

"But you weren't there!" – Effects of historical nostalgia on young consumers

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Abstract

Purpose – This study investigated young consumer experience of historical nostalgia, which is characterised by a longing for non-personal or pre-lived experiences. The data shows that self-identified historical nostalgia shapes consumption experiences when the scope of nostalgia marketing is expanded to include those without personal experience. By modelling historical nostalgia as a form of experience, the research contributes to nostalgia theory by demonstrating how historical nostalgia operates across affective, sensory and experiential dimensions within marketing contexts.

Design/methodology/approach – Using the experience economy framework, qualitative in-depth interview data were collected from 20 young participants. The participants' experiences were analysed and coded for themes.

Findings – Shaped by diverse and nuanced feelings, historical nostalgia was revealed to have a significant impact on various consumption experiences. These attitudes are enhanced when the media engenders nostalgic sentiments, amplifying romanticisation and facilitating emotional attachments. Visual elements are triggers for historical nostalgia as participants also expressed an inclination to idealisation in cultivating positive attachments, motivating consumption and supporting escapism tendencies. Marketers can leverage both idealisation and visual cues to boost historical nostalgia and stimulate hedonic consumption.

Originality/value – The use of general nostalgia continues to gain traction in marketing theory, particularly experiential marketing. However, this study connects the idealisation of the past with attitudes to conscious consumption, a connection yet to be made in studies on historical nostalgia. In addition, this research leads to specific directions on how to craft and trigger nostalgic consumer sentiment with idealisation in practice by presenting a bridge model of historical nostalgia.

Keywords Historical nostalgia, Experiential marketing, Consumption experiences, Nostalgia marketing, Idealisation, Romanticisation, Visual cues, Conscious consumption

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Nostalgia has become an increasingly visible influence in contemporary culture, shaping the ways that young people interact with media, branding and consumer experiences (Bowman *et al.*, 2023). From retro aesthetics to revived traditions, references to the past now appear across marketing and digital environments, prompting renewed interest in how younger generations relate to histories they did not personally live through (Kulczynski and Hook, 2024). The surge in young people identifying with the past raises the central question for this study:

Q1. How do young adults make sense of, and emotionally respond to, eras that precede their lived experience?

Historical nostalgia provides one lens for exploring this phenomenon, offering a way to understand how imagined or idealised pasts become meaningful in the present. Historical nostalgia is a nuanced psychological and sociocultural

phenomenon characterised by a sentimental longing for periods preceding or indirect from one's own lived experience (Holak and Havlena, 1991; Holak and Havlena, 1992; Stern, 1992; Holbrook, 1993; Marchegiani and Phau, 2013; Kulczynski and Hook, 2024). This phenomenon contrasts with classical nostalgia, which is a sentimental affection for a period in one's lived past. Marketers have used nostalgia to advertise to consumers for decades, with the idea that nostalgic presentations can transport and connect an individual to an earlier period, thus transcending temporal boundaries (Ju *et al.*, 2016). The television era has promoted the consumption of nostalgic media predating audiences' lived experiences. More recently, shows like *Stranger Things* and *Bridgerton* (Netflix) draw heavily on aesthetic and cultural references from the

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1980s and the Regency era, respectively. Successful brand applications of historical nostalgia, such as *Bath and Body Works*, attest to the relevance of this phenomenon as a tool for modern marketers (Gilal *et al.*, 2020; Relidzynska, 2021; Shaw, 2021; Bowman *et al.*, 2023).

Nostalgia-driven experiential marketing leverages emotional value as brands seek to forge meaningful consumer interactions through immersive and emotionally charged marketing techniques (Ju *et al.*, 2016; Wen *et al.*, 2019; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Schmitt, 2011). Nostalgia marketing has been shown to have favourable personal, brand and purchase effects (Ju *et al.*, 2016; Youn and Jin, 2017; Sedikides and Wildschut, 2018; Langaro *et al.*, 2020), although adverse effects like negative body image and age inconsistencies persist (Kim and Yim, 2018). This approach highlights the need to develop a nuanced understanding of consumer behaviour and the role of experience (real or imagined) in shaping consumer perceptions (Schmitt, 1999).

While the body of literature on nostalgia is significant, there are limited studies on discrete forms of nostalgia. Exceptions include Dam *et al.* (2024), Hartmann and Brunk (2019) and the earlier work of Holak and Havlena (1996). All these authors provide nuances to the idea of nostalgia and have paved the way for this study. Appendix 1 contains three tables to provide more detailed summaries of these nuances. Tables 1 and 2 include a typology of nostalgia (Holak and Havlena, 1996), a summary of nostalgia marketing and routes to enchantment (adapted from Hartmann and Brunk, 2019:675). Table 3 defines some of the terms used when marketing the past. These terms include retro, heritage, nostalgia and vintage (adapted from Dam *et al.*, 2024). All three of these tables contextualise the latest thought framing the use of nostalgia in a marketing context. Historical nostalgia in particular holds practical relevance for marketers, as it allows them to appeal to diverse consumer segments, and not just those who possess personal experience of a subject.

The indirect nature of the nostalgia also allows the use of the re-appropriation technique to create an idealised past and stimulate hedonic consumption (Holbrook and Schindler, 1991; Hartmann and Brunk, 2019; Dam *et al.*, 2024). Brands like Nike use retro and throwback designs in new products aimed at young consumers. In doing so, they romanticise and celebrate the past in campaigns like "Evolution of the Swoosh" (Sawyer, 2020), connecting with young basketball fans through historical nostalgia.

This study aimed to complement and expand the research on re-appropriation through the exploration of consumer experiences relating to historical nostalgia by exploring the impact of historical nostalgia on consumption experiences among 18–24-year-olds with self-identified historical nostalgia. The use of young consumers aligns well with the objective to explore nostalgic feelings for a time not physically experienced because these participants were too young to have personally experienced any phenomena in the 20th century. Based on the experience consumption model derived from Pine and Gilmore (1999), the study explored the four main elements influencing consumption experiences of historical nostalgia: entertainment, aesthetics, education and escapism. Finally, this research considered how historical nostalgia interacts with conscious consumption, highlighting how young consumers' attraction to

past ideals of simplicity, craftsmanship and sustainability informs their engagement with nostalgic marketing.

