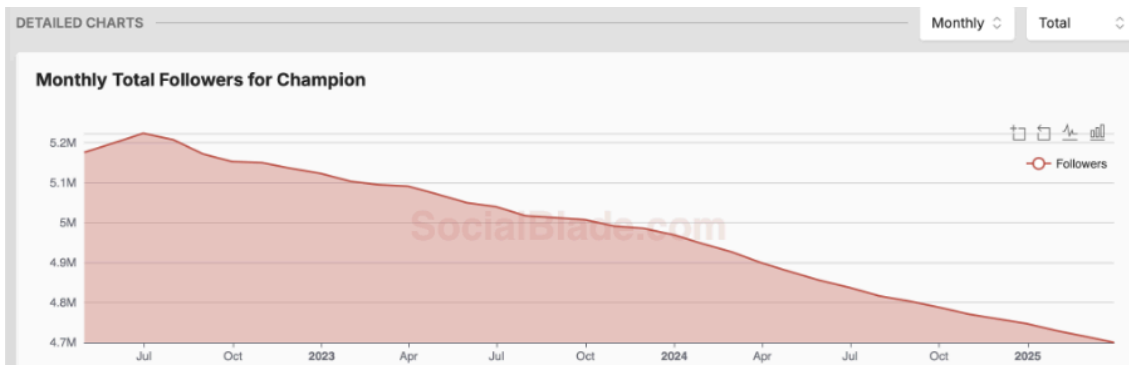**Kappa:**

Picture 12: Google Trends for Kappa Brand

Picture 13: Social Blade for Kappa brand

Not Just Analytics engagement rate: 1.37%. The ideal rate for a brand having more than 100.000 followers is 1.7%, therefore 0.33% below the average.
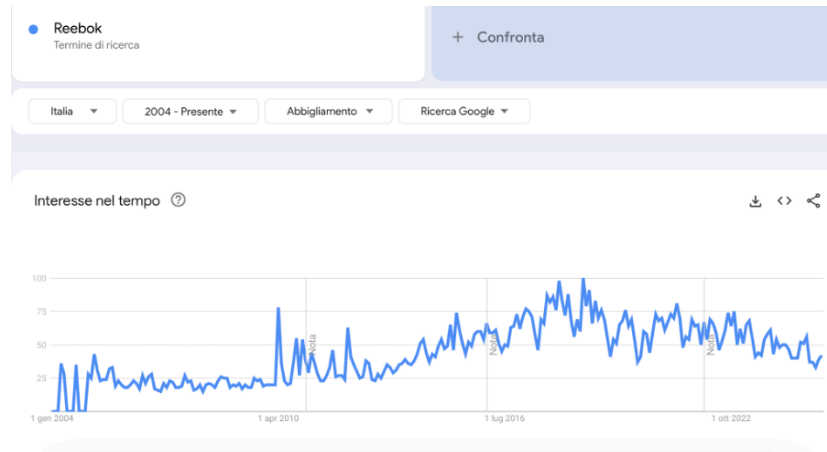
Champions:

Picture 14: Google Trends for Champion Brand

Picture 15: Social Blade for Champion brand

Not Just Analytics engagement rate: 0.01%. The ideal rate for a brand having more than 100.000 followers is 1.7%, therefore 1.61% below the average.

Reebok:

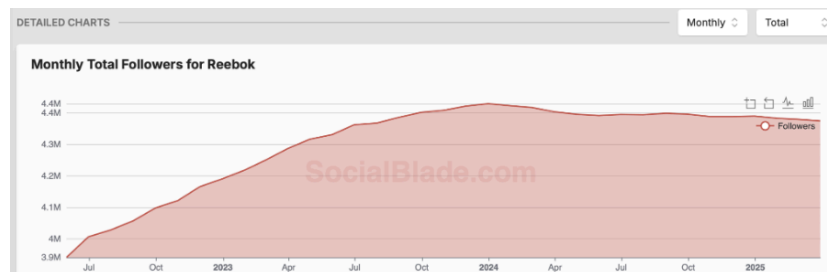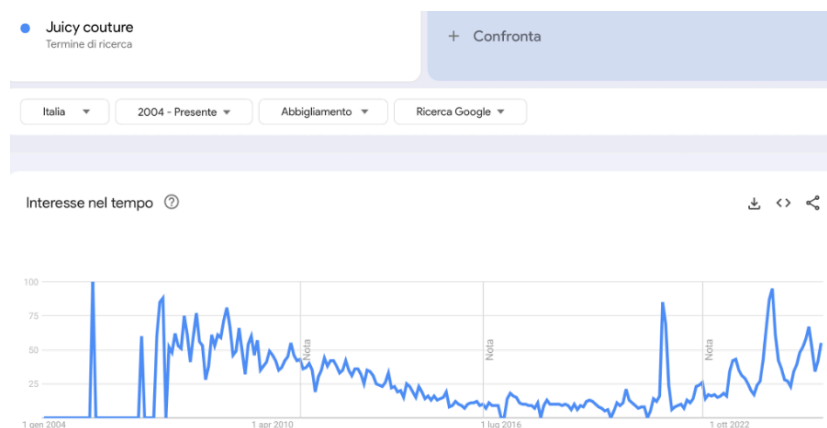*Picture 16: Google Trends for Reebok Brand*

Picture 17: Social Blade for Champion brand

Not Just Analytics engagement rate: 0.04%. The ideal rate for a brand having more than 100.000 followers is 1.7%, therefore 1.66% below the average.

Juicy Couture:

Picture 18: Google Trends for Juicy Couture Brand

Picture 19: Social Blade for Juicy Couture brand

Not Just Analytics engagement rate: 0.14%. The ideal rate for a brand having more than 100.000 followers is 1.7%, therefore 1.56% below the average.

Monella Vagabonda:

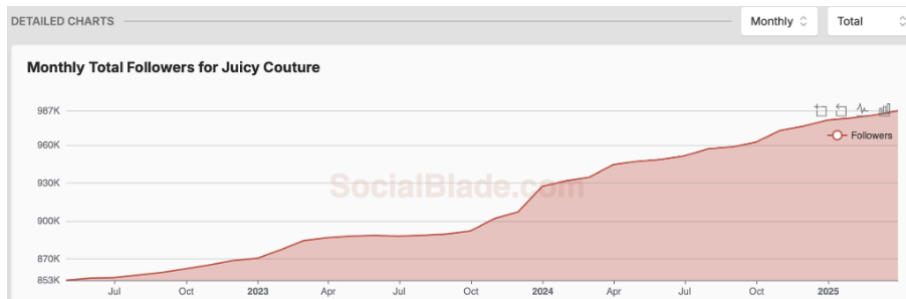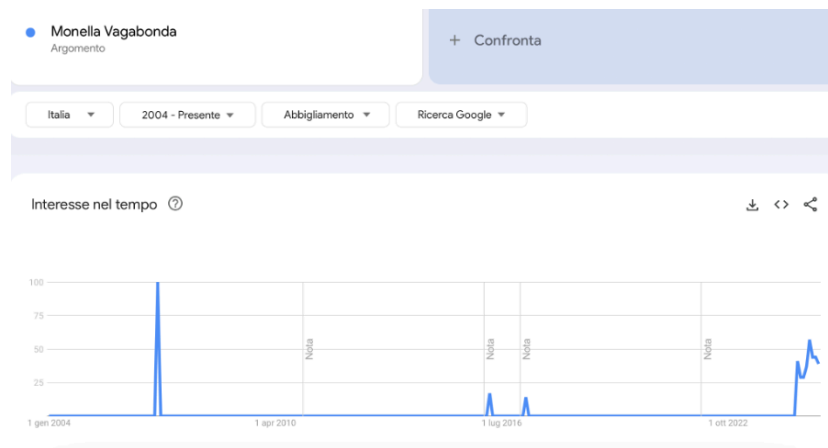*Picture 20: Google Trends for Monella Vagabonda brand*
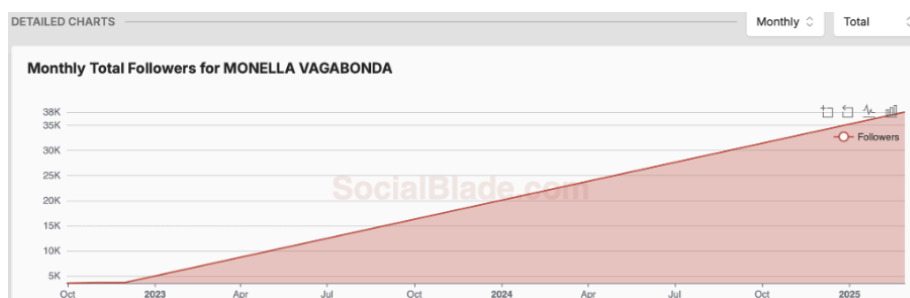
Picture 21: Social Blade for Monella Vagabonda brand

Not Just Analytics engagement rate: 1.49%. The ideal rate for a brand having between 10.000 and 100.000 followers is 2.4%, therefore 0.91% below the average.

The final selection of brands is based only on the two first criteria: interest over time (Google Trends) and followers trends (Social Blade). Engagement rate has been chosen to be excluded as a discriminating criterion, since the average to be referenced changes depending on the range related to the number of followers that the brand has.

Juicy Couture emerges as the most promising brand. The presented trend over time is characterised by initial peaks, a period of decrease and then an upswing again. Furthermore, there has been a steady increase in the number of followers, suggesting a resurgence in interest from the public. Despite so, among the possible brands to be chosen, Juicy Couture is the only one internation. This could be a limitation for the study since the target audience to which the survey will be submitted to is purely Italian. Thus, the other two brands which satisfy the criteria are Fiorucci and Monella Vagabonda. The final choice falls for Fiorucci brand, since its target is more homogenous than the one of Monella Vagabonda, whose primary focus are women.

3.4 Survey Design

A quantitative methodology based on primary data was adopted for empirical data collection. To this end, a structured questionnaire was meticulously designed and administered via Qualtrics platform, incorporating multiple functional blocks to assess the research hypothesis. The experimental design is composed by four distinct conditions, which were presented in a randomized sequence to neutralise potential sequence-related effects. The conditions differed depending on the presence or absence of two key elements: Fiorucci's brand evocative of the 1990s, the nostalgic component, and a Smartphone, representing the innovative component.

The experimental conditions were as follows: the presence of both the nostalgic brand on the t-shirt and the innovative element, the presence of the brand only on the t-shirt; the presence of the smartphone only; or the absence of both elements.

The images employed to depicts these conditions were generated though the utilization of generative artificial intelligence tools and a method that allowed the coherent integration of the selected elements within the visual composition while ensuring meticulous oversight of the configuration of the visual variables. Each participant was exposed to a single image, corresponding to the condition that was randomly assigned.
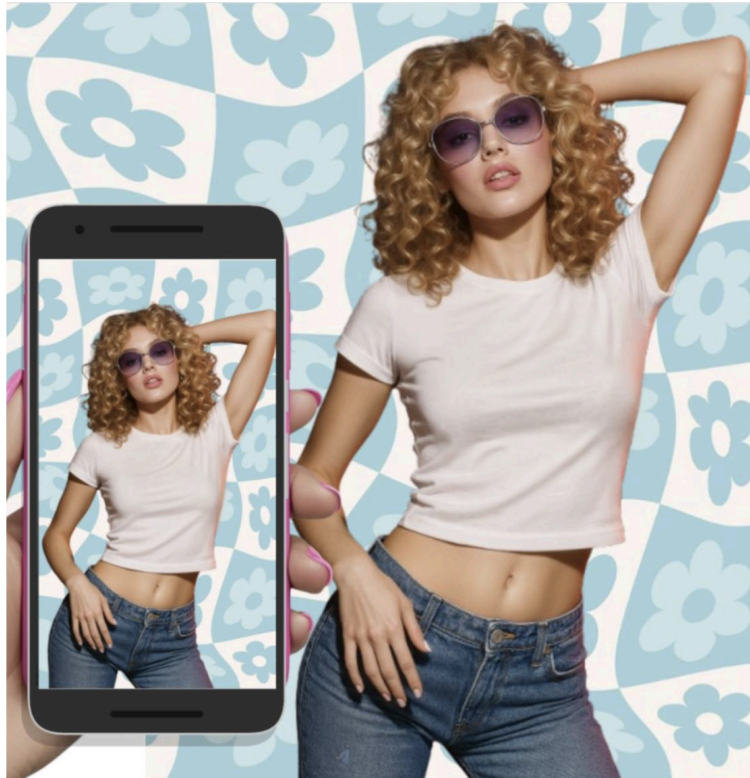
Here below are the four conditions:

Condition 1: Nostalgic brand and innovative element

Condition 2: Nostalgic brand only

Condition 3: Innovative element only

Condition 4: Neither nostalgic brand, nor innovative element

Following exposure to the visual stimulus, participants were asked to express their purchase intention using a 7-point Likert scale[3] consisting of two items adapted from validated measurements in the consumer behaviour literature. This scale is indicative of the dependent variable of the study.

In the subsequent section of the questionnaire, three psychological variables associated with the role of nostalgia and the activation of self were measured. Initially a 7-point Likert scale composed of five items was utilised to assess the level of nostalgia evoked by the visualised scene, with a particular emphasis on the presence or absence of the nostalgic brand. Consequently, two supplementary scales were employed to assess the extent to which participants identified with the presented image in relation to their personal identity. The initial evaluation focused on "self past", which quantifies the extent to which the t-shirt reflected the subject's past self-image. The following one, employing a mirror-image approach, addressed "self present", defined as the degree of current identification with the proposed stimulus.

Thereafter, a subsequent block was allocated to the manipulation check, which was imperative to ascertain the effectiveness of the experimental manipulation. The participants were asked to indicate whether, in their opinion, the image represented a brand capable of evoking nostalgia and whether it contained an element perceived as innovative.

The questionnaire concluded with a section dedicated to the collection of demographic information, including age and gender, which were noted for the purpose of potential segmentation and control analysis.

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[3] All the scales used in the questionnaire are measured by a 7-point Likert scale, where participants are asked to indicate their degree of agreement or disagreement with several statement. the answers range from 1=Not at all in agreement to 7=Completely in agreement.

CHAPTER 4 - RESULTS

4.1 Participants and Dataset preparation

The study sample was recruited through a non-probabilistic snowball sampling strategy, primarily by sharing the link to the questionnaire online on various social media platforms, including WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook. The survey was administrated via the Qualtrics platform, yielding an initial response rate of 226. However, only 214 participants completed the questionnaire in its entirety. Consequently, in the initial phase of the dataset preparation, 12 incomplete observations were eliminated due to their incompatibility with statistical analysis.

The final sample consisted of 68 male (31.8%), 144 female (67.3%) and 2 (0.9%), who preferred not to express it. The mean age of respondents was M_{age}=33.71, with a standard deviation of SD_{age}=14.08, indicating moderated age heterogeneity within the sample.
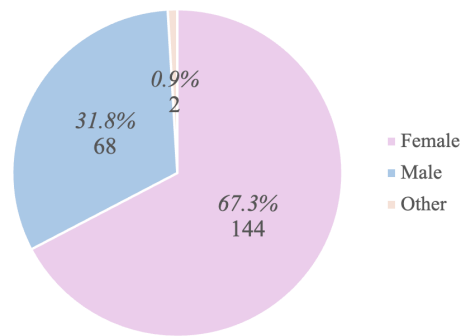
Graph 1: Gender
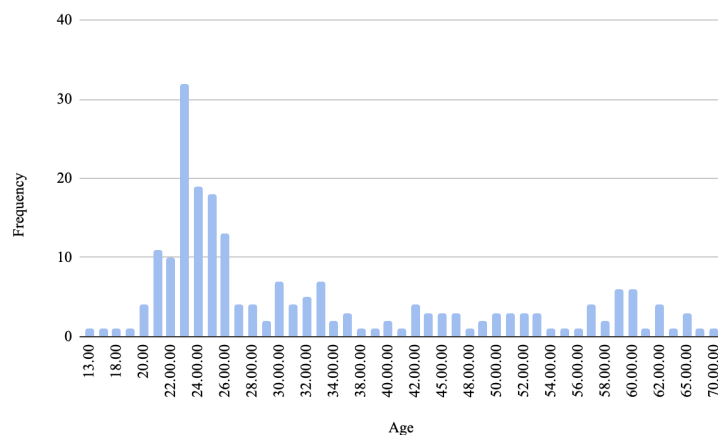
Graph 2: Age distribution

Participants were distributed across the four experimental conditions through randomization, which was incorporated into the questionnaire. More specifically, 58 subjects participated in the first condition viewing both the nostalgic brand and the smartphone, 52 in the second condition, viewing only the nostalgic brand, 50 in the third condition, viewing the smartphone only and the remaining 54 in the fourth condition, absence of both elements. This distribution ensured the variability necessary to reliably test the effects of experimental manipulations on the dependent and the other variables.

In order to prepare the dataset for analysis, two dummy variables were created, which proved to be useful in isolating the main effects of the two experimental stimuli. Respectively, the initial variable, designated as "nostalgic brand" was encoded in binary format, where 0 represents the absence of the brand and 1 the opposite condition, regardless of the presence of the innovative element. Descriptive statistics shows that 110 participants (51.4%) have seen the condition with Fiorucci brand, while the other 104 (48.6%) have seen a blank t-shirt (Appendix 1). Similarly, the second dummy variable "innovation", which has also been coded in a binary mode, identifies 0 as the absence of the smartphone, while 1 its presence independently from the presence or absence of the nostalgic brand. In this regard, 108 participants (50.5%) had a smartphone in their condition, while the other 106 (49.5%) didn't have it (Appendix 2). These two variables will allow the performance of more flexible analysis, not limited to the four experimental conditions alone, but also based on two-way models, facilitating the identification of main effects and interactions between nostalgia and innovation.