2. Nostalgia and marketing

2.1 Historical nostalgia

Holbrook and Schindler (1991:330) defined nostalgia in the marketing context broadly as the "preference (general liking, positive attitude or favourable affect) towards objects (people, places or things) that were more common (popular, fashionable or widely circulated) when one was younger (in early adulthood, in adolescence, in childhood or even before birth)". This definition is purposefully inclusive of historical nostalgia, extending the temporal scope of nostalgic experiences to include predating lived experiences (Holbrook and Schindler, 1991). Nostalgia can be described as ambivalent, and it has been attached to positive reactions and negative reactions, such as bittersweet feelings (Holak and Havlena, 1998). A number of types of nostalgia are described in literature: personal nostalgia refers to nostalgic feelings generated from direct experiences (Stern, 1992). Cultural nostalgia involves personal experience that is shared within a group and reflects a connection to a cultural group. Simulated nostalgia refers to a longing based on imagined pasts, while collective nostalgia is grounded in shared memory or cultural identity (Stern, 1992; Zhou *et al.*, 2012). Finally, virtual nostalgia refers to nostalgia based on a shared indirect experience, characterised by non-personal communication (Havlena and Holak, 1996).

Historical nostalgia occupies a unique space within this classification framework as it draws on personally meaningful interpretations of collectively shared historical narratives. Although nostalgia can be separated categorically, the most common separation is between personal and historical nostalgia (Holak and Havlena, 1992; Stern, 1992; Marchegiani and Phau, 2013; Phau *et al.*, 2016). While personal nostalgia is directly connected to an individual's subjective and idealised past recollections, historical nostalgia involves external sources that stretch over time and are detached from personal experience, serving as potential nostalgic stimuli (Holak and Havlena, 1991; Holak and Havlena, 1992; Holbrook, 1993; Kulczynski and Hook, 2024; Marchegiani and Phau, 2013; Stern, 1992).

Historical nostalgia can be both private and aspirational and can also become collective when tied to generational trends (Holak and Havlena, 1996) like Generation Z romanticising the 1990s despite not living through them. Importantly, the distinction between real (lived) nostalgia and vicarious nostalgia is of particular importance when conceptualising historical nostalgia. This study builds on Stern's (1992) argument that vicarious (or second-hand) nostalgia can generate real emotional effects and influence behaviour, even without autobiographical memory. While these nostalgia types share mechanisms like emotional valence and identity reinforcement, historical nostalgia's lack of direct memory distinguishes it from other nostalgia types as a distinct and increasingly relevant construct in modern marketing practice.

While historical nostalgia has traditionally been underexplored in marketing literature, the studies of Marchegiani and Phau (2011) and Merchant and Rose (2013) affirm its relevance to branding and advertising. These studies,

however, tended to examine historical nostalgia as an emergent theme in comparison to other nostalgia types, or as a subtheme. There is still a lack of literature that isolates historical nostalgia as an independent driver of consumer sentiment and experience. Historical nostalgia uses cues with the aim of transforming the present condition to allow the consumer to transcend their own existence in time and feel connected to "the continuous flow of humanity" (Stern, 1992:15–16). Moreover, these cues can be re-appropriated and leveraged with the individual propensity to focus on favourable aspects of the past (Baker and Kennedy, 1994; Hartmann and Brunk, 2019). Specifically, the show *Stranger Things*, set in the 1980s, was observed to foster a relationship to the referenced period that is nostalgic and celebratory rather than condemnatory (Hassler-Forest, 2020; Relidzynska, 2021). This re-appropriation is characterised using past-themed resources to create playful and celebratory engagement that enlivens the present, and by doing so, involves a moralistic separation and spectacle-focus that opens engagement with the past to those who have no lived experiences of it (Hartmann and Brunk, 2019).

While it is evident that general nostalgia has been widely studied in marketing (Pascal *et al.*, 2002), research focusing on historical nostalgia as a distinct construct remains limited. Sarial-Abi *et al.* (2017) demonstrated that historical nostalgia can influence product evaluations, especially when items are framed as timeless or authentic. Thus, as digital media and cultural consumption patterns evolve, the relevance of historical nostalgia is increasingly prominent. Few studies, however, showcase how historical nostalgia can act as an independent factor driving perceptions of quality, sustainability and brand trust. The purpose of this study is to address that gap by exploring how consumers experience and emotionally respond to historical nostalgia in the absence of lived memory, and how this shapes their media, product and lifestyle orientations.

2.2 Nostalgia, experiences and marketing

Building on the focus on historical nostalgia previously outlined, this section examines how nostalgic experiences are interpreted within marketing contexts, paying particular attention to how historical nostalgia shapes emotional engagement, meaning-making and consumer attitudes.

While nostalgia is characterised as a dynamic phenomenon contingent on the temporal separation between the past and present (Higson, 2014; Dam *et al.*, 2024), the recycling of nostalgic subjects is used to erase the sense of distance to the past. Nostalgia is moulded by collective memory and can be manufactured as a market-mediated cultural resource (Higson, 2014; Brunk *et al.*, 2018; Hartmann and Brunk, 2019; Cantone *et al.*, 2020; Dam *et al.*, 2024). Marketers can stimulate the consumers' senses to induce nostalgic feelings, thereby leveraging emotional value (Ju *et al.*, 2016). These nostalgic feelings are different to merely having an interest in a past era or subject. This is supported by a study that found that nostalgic emotion had a significant positive impact on brand trust and brand attachment (Wen *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, nostalgia-driven experiential marketing not only appeals to the emotional psyche of the consumer but also contributes to the overall brand position. Benefits to brands include the ability to tap into

higher-order needs and even the "brand as friend" phenomenon (Ohlwein and Bruno, 2021). Through experiential marketing, the emphasis is placed on the "hedonic and experiential elements" attached to the product (Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2013:26), and in the experience of consumption, rather than merely utilitarian or functional benefits (Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2013; Urdea *et al.*, 2021).

In a world in which the market environment is swiftly evolving, marked by the rapid introduction of new brands, products, services and technologies, consumers seek reassurance from consumer products and brands, aiming to establish stability and security by embracing consumption that evokes the past to transcend present conditions (Rana *et al.*, 2022). Nostalgia can be viewed as a resource that can be accessed during times of stress and discomfort (Barauskaite *et al.*, 2022). The literature demonstrates that nostalgia often emerges in response to feelings of alienation or discomfort with the present, and people are drawn to nostalgic experiences during challenging periods (Hemetsberger *et al.*, 2011; Merchant *et al.*, 2011; Hartmann and Brunk, 2019; Cantone *et al.*, 2020; Dam *et al.*, 2024). Marketing can transform these negative sentiments into nostalgia (Brunk *et al.*, 2018; Dam *et al.*, 2024). Marketing the past can temporarily provide comfort for consumers by transporting them to an idealised space of moral certainty and romance, while simultaneously cultivating a sense of individuality, novelty and exclusivity (Brown *et al.*, 2003). Wealthy older consumers who purchase Casio's vintage range of wrist watches display these qualities. The choice to embrace the simplicity of their childhood brand in a quickly evolving technology category speaks further to Dam *et al.*'s (2023) theory of idealisation as a value-creation process of past-themed marketing and consumption. These dynamics are especially relevant to historical nostalgia, where emotional resonance is derived from imagined or idealised past eras rather than lived memory.