4.2 Data and Model analysis

4.2.1 Manipulation check

Manipulation check of the nostalgic condition

To determine the effectiveness of the experimental manipulation on the presence of the nostalgic brand, an independent sample t-test was conducted. The participants were randomly exposed to images containing or not containing the brand Fiorucci, evocative of the 1990s. Then, they were asked to rate the extent to which they perceived the campaign as belonging ti a brand capable of eliciting nostalgia on a 7-point Likert scale.

The findings indicate a statistically significant discrepancy between the two groups. Participants who exhibited the condition containing the nostalgic brand, coded as Nostalgic Brand=1 are 110 and reported a significantly higher mean score in nostalgia perception with a mean and a standard deviation of M= 4.74 and SD= 1.75; compared to those who didn't display any brand: M=3.31 and SD= 1.83 (Table 1). The mean difference between the groups was 1.429. Based on this, the t-test shows a significant difference between the groups t(212)=5.843, p<0.001 (Table 2). In addition to the statistical significance, effect size was calculated to estimate the magnitude of the observed phenomenon. The resultant Cohen's d was found to be 1.79 (Table 3), indicating a very large effect according to the interpretation conventions established by Cohen (1988).

These results confirm the effectiveness of the experimental manipulation related to the nostalgia component. The mere presence of a brand associated with the 1990s was sufficient to evoke significantly higher perceptions of nostalgia in the participant than in the neutral condition. This substantiates the utilisation of the nostalgic brand variable as a legitimate indicator of the nostalgia manipulation in subsequent analysis.

	Nostalgic Brand	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean Standard Error
La campagna riguardava un brand che suscita nostalgia	1	110	4.74	1.749	0.167
	0	104	3.31	1.828	0.179

Table 1: Group statistics

	Levene Test		t Test								
					Significatività				Confidence Interval 95%	
	F	Sign	t	gl	P unilaterale	P bilaterale	Mean Difference	Std error Difference	Inferior	Superior
Varianze uguali presunte	0.855	0.356	5.843	212	<0.001	<0.001	1.429	0.245	0.947	1.911
Varianze uguali non presunte			5.836	209.88	<0.001	<0.001	1.429	0.245	0.946	1.911

Table 2: Independent t-test

	Standardization
D di Cohen	1.788
Hedges correlation	1.794
Glass Delta	1.829

Table 3: Independent sample size effect

Manipulation of the innovative condition: mod_inn

In order to ascertain the validity of the experimental manipulation regarding the presence of an innovative element, depicted by the smartphone, an independent sample t-test was conducted. This test made comparisons between participants exposed to a condition containing the innovative element, innovation=1, and those who had not displayed it, innovation=0. Participants were asked to rate their agreement with the statement "the campaign contained an element reminiscent of modernity" on a 7-point likert scale.

The findings indicate a statistically significant discrepancy between the two groups. Participants in the experimental group were 108 and exhibited a significantly higher score in comparison to the control group (106), respectively: M=4.48, SD=1.83 and M=3.69, SD=1.72, with a mean difference of 0.793 (Table 4). The assumption of homogeneity of variance was met, F=0.988, p<0.321, thus permitting the utilization of the t-test for equal variance.

The t-test confirmed that there was a significant difference between the groups t(212)=3.272, p=0.001, two-sided, thereby supporting the effectiveness of the manipulation (Table 5). Consequently, participants were capable of discerning the modern element in the experimental condition, from the control condition. The effect size, as measured by Cohen's d, was 0.45, indicating an effect size of average magnitude according to conventional criteria (Table 6).

In summary, the findings demonstrate that the experimental manipulation, which entailed the introduction of an innovative element, the smartphone, was perceived as such by the participants. As a consequence, the utilisation of the dummy variable innovation was validated in subsequent analyses. These analyses were conducted to explore the impact of innovation, either independently or in conjunction with nostalgia, on purchase intention and the activation of the present self.

	Innovation	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean Standard Error
La campagna conteneva un elemento che richiama la modernità	1	108	4.48	1.827	0.176
	0	106	3.69	1.715	0.167

Table 4: Group statistics

	Levene Test		t Test								
					Significatività					Confidence Interval 95%	
	F	Sign	t	gl	P unilaterale	P bilaterale	Mean Difference	Std error Difference		Inferior	Superior
Varianze uguali presunte	0.988	0.321	3.272	212	<0.001	0.001	0.793	0.242		0.315	1.27
Varianze uguali non presunte			3.274	211.584	<0.001	0.001	0.793	0.242		0.316	1.27

Table 5: Independent t-test

	Standardization
D di Cohen	1.722
Hedges correlation	1.778
Glass Delta	1.715

Table 6: Independent sample size effect

4.2.1 Variable analysis

Dependent variable: purchase intention - Appendix 3

The purchase intention variable, which functions as the dependent variable in the study, was conducted through the combination of two items administered to all participants.

To assess the internal reliability of the scale, a reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha, which returned a value of $\alpha=0.963$, indicaicating excellent internal consistency among items (N=2). The corrected item-total correlations for the two items are elevated (0.929), indicating that each item makes a significant contribution to the overall variable measure. The elimination of either item would not have enhanced Cronbach's alpha, thereby confirming the robustness of the scale in its compact form. In addition, the arithmetic mean of the two items was calculated for each participant, therefore generating the aggregate variable "*Purchase Intention*".

Descriptive analysis of this variable indicate a mean value of M=3.27, SD=1.72, on a scale of 1 to 7, suggesting a general trend toward moderate purchase intention on the part of the sample.

Overall, these results suggest that the scale employed to assess purchase intention is statistically robust and psychometrically valid. Furthermore, it can be reliably utilised in subsequent analyses designed to explore the effect of experimental conditions and psychological mechanism associated with the exposure to nostalgic and innovative brand messages.

Mediator Variable: Present Self - Appendix 4

The Self-Present variable was developed to measure the degree of perceived alignment between the advertising campaign message and the individual's current self-image. The construct was measured though three items, each rated on a 7-point Likert scale.

The Internal reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's Alpha value of α=0.967, signifying an exceptional degree of internal consistency among the items (N=3). The item-total correlations are notably high from all items, ranging from 0.923 to 0.939, therefore confirming that each item contributes substantially to the construction of the scale. The alpha remains high even when any of the items are excluded, hence demonstrating the psychometric robustness of the measure.

A composite mean of the three items was calculated for each participant, generating the aggregate variable "*Present Self*".

A descriptive analysis of the variable indicates a mean value of M=2.54, SD=1.61, on a scale of 1 to 7, suggesting that, on average, participants perceived a moderate discrepancy between the campaign content and their current image.

Overall, the self-present scale has been demonstrated to be reliable and appropriate of the role of identity congruence in consumer response.

Mediator Variable: Nostalgia - Appendix 5

The variable Nostalgia was conceived as a metric to assess the extent to which the advertising campaign elicited a nostalgic sentiment in participants, defined as an emotional and cognitive reminiscence of favorable past experiences. As for the previous

ones, the construct was assessed by means of five items on a 7-point Likert scale, which investigates the evocative power of the brand depiscted in the t-shirt.

The internal reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of α=0.945, signifying excellent internal consistency among the five items (N=5). The item-total correlations range form 0.762 to 0.895, and the elimination of any item maintained an alpha above the threshold value of 0.90, therefore confirming the balance and consistency of the construct. The value indicates that each item contributes substantially to the overall scale.

The aggregate variable "Nostalgia" was calculated as the mean of the five items. A mean of M=3.78, SD=1.77 was obtained, on a scale of 1 to 7, according to the results of the descriptive statistics. The mean value is situated in the median range, indicating a moderate level of campaign-induced nostalgia.

Overall, the scale demonstrates robust psychometric properties, substantiating its validity and reliability in measuring nostalgia elicited by brand elements with pronounced temporal appeal, as exemplified by the t-short under consideration.

Other Variable: Past Self - Appendix 6

The Self-Past variable was developed to assess the extent to which participants identified their self-image in the past in relation to the t-shirt present in the advertising campaign. The construct was assessed though three items, also measured on a 7-point Likert scale.

The internal reliability analyses yielded a Cronbach's Alpha value of α=0.945, indicating high internal consistency among the scale's items (N=3). Adjusting item-total correlations are also elevated, rating from 0.874 to 0.903. The alpha remain above 0.90 even when each item is excluded individually, therefore conforming the psychometric robustness of the scale.

A composite mean was calucalted form the three items, thus generating the aggregate variable "Past Self".

The descriptive statistics demonstrate an overall mean of M=2.72, SD=1.65; the latter suggest that, on average, participants perceived a moderately low association between the t-shirt represented and their past selves.

For this variable, the frequency analysis indicates that on one side 29.9% of the sample assigned the lowest score (1.00); however an 18.7% of respondent assigned a score of 5.00 or higher, indicating that for a proportion of the sample, the campaign evoked a sense of continuity with their personal past.

Overall, the scale has demonstrated its reliability and conceptual consistency, thus serving as a valuable indicator for investigating the relationship between nostalgic communication and consumer retrospective identity construction.

4.2.2 Model Analysis

Analysis of the Moderated Mediation Model: Joint effects of Notalgia and Innovation on Purchase Intention

To investigate the psychological mechanism through which the presence of a brand activates consumers' intention to buy, Model 7 of PROCESS macro was used (Hayes, 2022). In particular, a model of moderate mediation was tested, in which the effect of the independent variable "*Nostalgic Brand*" on the dependent variable "*Purchase Intention*" is mediated by two psychological constructs: evoked "*Nostalgia*" and activation of the "*Present Self*", with the perception of "*Innovation*" as moderator variable of the first path (Table 7)

Model	7
Y	Purchase Intention
X	Nostalgic Brand
M1	Present Self
M2	Nostalgia
W	Innovation

Table 7: Variables for PROCESS Model 7 output

The results obtained allow to verify the four hypotheses formulated.

In the test of hypothesis H1a, it was assumed that the perception of technological innovation moderates the relationship between the brand of the 1990s and the activation

of the present self, reinforcing the positive association between the two constructs. The analysis showed that the predictive model of Present Self is marginally significant $(F(3,210)=2.462, p=0.0636, R^2 =0.034)$, explaining 3.4% of the variance.

The data in support of this hypothesis demonstrates that the interaction between the nostalgic brand and innovation is significant (b=1.1036, p=0.0123), indicating that the impact of the brand on the present self is conditioned by the perceived presence of innovation (Table 8).

Model Summary	R	R_squared	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
	0.1843	0.034	2.5474	2.4621	3.000	210.000	0.0636
Model	Coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	
Constant	2.9198	0.2172	13.4413	0.0000	2.4916	3.3479	
Nostalgic Brand	-0.5415	0.3101	-1.7464	0.0822	-1.1529	0.0698	
Innovation	-0.7864	0.3132	-2.5106	0.0128	-1.4039	-0.1689	
Int_1	1.1036	0.4371	2.5251	0.0123	0.2420	1.9652	

Table 8: Effects on Self Present Mediator

In the absence of innovation, the brand has a negative and not significant effect of the activation of the present self (b=-0.5415, p=0.0822), while, with its presence, the effect is reversed and becomes positive, despite being marginally significant (b=0.5621, p=0.0694). Basically, the presence of the brand activates more the present self only in the presence of a strong perception of innovation (Table 9).

This suggests that the nostalgic reference to the past, in order to be relevant in building the current customer identity, must be complemented with signals of actuality and progress. More specifically, the familiarity linked to a brand of the past is not enough to make it psychologically "current". In this regard, it is the innovative element that facilitates the association between the brand and the present self of the consumers, making it a potential integrable object in one's own contemporary personal narrative.