Advertisers may be capable of encouraging nostalgic reflection using executional elements (Holak and Havlena, 1991). Nostalgia marketing stimulates the consumer's senses (smell, touch, taste, sound and sight), which encourages them to journey to a past moment, resulting in a nostalgic sensation (Ju *et al.*, 2016). The Proust effect of scent and taste as elicitors of emotion illustrates how nostalgia evoked by scent and taste presents positive psychological functions, such as meaning in life, self-esteem and social connection (Green *et al.*, 2023). Batcho (2023) adds to this by concluding that sight-based nostalgia generated by reading memoirs and literature is associated with maintaining social connection, self-esteem, meaning and identity, as well as life-event management like coping with loss and conflict resolution. Attention has also been drawn to the use of aesthetic visualisation in branding and consumption of the past (Brown *et al.*, 2003; Dagalp *et al.*, 2020). These sensory triggers are central to historical nostalgia, which relies heavily on symbolic representations such as period aesthetics, colour palettes and retro imagery to evoke engagement.

Nostalgia marketing relies on the fact that a consumer's desire to relive the past can be satisfied by the nostalgic consumption of products that simulate sensations and the recollection of the past (Zhou *et al.*, 2012; Ju *et al.*, 2016; Weingarten and Wei, 2023). Moreover, brands can create

short-lived enchantment that, when gone, stimulates the pursuit of re-enchantment (Ritzer, 2005; Ritzer, 2011; Hartmann and Brunk, 2019). Hartmann and Brunk (2019) suggested that nostalgia marketing through this enchantment stems from three distinct routes: re-instantiation, re-enactment and re-appropriation. Each route introduces the element of enchantment in nostalgic marketing by "re-instantiating a past" (Hartmann and Brunk, 2019:675). There is, therefore, a relationship between nostalgia marketing and the engendering of enchantment (Hartmann and Brunk, 2019). This process not only allows consumers to connect with historical narratives but also facilitates an opportunity for marketers to imbue present conditions with heightened significance and leverage historical nostalgia to re-appropriate past resources. The process cultivates a more utopic and hedonic consumer experience (Hartmann and Brunk, 2019). This aligns with historical nostalgia's role in creating immersive experiences that transport consumers into emotionally idealised past moments.

Dam *et al.* (2024) highlighted the link between romanticisation, nostalgia and marketing, by which the yearning for the past is often romanticised and is characterised by a desire to engage with the past for both consumer and marketer. Dam *et al.* (2024) suggested that modern marketers and scholars still engage with the concept of "past" when studying present marketing and consumption phenomena regarding retro, heritage, nostalgia and vintage marketing. Moreover, consumer cultural literature explains how nostalgia is actively manufactured by brands, products and services that are nostalgically framed and collectively co-construct a unique version of the past for consumers (Brunk *et al.*, 2018). Within this domain of nostalgia marketing, retro marketing has also become of interest in academic spheres (Brown, 1999; Dogerlioglu-Demir *et al.*, 2017; Brown, 2018; Ahlberg *et al.*, 2021). Retro marketing stands apart as a method that integrates both past and present to account for potential consumer anxieties around socialisation and alienation when indulging in past-related consumption (Brown *et al.*, 2003; Hemetsberger *et al.*, 2011; Dam *et al.*, 2024).

Nostalgia's implications span a variety of consumer behavioural research contexts, including self-continuity, pandering to senses, shareability and purchase intention (Ju *et al.*, 2016; Youn and Jin, 2017; Green *et al.*, 2023). While nostalgic marketing has the potential to reap benefits such as shareability, increased purchase intention and favourable consumer attitudes, there is also the possibility for negative interactions exemplified within the context of gender and age dynamics (Ju *et al.*, 2016; Youn and Jin, 2017; Langaro *et al.*, 2020). Kim and Yim's (2018) study showed that nostalgic marketing communication can generate negative reactions in older female consumers, due to perceived discontinuity between current and ideal body image, as well as negative ageing implications. Conversely, younger adults were less likely to be impacted by messaging, due to already having a heightened sense of perceived youthfulness (Kim and Yim, 2018). Nostalgia was shown to enhance brand attitudes and purchase intention, particularly when consumers had experience with the brand or had high existing brand attachment (Khoshghadam *et al.*, 2019; Langaro *et al.*, 2020).

While existing studies have consistently highlighted emotional outcomes such as trust, attachment, comfort and

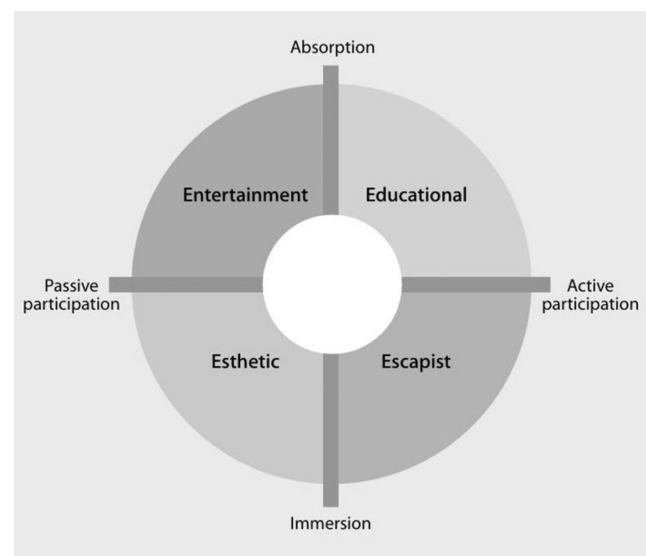
romanticised perceptions, their interpretations and scope vary considerably. Recognising these differences is important for situating the current study, as they reveal both the richness and the inconsistency within the literature on historical nostalgia. Cases show the complexity of the reception process and contradictory responses (Ju *et al.*, 2016; Youn and Jin, 2017; Ju *et al.*, 2018). These contradictory results of testing nostalgia as a unified concept demonstrate the need for research targeting the differentiated nostalgia types. This reveals an opportunity to examine consumer attitudes further within this subject and within a distinct nostalgia type. Together, these studies indicate that historical nostalgia operates not only as an emotional response but also as an experiential mode that shapes how consumers interpret and interact with products. This provides a clear rationale for adopting the experience economy framework, and also positions nostalgia as a meaningful lens through which marketing theory can examine affective engagement, sensory cues and experiential value. An investigation into the experiential dimensions of historical nostalgia remains underexplored in marketing theory.

3. Theoretical framework

This qualitative enquiry is underpinned by the seminal work of Pine and Gilmore (1999), which was used to emphasise historical nostalgia as a derivative of experience. Pine and Gilmore (2013) stressed that, within the experience economy, staging marketing experiences for brands to generate demand for their offerings is key (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, 2011, 2013). The experiential consumption model suggests that consumption experiences involve four realms: entertainment, aesthetics, education and escapism, as shown in Figure 1 (Pine and Gilmore, 1999).

The experiential consumption model is framed around how value is derived from the experiences of both brand and consumer, and how the combination of such factors creates a rich consumption experience (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). In the context of historical nostalgia, this model provides a framework

Figure 1 The four realms of an experience



Source: Pine and Gilmore, 1999

for how individuals derive value from their indirect nostalgic experiences. The experiential consumption model was selected because it provides a structured way to understand how consumers engage with the emotionally and sensorially rich stimuli of historical nostalgia. Its four experiential realms allow a nuanced examination of how nostalgic triggers influence consumer meaning-making, offering an analytical coherence that bridges the literature on affect, sensory processing and nostalgic engagement.

Understanding how historical nostalgia interacts with the consumption experience can guide the integration of nostalgia into marketing activity in a novel way. This targeted activity can enhance consumer interactions with brands by leveraging the emotional and experiential richness of nostalgia. A discerning perspective on nostalgia can, therefore, improve our understanding of value creation, experiences, engagement, motivations and sentiments, as we improve our ability to design content and cultivate nostalgic experiences that resonate with the consumer beyond the boundaries of personal experience.

4. Methodology

Given the intricate nature of the nostalgia phenomenon and the nuanced responses required from participants to extract meaningful insights, an exploratory qualitative research design was chosen (Sofaer, 1999; Mbaka and Isiramen, 2021). The subjective nature of nostalgia also points to a qualitative approach grounded in interpretivist epistemology, because the primary aim of qualitative research is to gain depth and richness of insight into how individuals interpret, experience and give meaning to concepts or contexts (Lim, 2024). While majority and minority perspectives may be noted in a broad sense, these are not quantified. Rather than quantify variables or produce generalisable claims as in quantitative research, this approach facilitated an examination of how individuals articulate, negotiate and make sense of their nostalgic engagements with the past. The method added a novel divergence from the quantitative marketing study by Marchegiani and Phau (2011).

In-depth, semi-structured interviews based on the experience economy model (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) were used to obtain a rich contextual understanding of participants' experiences and historical nostalgia, allowing them the flexibility to articulate sentiments without stringent limitations. The framework was operationalised into a series of open-ended, exploratory questions, allowing participants to reflect on their experiences with media, objects and settings that evoked historical nostalgia (see Appendix 2).

The target population for this study was defined narrowly as individuals, 18–24 years old, with self-identified historical nostalgia. The final sample included both genders and a range of socio-economic backgrounds, providing diversity in the youth demographic and allowing depth and variation in experience and nostalgic associations. The age range was chosen with a view to exploring historical nostalgia's indirect nature and connection to time periods that precede one's own birth (Holbrook and Schindler, 1991; Stern, 1992). Focusing on a younger age group allowed more historical periods to be examined, because the group's lived personal experience was limited. This cohort was of particular interest because their unique engagement with and exposure to digital and cultural

intermediaries created differing opportunities for historical nostalgia immersion across the four experiential realms defined by Pine and Gilmore (1999). These authors' theoretical framework thus provided an interpretive lens for understanding how younger individuals' historical nostalgia operates as an experiential process while taking into account within its realms – entertainment, aesthetics, escapism and education – the presence of contemporary factors that shape value creation (Pine and Gilmore, 1999).

Given the specialised nature of the participant criteria (individuals who self-identify with historical nostalgia), judgement sampling (non-probability) was used to enable the researchers to purposefully select participants with the requisite knowledge and experience (Elfil and Negida, 2017). This sampling focused on individuals with self-observed experiences of historical nostalgia to ensure the nuances and depth of the subject were adequately captured. A short screening test was administered to find participants who could self-identify as historically nostalgic. This screening test involved presenting potential participants with a uniform definition of nostalgia, derived from established literature as outlined in Appendix 2. Only respondents who responded affirmatively, and were able to briefly describe a corresponding feeling, attachment or association were included in the final sample. This ensured all participants possessed a baseline self-recognition of historical nostalgia engagement and were able to actively reflect on said engagement. This approach was instrumental in achieving more textured and analytically valuable data because individuals with an understanding of the concept could reflect on their nostalgic experiences and describe them in more depth. The deeper understanding that came with the self-recognition and reflection was also central in ensuring participants could more concisely articulate sentiments around the experiential realms (Pine and Gilmore, 1999).

A sample of 20 participants from Cape Town, South Africa, was chosen in alignment with other qualitative studies that explored nostalgia (Kessous, 2014; Kessous *et al.*, 2015; Gilal *et al.*, 2020; Subedi, 2021; Barakat and Ali, 2023). This sample size struck a balance between the feasibility and the depth of analysis required to explore the complexities of the subject. Students (18–24) who were currently receiving tertiary education and represented a range of academic disciplines and both genders were selected to provide a diverse, yet demographically cohesive sample, suited to the study. The selection decisions were made to ensure a multiplicity of perspectives and interests. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, with written consent.

Recordings and transcriptions were safeguarded on encrypted and password-protected devices. The confidentiality and anonymity of participants was ensured by omitting names, removing all identifying information during the transcription process and identifying participants by numbers. As part of the consent form, participants were made aware of the uses of their responses for research processes in alignment with institutional ethics approval. We did not collect data on participants' ethnicity or backgrounds. In a culturally diverse country such as South Africa, we acknowledge that cultural heritage may shape perspectives on nostalgia. However, as this research focused on the affective and experiential dimensions of historical nostalgia, data collection emphasised emotional and

conceptual responses rather than demographic identifiers. In addition, to safeguard their privacy and avoid potential identification, we chose not to report or disclose participants' sensitive or personal information in this study. This decision aligns with the study's ethical framework, which prioritised confidentiality and psychological safety.

Participants were asked whether they related to feelings of nostalgia triggered by external sources from the past that are not part of one's personal experiences and can precede one's own birth and were included if they confirmed a connection to the experience of historical nostalgia. They were asked to reflect on and describe the sensory and emotional responses they typically experienced when encountering nostalgic content. This included the desire for escapism (aesthetic and escapist realms) and descriptions of how nostalgic media or educational material affected their nostalgic experiences (educational and entertainment realms). Furthermore, participants were asked how these nostalgic experiences influenced their personal consumption choices (focusing on implications for marketing and consumer behaviour). By making sure each component was explored, these open-ended yet focused questions ensured emergent themes were consistent with the theoretical model.

Considering the exploratory nature of this study, thematic analysis was used to identify themes related to historical nostalgia (Terry *et al.*, 2017). In undertaking thematic analysis, the researchers remained aware of their positionality and the influence this might have on interpreting the data. While acknowledging that complete objectivity is not attainable in qualitative enquiry, efforts were made to maintain impartiality throughout the analytical process: the researchers engaged in reflexivity throughout the research, reflecting on how economic, social and cultural contexts, as well as their own potential biases or preconceptions, affected the study. To ensure inter-coder reliability (O'Conner and Joffe, 2020), the researchers conducted independent coding followed by comparison. Findings were shared with individual participants to verify the accurate representation of their experiences, as a form of member-checking (Singh *et al.*, 2021).