Conditional effects of the focal predictor at values of the moderator:						
Innovation	Coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
0	-0.5415	0.3101	-1.7464	0.0822	-1.1529	0.0698
1	0.5621	0.308	1.7249	0.0694	-0.0451	1.1692

Table 9: Conditional effects of the moderator Innovation

The H2a hypothesis extends this logic, proposing that the indirect effect of the brand on the purchase intention, conveyed by the present self, is conditioned by the presence of innovation. Again, the results confirm the hypothesis: the indirect effect is significant only in the presence of perceived innovation (b=0.2973, BootCI [0.0153, 0.6134]), whereas it is not significant in its absence (b=0.2863, BootCI [-0.6322,0.0665]). Furthermore, the index of moderated mediation is significant (index= 0.5837, BootCI [0.1237,1.0531]), demonstrating that the predictive power of the present self with respect ot the purchase intention depends on the perceived level of innovation (Table 10). This results provides an important indication from a strategic point of view:to convert nostalgia into purchase intention through personal identification, it is essential that the brand communicates its own technological evolution. For example, an iconic product re-launched in an updated version, which includes new features, materials or contemporary design, is more effective at generating relevant engagement than the simple re-proposal of the original model.

Indirect Effect				
Innovation	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
0	-0.2864	0.1783	-0.6322	0.0665
1	0.2973	0.1542	0.0153	0.6134

Table 10: Indirect effect of Nostalgic Brand and Purchase Intention through Innovation

Moving toward the hypothesis related to the second mediator, the model is highly significant (F(3,210)= 8.018, p<0.001, R^2 =0.103), explaining 10.3% of the variance. H1b hypothesis predicts that the presence of a brand from the 1990s could significantly increase the feeling of nostalgia in consumers. The results of the analysis fully support this hypothesis. In particular, the main effect of the independent variable "nostalgic brand" on the nostalgia median variable is positive and statistically singificant (b=1.0699, p=0.0013).

In addition to that, neither the main effect of the moderator (b=-0.0465, p=.8883), nor the interaction between the brand and innovation (b=0.1167, p=.8007) are significant in predicting nostalgia. This suggest that the nostalgic feeling aroused by a brand of the 1990s is not conditioned by the presence or absence of innovative elements. (Table 11).

Model Summary	R	R_squared	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
	0.3206	0.1028	2.8421	8.0184	3.0000	210.0000	0.0000
Model	Coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	3.2185	0.2294	14.0293	0.0000	2.7663	3.6708
Nostalgic Brand	1.0699	0.3275	3.2665	0.0013	0.4242	1.7156
Innovation	-0.0465	0.3309	-0.1406	0.8883	-0.6988	0.6057
Int_1	0.1167	0.4617	0.2527	0.8007	-0.7934	1.0268

Table 11: Effects on Nostalgia Mediator

Furthermore, the H2b hypothesis proposes that nostalgia acts as a mediator of the effect of the brand on the purchase intention in a way independent from the presence of innovation. The results confirm this prediction. On top of the effect of the brand on notalgia, mentioned earlier, also the effect on nostalgia on purchase intention is significant (b=0.2859, p<0.001). In addition, the indirect effects are significant both under conditions of absence (b=0.3059, BootCI [0.0967,0.5973]) and presence (b=0.3392, BootCI [0.1396,0.5766]) of innovation, while the moderation index is not significant (index= 0.0334, BootCI [-0.2528,0.2879]) (Appendix 7). This indicates that the evocative effect of nostalgia represents a robust mechanism that acts on the emotional and affective level, and that it can be activated effectively even in absence of

contemporaneity signals. From an application point of view, this suggests that communication strategies based on nostalgic archetypes can be persuasive even in sectors not oriented to innovation, where the value lies precisely in continuity with the past.

Aside from the hypothesis, the final model, with purchase intention as dependent variable, is highly significant (F(3,210)=49.24, p<0.001, R^2 =0.0423), explaining about 41% of the variance. The direct effect of the nostalgic brand on purchase intention is not significant (b=-0.1949, p=0.3145), but both mediators have a positive and significant effect on the dependent variable. More in depth, the latter effects for present self (b= 0.5289, p<0.001) and nostalgia (b= 0.2859, p< 0.001) confirm that both the evoked nostalgia and the activation of the present self contribute to the purchase intention, regardless of the direct effect of the brand (Table 12).

To sum up, the results show a double mechanism through which the presence of the brand can influence the purchase intention. One the one hand, the nostalgia-mediated effect is robust and independent of the perception of innovation; on the other hand, the activation of the present self only plays a key role when the nostalgic element is flanked by an innovative component. This evidence supports the idea that a strategic combination of nostslgia and innovation can maximase brand engagement and communicative effectiveness.

Model Summy	R	R_squared	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
	0.6426	0.4129	1.7718	49.2356	3.0000	210.0000	0.0000
Model		Coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant		0.944	0.2361	3.9982	0.0001	0.4786	1.4095
Nostalgic Brand		-0.1949	0.1933	-1.0083	0.3145	-0.5761	0.1862
Present Self		0.5289	0.0599	8.8304	0.0000	0.4108	0.6469
Nostalgia		0.2859	0.0577	4.9559	0.0000	0.1722	0.3996

Table 12: Effects on Purchase Intention, Dependent Variable

CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Theoretical implications

The present study offers a significan theoretical contribution to the literature on nostalgia marketing, extending its scope in relation to the activation of the self and the intention of purchase of the consumer, in context where technology acts as a crucial moderator. More specifically, the results show that the positive effect of the nostalgic brand on the present self-perception is only manifested when the innovative element is present, thus contributing to the theoretical debate on the coexistence of past and future, creating a unique brand experience.

One of the main contributions lies in the integration between nostalgia and innovation, two concepts appeantly antithetical, but in reality able to co-exist. This aspect has rarely been explored in the existing literature. In this regard, the paper of Hartmann and Bruck (2019), emphasise how the call to the past can serve as a response to the disillusionment generated by the modernity. On top of this, the present study adds a new dimension to this perspective by showing that the nostalgic element, in this case the 1990s brand, to be really effective needs to activate the present self, which results into increase purchase intention. Basically, nostalgia seems to have a significant impact when it is contextualised in a contemporary narrative.

In ine with what was highlighted by Young and Jin (2021) research, on the role of social media in strengthening the effectiveness of nostalgia marketing, this study add a piece. In fact, this research suggest that the effectiveness of nostalgia in building brand-consumer relationships is not automatic, but dependent on the context and how it is communicated.