5. Findings and discussion

This section presents the findings of the study, structured according to the four experiential realms outlined in the experience economy framework: entertainment, education, escapism and aesthetics. The analysis drew from 20 in-depth interviews with young adults who identified themselves as relating to historical nostalgia. Their responses were thematically coded to identify the affective, sensory and cognitive dimensions of their nostalgic experiences. Quotations are used to illustrate their lived meanings and orientations towards nostalgic media, products and lifestyles. Together, these findings address the study's central research aim by demonstrating how historical nostalgia shapes experiential engagement consumption.

The four experiential realms provide a consistent analytical structure, but participants placed varying emphasis on each dimension. The following subsections reflect these naturally occurring differences in depth, while presenting each realm as an integral component of the overall nostalgic experience.

5.1 Entertainment

In exploring historical nostalgia in the context of television shows, movies and other media formats, participants' reflections revealed frequent and intensive engagement with past eras, both real and imagined. The availability of historical nostalgia content influenced how many participants engaged with media consumption. Platforms like Netflix and TikTok were found to facilitate exposure to historical content and to generate historical nostalgia. Television shows stood out as a key channel for historical nostalgia transferral, with all participants utilising this example to detail their sentiments. This entertainment dimension demonstrates how historical nostalgia offers consumers an enjoyable and emotionally engaging encounter with imagined pasts, which in turn can influence purchase decisions by making products feel more meaningful, familiar and pleasurable to interact with. All participants were found to display an emotional attachment to past eras, and they frequently associated historical nostalgia periods with simplicity and community, antithetical to what is described as a busy and complex current reality. Participants derived emotional value and longing from these associations:

A lot of it was like just going back to slow times where there was less consumption, more community – Participant 1.

The desire for deeper interpersonal connections, face-to-face and straightforward social exchanges, and a slower-paced and simplified time with limited distractions recurred in several responses:

Everyone's just on their phones all the time. And in this movie, everyone actually talks to each other, reads books and has philosophical conversations [...] I'd say it's a craving to experience it – Participant 4.

A recurring notion was that the media romanticises, glamourises or idealises historical nostalgia periods, leading to a misleading or skewed perception of the respective era. Most participants openly acknowledged and displayed an explicit awareness of the romanticisation and misrepresentation of these eras, yet all expressed continued enjoyment and engagement. This aligns with the potential use of historical nostalgia to create a morally detached and idealised version of the past, re-appropriating it for a more hedonic and less melancholic consumption experience (Hartmann and Brunk, 2019), while also supporting romanticisation as a key function in value creation and the inherent appreciation in marketing the past (Dam *et al.*, 2023):

They changed narratives and cherry-picked aspects from it. It also made me more nostalgic for it because they are only showing the good sides of it – Participant 2.

Interpersonal transferral was found to have a crucial role in certain individuals' historical nostalgia experience and amplified nostalgic sentiment for these individuals, as well as leading to realised consumption in some cases:

I do find myself drawn to certain trends that I know my gran would have worn because it makes me feel the sense of – this is a slither into what it was like to live then. Or makes me even feel weirdly connected to my gran, like knowing I'm the same age as her when she would have been wearing this. I definitely have been influenced by that, and I've definitely bought stuff – Participant 12.

While not all participants directly sought out products due to media-induced historical nostalgia, in many cases, media-inspired product choices were found to reflect historical nostalgia associations and temporal attachments. This

influence also extended across media formats, whereby respondents advocated trend-driven consumption and reinforced social media as a means to inspire the consumption of historically framed products:

So, yes, I got into film cameras and disposables five years ago in 2019 already when it just started becoming a trend. So since then, it's been a hobby of mine. And I think the media that influenced that was mostly Instagram. Mostly Instagram and TikTok actually. Like, the cool filters that you get from the cameras – Participant 8.

I feel like the 90s trend has come back into fashion and a lot of celebrities like Kendall Jenner or Hailey Bieber, who are the IT girls on social media right now, they are also pushing that further – Participant 14.

I think, if you consider the fact that trends recycle and especially trends in eras, then we tend to approach, especially products and purchases, in the sense that it reminds us of a certain time, and we know the cyclical movement of trends. So, for example, if the 90s are back and everyone's talking about the trends that happened there, then definitely the media would [...] the references to the media would incite the purchases, as that's my only reference that I have to those times – Participant 19.

5.2 Aesthetics

Among participants, aesthetics acted as a powerful trigger for historical nostalgia sentiment. Fashion particularly stood out as a transmitter of historical nostalgia, with most participants using fashion to describe their nostalgic experience. The visual representation of historical eras was found to act as a symbolic mediator between the present and the past, generating positive experiential and emotional responses based on aesthetic recognition. Particularly, visuals acted to create an idealised image of the past for participants:

They put a colour gradient on it [...] I think it creates an image in your head of what things were like. And oftentimes, when we think back on things, we only remember them for the good that they were – Participant 18.

Material items also play a pivotal role in the historical nostalgia experience for participants. Tangible representations of bygone eras, such as architecture in churches, were mentioned by many respondents as a trigger of nostalgia and aesthetic reminders to provoke nostalgic reflections. This finding is valuable because it suggests that nostalgic aesthetics can trigger imagination and emotional engagement, allowing participants to construct visions of past lifestyles. The aged look of these objects, such as typewriters, was found to suggest a tangible link to history, suggesting a story that extends beyond its immediate purpose:

I would say Churches because they typically [...] like, most of the churches you see today were typically built quite a while ago, so they maintain whatever architecture was popular at that time, and also they tend to hold a lot of artefacts or facts of memorabilia. You are sort of forced to go back in time and look at it, and you just start to think of, you know, maybe the people who were around doing that day, what they wore, what they look like, what their social life was like. I'd say I like the 60s and 70s the most. Also, like medieval stuff, I'm really big into. Also, like some Victorian stuff, like that Gothic style, I think is quite cool – Participant 1.

Another thing is Typewriters. So, I associate typewriters with the previous era before we had, like, laptops, for example, for writing. And I appreciate the aesthetics of a typewriter. I think the pages that it prints look very nice and I think I enjoy the minimalism of not having any other apps or internet connection, and it evokes feelings of connection with writers in a previous era – Participant 3.

The 70s academia aesthetic appeals to me [...] those thick brown books. This has attracted me a lot, and it always makes me think of those old movies or those old libraries – Participant 4.

The aesthetic appeal of historical elements was found to catalyse the consumption of historically framed products. The power of visual aesthetics therefore lies in their ability to evoke an appealing, imagined version of the past. This supports the

idea that aesthetics do not merely recall the past, but help construct a desirable, emotionally resonant version of it (Hartmann and Brunk, 2019). This is of particular importance to marketers when considering utilising historical nostalgia to appeal to consumers. The aesthetic allure of elements was found to not only foster emotional attachment but also to influence consumer decision-making. Aesthetic depictions acted as a powerful shaper of current preferences, and therefore a motivator in seeking out products that allowed participants to connect with or integrate the idealised past into their reality:

I like to replicate things like clothing and style, and it helps me adapt or connect to those different times – Participant 10.

The cyclical nature of trends was also frequently remarked upon; specifically, how visual and cultural elements are continuously reinterpreted and reintegrated into the present. This was reflected on as a resurfacing of past aesthetics, styles and elements in modern contexts:

I think trends cycle. Especially in fashion. So, I think, I don't know if it's like a 30-year cycle or something. So, where trends from 30 years ago come back into fashion [...] So, as things from the past come back into trend, then I'm more likely to buy and purchase it, purely because it is trending again. I guess, again, with the Polaroid, for example. It's again connecting with a trend, which is my current generation, as well as connecting with the past generation who used Polaroids before the invention of digital photography. I suppose it gives one something in common with the previous generations – Participant 3.

The trends in fashion move and they recycle, but with very sharp nostalgia of the past – Participant 19.

This trend resurgence is amplified through modern platforms and influential figures, particularly with social media platforms being important for reviving and reinterpreting historical aesthetics and blending past and present.

In addition, participants were found to frequently mention the "higher quality" perception that comes with vintage items. Reliability, lifespan and confidence in durability were all mentioned. Objects of past eras evoking historical nostalgia are often associated with the design, value, emotional significance and craftsmanship embedded in their aesthetics, and therefore imbued with a greater sense of quality. This translates to the consumer decision-making process in the evaluation stage, where items with visible markers of history are perceived as indicators of quality:

I mean, even just like the way things are manufactured, people weren't alienated from their labour, and I feel like the quality of and the care that people put into those things was a lot higher than what we see today – Participant 1

You always hear that older clothes are better quality, and I try to consume as little as possible so therefore I prefer to buy things that are high quality from one source. So, I think, anything that can bring back that vibe of "this is going to last you 30 years" [...] I'm more likely to go for that and products from that era – Participant 2.

This appreciation and perception of quality and durability evolved into a broader reflection on conscious consumption and the perceived moral and material value of the past. Participants expressed admiration for what they deemed a simpler, more resourceful time and were influenced by their wish to escape to the simplicity, craftsmanship and perceived lower consumption levels of the past:

I feel like I've learned there is a way to survive and thrive without buying things all the time. Through learning to make things by yourself. Not having to just buy everything or throw things away when they can actually be fixed or made into something else. So, I feel like it has helped me to be less

wasteful and more precious of my things and conscious of my waste – Participant 1.

This potentially showcases a romanticisation of the survival, workmanship and resource limitations of individuals in past eras and a significant finding of intersection between sustainability and romanticisation. Participants mentioned the romanticisation of eras where products were perceived to be long-lasting, crafted with quality in mind. This inclination is in direct contrast to trends in fast fashion. In addition, romanticisation of a simplified past encourages more minimalism and a reduction in over-consumptive and wasteful behaviours.

5.3 Education

Educational exposure among participants, whether formal or informal, played a significant role in enhancing or altering historical nostalgia connections and altering perceptions. Participant responses illustrated the complex ways in which educational content intersects with historical nostalgia, whereby for some it deepened emotional attachment and added layers of realism. This indicates the potential of education to enhance the emotional depth of nostalgia by fostering a more intimate understanding of the past:

I think that's [research] probably heightened the historical nostalgia more, because now, when I then am exposed to those things again – be it the fashion, be it the scenery – I almost feel like I'm there even more. Because the research has kind of made me feel like, "Okay, you were a part of that time period", and you can almost convince yourself that you were there – Participant 12.

For others, education was found to hinder the connection to the romanticised ideas nurtured by the media and there was a desire to preserve the idealised version created:

I haven't done any research into what the 80s was really like. I think, because I have such a positive idea about what that decade was like, I don't want to read too much into what it actually was like. I'm sure it wasn't a good time all the time, but I really don't want to damage the idea I have of it – Participant 9.

Participants frequently expressed a desire for a romanticised version of the past to act as an emotional escape, as opposed to accurate depictions. There was a mix of preferences for either romanticisation or accuracy in their sentiments about exposure. The duality identified adds nuance to Dam *et al.* (2024) notion of romanticisation: while education can heighten connection through contextual understanding, it can simultaneously threaten the aestheticised appeal that brings nostalgic pleasure. This highlights education as an interpretive lens that can both reinforce and disrupt nostalgic meaning-making, revealing its subtle but significant role in historical nostalgia.

5.4 Escapism

Historical nostalgia was revealed to be an effective mechanism for escapism. Historical nostalgia content and products were seen as a method of detachment from daily stressors and present conditions. A significant number of participants reported that they gravitated towards historical nostalgia subjects when faced with stress or uncertainty. For some, the primary reason was to disengage from present concerns, while others yearned for the simplicity, stability and familiarity of these subjects. Participants described escapism as a route for historical nostalgia to offer momentary relief from everyday pressures, allowing them to immerse themselves in an idealised

or comforting past. The consensus therefore centred on escapism as an emotional coping mechanism:

I feel like, especially during a time of stress, everybody feels very unsure about the future, and so the past is kind of a safe bet. Because we already know what happened. I think it's the simpler time and, again, it's that fantasy, right, so you're escaping from a current reality – Participant 14.

This finding aligns closely with existing research positioning nostalgia as a psychological resource in times of instability (Hemetsberger *et al.*, 2011; Barauskaite *et al.*, 2022). The idea of nostalgia as an emotional retreat, and its encouragement of historically framed consumption, also reflects previous literature, which conceptualised retro-consumption as a quest for moral reassurance and continuity in an unstable consumer landscape (Brown *et al.*, 2003; Hemetsberger *et al.*, 2011; Dam *et al.*, 2024).

5.5 A Bridge model of historical nostalgia

The findings of the study provide a bridge between Pine and Gilmore's (1999) four realms of experience and our understanding of historical nostalgia as a collective experience. By using each of the realms to describe how imagined or idealised pasts become meaningful in the present, the model highlights specific connections between the real and the detached experience as shown in Figure 2.

The model presents a means to think more systematically about how historical nostalgia can be understood in both marketing and media in general. Through this study, each component of an experience can bridge into nostalgic feelings through both internal (e.g. interpretive meaning making and emotional refuge seeking) and external (e.g. material cues and media) mechanisms.