Despite this, the indirect effect of nostalgia in purchase intention has been confirmed as significant regardless of the presence of innovation (H2b). Therefore, it reinforces the idea that emotional recall to the past exert an intrinsic power on consumer motivation to purchase. The latter is in line with what emerged from the study of Lasaleta et al. (2014), who demonstrate that nostalgia can reduce material desire.

Furthermore, the study contributes to the growing literature that considers nostalgia not only as an emotional construct but also as a cognitive lever able to influence consumer behaviours through self-activation. As shown by Fan et al. (2020), nostalgia favors

more compliant and reassuring consumer choices. In this study this concept is shifted laterally, demonstrating that this emotion is able to activate identity dimension and consequently having a direct impact on purchase decisions.

Finally, the model of moderate mediation adopted in the study enriches the methodological literature applied to nostalgia marketing. The introduction of a moderation by innovation in the relationship between nostalgic brand and the present-self proposes a deeper interpretation of the psychology of the contemporary consumer. This approach reflects the complexity of brand experience in an era of overlapping between traditions and innovation.

5.2 Managerial contributions

The results of this study offer several relevant managerial implications for marketing professionals, strategic communication and brand managers, especially for those brands that want to capitalize on their historical heritage. In a context where consumers are increasingly exposed to digital stimuli, but at the same time seek emotional and meaningful connections with brands, the synergy between nostalgia and innovation can be a highly strategic and distinctive lever.

First of all, it is clear that the simple activation of nostalgic elements linked to the brand's past is not enough to generate a direct impact on the purchase intention. As demonstrated by the results of the moderate mediation model, the presence of an innovative element significantly strengthens the nostalgic brand's ability to activate the present self of the consumer, an identity dimension that translates into a greater propension to buy. Therefore, marketers should avoid purely "revivalist" approaches and instead integrate iconic elements of the past with features, technologies or messages that reflect the needs and desires of the modern consumer.

Especially for established brands that have reached a stage of maturity or decline of the product life cycle, being able to recover their roots should not be understood as a return to the static past, but as a strategic "re-invention". The recovery of visual assets, values or brand symbol products can act as a catalyst for attention and engagement, however it is only when the latter are reinterpreted in a contemporary way that the brand returns to acquire appeal similar to the first stages. This approach can be an effective solution to counter the perceived value erosion, typical of the decline phase.

Secondly, the effect of nostalgia on purchase intention remains significant even in the absence of the innovative elements, as shown in the simple mediation. This result suggests that the inclusion of emotional references linked to the past can still be useful to strengthen brand loyalty and stimulate positive responses, especially in markets where competition takes place more on an emotional level, rather than on a functional one, like the entertainment industry. Marketers can therefore use nostalgic narratives as a tool to fuel the emotional bond between brand and consumer, facilitating the mergence of shared memories and feelings of familiarity.

Thirdly, it is possible to outline two distinct strategic approaches in the use of nostalgia, each oriented towards different time objectives. On the one hand, integrating nostalgia with contemporary elements, which activate the present self, can be implemented to set and achieve long term strategy goals. In this perspective, the past is not simply evoked, but reinterpreted in a present-day way, making it relevant to today's consumer needs and values. This approach allows to sustain the relevance of the brand over time, strengthening the identity bond and maintaining high level engagement. It is particularly useful in relaunch or re-positioning context, where the narrative coherence between past and present becomes a distinctive lever.

On the other hand, the use of nostalgia as an autonomous lever is a short-term strategy, effective to quickly stimulate positive emotions, familiarity and recognition. This technique is suitable for tactical actions such as promotional campign, launch of limited editions or creation of viral content. The main benefit is the ability to generate immediate attention, increase brand awareness and facilitate brand recall, without necessarily having to sustain a prolonged narrative commitment. Companies can use nostalgia in a flexible way, therefore calibrating the depth and duration of involvement according to strategic objectives and brand positioning.

A further implication concerns target segmentation. The results highlights that strategies based on the two protagonists of the study are particularly effective in engaging those consumers who shoe a greater predisposition to personal identification with the brand. For this reason, managers should consider personalised campaigns based on psychographic and identity traits, rather than exclusively on demographic variables. For example, nostalgic-innovative campaigns can be particularly impactful to millennials or

GenZ, since they are familiar with the culture of the 1990s and at the same time used to interact with digital content and cutting-edge technologies.

Despite the numerous advantages, a good marketer needs to detect and evaluate drawbacks as well, in fact the use of nostalgia as a communicative lever involves some critical points. The excessive reliance on the past can convey an image of stagnation or lack of innovation, especially in highly dynamic markets. Moreover, nostalgia is not a universally shaped emotion, but it effectiveness depends strongly on the generational group and individual experience, thus risking to exclude younger or culturally distant segments. Lastly an inauthentic or forced use of nostalgic elements can generate manipulation knowledge, resulting in a loss of confidence in the brand. To avoid these counterproductive effects, it is essential that nostalgia is used consistently with brand values and in balance with innovation, therefore ensuring an emotional experience that is engaging but also credible and relevant for the contemporary consumer.

## 5.3 Study limitations and future research

Although the present study offers relevant theoretical and managerial insights, it has some limitations which need to be recognised. First, the experimental design is based on visual stimuli, which while ensuring control of variables could reduce the ability to replicate the complexity of real-word consumer experience. Moreover, the manipulations have been operationalised through fictitious scenation and to a mostly feminine brand, Fiorucci. Future study could benefit from the use of more unisex brands to extend possible significant results.