6. Conclusions

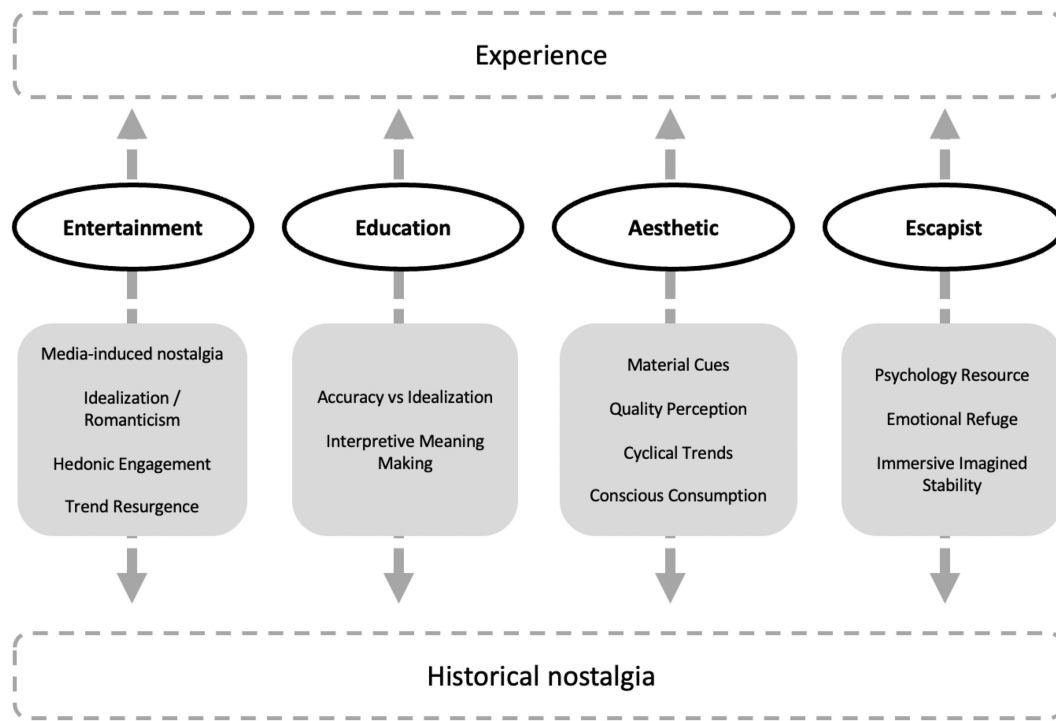
Several conclusions are relevant to marketing practice, particularly in leveraging tools such as idealisation, visual cues and addressing the shift in preferences towards minimalism and sustainability. Participants described the experiential realms with differing levels of richness, emphasising entertainment and aesthetics. This variation reflects the emotional and sensory nature of historical nostalgia and helps explain why education and escapism emerged in nuanced, rather than extensive, ways.

This study contributes theoretically by extending the experience economy framework into the domain of historical nostalgia. It demonstrates how nostalgia operates across the four experiential realms – entertainment, aesthetics, education and escapism – thereby integrating affective and sensory constructs and showing how experiential theory can deepen the understanding of nostalgic engagement in marketing. The bridge model further illustrates how this theoretical understanding can be itemised with a lived experience framework.

6.1 Crafting nostalgic consumer sentiment with idealisation

This study showed that the study participants not only had a strong preference for romanticised and idealised representations of historical periods, but this preference was also a critical part of sentiment formation, emotional attachment and escapism. The research highlighted a need for escapism from contemporary

Figure 2 A bridge model of historical nostalgia



Source: Authors' own work

pressures. From a theoretical standpoint, this extends the understanding of how idealisation functions in the nostalgia marketing landscape. Consistent with [Dam et al. \(2023\)](#), the study demonstrates how idealisation forms part of the value-creation process in historically framed marketing and consumption and how this dynamic operates in the historical nostalgia context. The study reveals how romanticisation and idealisation have the potential to act as coping resources that intensify attachment, in agreement with assertions by [Batcho \(2023\)](#) but with the absence of personal memory.

The indirect nature of historical nostalgia allowed respondents to have a detached experience of the past, allowing the leveraging of idealisation as a marketing tool. This detachment enables marketers to manipulate past narratives and stimulate emotional responses. Marketers can use idealisation to translate negative emotions into productive nostalgia. This can contribute to creating strong consumer experiences. Marketers who place a higher emphasis on positive and aspirational elements of historical nostalgia can reinforce positive emotional responses by appealing to the desire for escape. This appeal can entail selective and aestheticised representations of past eras. For example, fashion marketers can develop campaigns that highlight romanticised elements of 1990s minimalism to evoke emotional attachment and offer an escape from modern-day pressures. By minimising present realities, marketers can appeal to the comfort, simplicity or moral certainty of historical nostalgia.

The study raises ethical considerations regarding the selective and aestheticised representations of history in marketing. The discussion of the ethics and implications of idealised (or curated) portrayals of the past and obscuration of

reality is far from over. It is important that marketers use nostalgia with sensitivity, avoiding the manipulation of history in ways that may mislead or exploit consumers.

6.2 Leveraging visual cues

The use of visual cues – such as colour palettes, fashion and filters – emerged as a significant trigger for historical nostalgia that subsequently influenced consumer preferences and purchase behaviour. This insight contributes to the understanding of aesthetic visualisation in past-related consumption and branding ([Brown et al., 2003](#); [Dagalp et al., 2020](#)), showing how visual elements, such as the period-specific imagery, can generate the enchantment discussed by [Hartmann and Brunk \(2019\)](#). Marketers should appeal to aesthetic continuity when leveraging historical narratives. With the rise of media content innovation, there has been an accelerated use of sensory triggers ([Rana et al., 2022](#)). Marketers can leverage aesthetic appeal, for example, by utilising retro typography. Marketers can drive consumer fantasies and the recall of past eras using triggers such as period-specific imagery ([Merchant and Rose, 2013](#); [Rana et al., 2022](#)). Sensory triggers and historical nostalgia as a medium can foster emotional engagement and brand attachment ([Merchant and Rose, 2013](#)).

Given the rise of visual-first social media like Instagram, Pinterest and TikTok, brands can integrate historical aesthetics into product design and packaging and into short-form visual content like videos. Visual elements in social media marketing must be strategically composed and employed to entice interest, desire and action ([Chan et al., 2023](#)). By using

components, such as filters, retro fonts and period-appropriate fashion, which were identified in the study as key triggers to elicit aesthetic appeal in ads and user-generated content, marketers can tap into the viral potential of nostalgic visuals (Dharmasaputro and Achyar, 2020).