Secondly, further research could examine more dynamic forms of nostalgic communication integrated with cutting-edge technology, such as virtual reality or metaverse. Assessing their impact on behavioural variables beyond purchase intent, such as word of mouth, active engagement or brand advocacy.
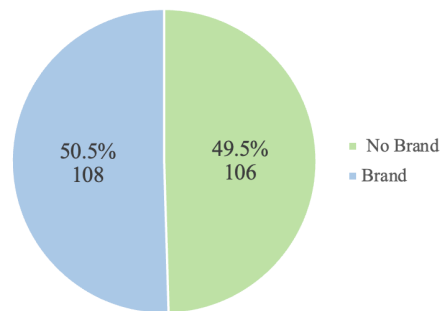
APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Independent Variable - Nostalgic Brand - Descriptive statistics

		Frenquency	Percentage
N	Valid	214	100%
	Missing	0	0%
Valid	No brand	104	48.6%
	Brand	110	51.4%
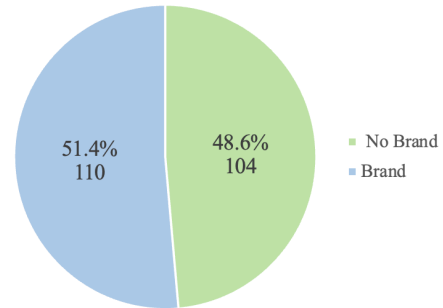
Appendix 2: Moderator - Innovation - Descriptive statistics

		Frenquency	Percentage
N	Valid	214	100%
	Missing	0	0%
Valid	No Smartphone	106	49.5%
	Smartphone	108	50.5%

Appendix 3: Dependent variable: purchase intention

   a. Reliability analysis results:

Reliability Analysis	
Cronbach Alpha	Elements
0.963	2

Item-Total Statistics			
Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Correleted Item-Total Correleted	Cronbach Alpha if Item Deleted
Considererei l'acquisto di questa T-Shirt 3.2800	3.0740	0.9290	
Valuterei di acquistare questa T-shirt 3.2600	3.0960	0.9290	

b. Descriptive statistics results:

Purchase Intention		
N	Valid	214
	Missing	0
	Mean	3.2687
	Standard Deviation	1.72499

Appendix 4 - Mediator Variable: Present Self

a. Reliability analysis results:

Reliability Analysis	
Cronbach Alpha	Elements
0.967	3

	Item-Total Statistics			
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Correleted Item-Total Correleted	Cronbach Alpha if Item Deleted
Questa T-Shirt riflette chi sono oggi	5.1700	11.0360	0.9250	0.9540
Questa T-Shirt è in linea con la mia immagine attuale	5.0800	10.2990	939.0000	0.9430
Indossare questa t-shirt mi farebbe sentire in sintonia con la mia personalità attuale	5.0100	10.3850	0.9230	0.9550

b. Descriptive statistics results:

Present Self		
N	Valid	214
	Missing	0
	Mean	2.5436
	Standard Deviation	1.61238

Appendix 5 - Mediator Variable: Nostalgia (nost)

    a. Reliability analysis results:

Reliability Analysis	
Cronbach Alpha	Elements
0.936	5

	Item-Total Statistics			
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Correleted Item-Total Correleted	Cronbach Alpha if Item Deleted
Il brand della T-Shirt mi aiuta a rievocare ricordi piacevoli	15.17	49.840	0.895	0.909
Il brand della T-Shirt mi fa sentire nostalgico	15.36	51.584	0.804	0.925
Il brand della T-Shirt mi fa pensare a quando ero più giovane	15.00	50.718	0.762	0.934
Il brand della T-Shirt mi evoca ricordi piacevoli	14.97	51.595	0.829	0.921
Il brand della T-Shirt è un piacevole ricordo del passato	15.04	50.121	0.859	0.915

    b. Descriptive statistics results:

Present Self		
N	Valid	214
	Missing	0
	Mean	3.7766
	Standard Deviation	1.76721

Appendix 6 - Other Variable: Past Self

    a. Reliability analysis results

Reliability Analysis	
Cronbach Alpha	Elements
0.945	3

Item-Total Statistics			
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Correleted Item-Total Correleted	Cronbach Alpha if Item Deleted
Questa T-Shirt riflette chi ero in passato	5.43	11.073	0.903	0.906
Questa T-Shirt è coerente con la mia immagine di qualche annno fa	5.33	10.963	0.874	0.929
Indossare questa T-Shirt mi fa sentire in sintonia con il "vecchio" me	5.53	11.518	0.879	0.924

b. Descriptive statistics results:

Past Self		
N	Valid	214
	Missing	0
	Mean	2.715
	Standard Deviation	1.6496

c. Mediation analysis PROCESS Model 4:

A mediation analysis was conducted using PROCESS Model 4 (Hayes, 2022) with "Nostalgic Brand" as independent variable, "Past Self" as mediator and "Puchese Intention" as dependent variable.

The results indicate that the presence of the '90s brand has a significant direct effect on the activation of the past self (b=0.5678, p=0.0115), suggesting that the presence of the brand is able to evoke an autobiographical connection in the consumers. Moreover, the past self significantly predicts the purchase intention (b=0.4637, p<0.001), and the indirect effect of the independent variable on the dependent through the past is significant (effect=0.2533, BootCI=[0.0529,0.5068]).

Outcome variable: Past Self

Model Summary	R	R_squared	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
	0.1724	0.0297	2.6527	6.4977	1.0000	210.0000	0.0115
Model	Coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	2.4231	0.1597	15.1719	0.0000	2.1083	2.7379
Nostalgic Brand	0.5678	0.2228	2.5491	0.0115	0.1287	1.0069

Outcome variable: Purchase Intention

Model Summary	R	R_squared	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
	0.4384	0.1922	2.4264	25.1049	2.0000	211.0000	0.0000
Model	Coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	2.0783	0.2206	9.4213	0.0000	1.6435	2.5132
Nostalgic Brand	-0.1334	0.2163	-0.6168	0.538	-0.5598	0.2929
Past Self	0.4637	0.0657	7.0596	0.0000	0.3342	0.5932

Appendix 7 - Indirect effect of Nostalgic Brand on Purchase Intention through Nostalgia and Index of moderated mediation

Indirect Effect			
Innovation	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
0	-0.3059	0.1263	-0.0967	0.5973
1	0.3392	0.1119	0.1396	0.5766
Index of Moderated mediation:			
Innovation	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
	0.0334	0.1336	-0.2528	0.2879

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