6.3 Harnessing the shift towards minimalism and sustainability

The study found that the participants linked their desire for simplicity, quality and sustainability with historical nostalgia. Also notable was a preference for simplification and a rejection of modern overstimulation, aligning with a shift away from materialism and consumerism (Kang *et al.*, 2021). These findings build on the theoretical understanding of the current transition to post-materialist values and offer a new perspective on how nostalgic narratives could be contributing to re-anchoring consumption practices. High-quality products and sustainability were perceived to be connected with historical periods that were associated with the ideals of craftsmanship, minimalism and resourcefulness. This contrasts with the idea of technology as a source of development.

Marketers can capitalise on the perceived higher quality, sustainability and durability of historically framed products that have "stood the test of time". Marketers can align sustainable branding with nostalgic messaging, such as "build to last" or "timeless quality", which could be embedded in packaging, product design and campaigns. By understanding the interconnectivity of past and present, marketers can highlight appropriate qualities of historically framed products. For instance, they can emphasise past craftsmanship, resource efficiency, continued relevance, repurposing and customisability (Sarial-Abi *et al.*, 2017). Promoting the potential for repurposing and alterations meets growing consumer preferences for sustainability and minimalism (Sesini *et al.*, 2020). This also adds nuance to the usability of nostalgia in relation to brand heritage (Merchant and Rose, 2013). Given participants' emphasis on durability, authenticity and past craftsmanship, brands with a heritage can activate historical nostalgia by incorporating this into messaging.

7. Directions for future research

Culture, subculture and ethnic effects. Future research could involve a larger sample and age range, and span a greater geographical area to account for differing cultures, regions and memory compositions. Including other generations could enable a comparison between historical and personal nostalgia illuminating intergenerational acculturation. Including various demographic and socio-economic groups would enhance the understanding of how historical nostalgia is experienced. For example, growing up in poverty will offer different perceptions and attitudes to the past (compared to growing up in affluence). While this study centred on experiential and emotional connections to historical periods, this could be extended to culturally or ethnically situated nostalgic memory and how this relates to historical nostalgia. In a similar way, subcultures like computer gaming can be studied to see the applications as first and second-generation gaming brands evolve and more retro revivals surface.

Sustainable consumption. Given that the participants in this study associated historical eras with simplicity, durability and intentional living, future research could test whether historical nostalgia increases pro-sustainability behaviour and attitudes. This study revealed a link between historical nostalgia and sustainable consumption patterns, with participants valuing minimalism and resourcefulness inspired by historical values. Future research could further explore this relationship, investigating the impact of nostalgia on environmentally conscious behaviour. Studies can examine historical nostalgia as a motivator for sustainable consumption, with controlled experiments that could assess whether historically nostalgic messaging, such as "tried and tested" or "quality made", increases preferences for sustainable brands. This would contribute to the research on green marketing, conscious consumption and behavioural economics and enable sustainability to be positioned as emotionally fulfilling and historically resonant. The trend towards minimalism and sustainability was also found to be amplified by idealisation of past eras and the perceived values of historical figures. Future research can explore this intersection to develop a better understanding of how modern sustainability values and romanticising of the past are related. This research would offer potential insights into the role of historical nostalgia and romanticism as a mechanism for sustainable consumer behaviour.

Behavioural models. The study depended on the use of the thematic framework, the experience economy model as a guide for questioning. While this was a meaningful framework with historical nostalgia falling under experiential marketing, this potentially restricted the exploration of nostalgia experiences to specific realms. Future research could take different theoretical approaches, like using the tri-component attitude model (Rosenberg and Hovland, 1960). By complementing the experiential findings with attitudinal modelling through exploring cognitive, affective and behavioural components of attitudes, researchers will be able to segment and measure these components of consumers' exposure to historically nostalgic stimuli. This approach could assess brand sentiment and campaign effectiveness across nostalgia-based segmentation, which would provide evidence-based insights into how consumers interpret and engage with brand narratives that reference the past. In addition, research could investigate how historical nostalgia shapes consumer attitudes towards products, categories and brands. By applying such behavioural models, future studies could enhance the understanding of nostalgia in marketing.

Aesthetics. While this study focused on the overall consumption experience, it highlighted how historical aesthetics, like fashion, triggered strong emotional responses that influenced consumption decisions. Further studies could explore the manipulation of the aesthetic features of products to isolate how historical nostalgia impacts consumers' emotional connection to products and their purchasing behaviour. For example, neuromarketing eye-tracking studies could measure how retro-packaging impacts consumers' purchasing behaviour. Vintage-style typography or period-based imagery could be studied. This line of enquiry could inform the crafting of campaigns that leverage historical appeal to drive sales and provide marketers with product-design

strategies that link emotional engagement to historical nostalgia.

Cognition and psychology. Given the psychological complexity of nostalgia and the experiential marketing link to emotions (Ju et al., 2016), future research could integrate cognitive and psychological theories to better understand the mental and emotional processes behind historical nostalgic engagement, to uncover why consumers idealise and emotionally retreat into imagined versions of the past. Frameworks such as memory recall, emotion regulation or identity formation could deepen the understanding of how individuals connect with the past and of historical nostalgia as escapism or as a coping mechanism versus a consumption motivator. Marketers could tailor emotionally immersive campaigns that align with consumers' identity narratives. This would allow researchers to examine the cognitive biases that influence the idealisation of past eras.

Limitations. This study was qualitative. Given the small and purposively selected sample, the findings are not generalisable to the broader population. Rather, the study was intended to uncover the depth and range of perspectives, emotions and experiences relevant to the research objectives, thereby serving as a foundation for further exploration. The constructs revealed through thematic analysis offer a basis for future quantitative studies, such as surveys or experiments that can test the generalisability of these relationships.

Ethics statement

This research has been approved by the institutional review board (IRB) and the Research Ethics Committee at the authors' institution. To protect the identity of participants, as well as their personal and sensitive responses, the authors have not reported participant's backgrounds, ethnicities or any other identifying elements in this study.

Data availability

No data are available from this study.

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Appendix 1

Table A1 Typology of nostalgia

Nature of experience	Social experience	
	Personal	Collective
Direct	Personal Nostalgia	Cultural Nostalgia
Indirect	Interpersonal nostalgia	Virtual Nostalgia

Source(s): Holak and Havlena, 1996

Table A2 Nostalgia marketing and routes to enchantment

Description and mode	Re-instantiation	Re-enactment	Re-appropriation
Description	Past-themed market resources inject consumers into a past condition achieved by reminiscing and reclaiming a romanticised sense of belonging. Consumers valorize past-themed offerings as reverberations of a better, happier condition and as identity salves that can symbolically re-instantiate a past lifeworld.	Past-themed market resources facilitate a symbolic return to selected morally valuable aspects and consumption practices of a past. Consumers valorize past-themed offerings as symbols of moral superiority that can be used to shape a better present and future.	Past-themed market resources render a past condition as a site for hedonic, ludic, playful and ironic engagement and creative patchwork. Consumers valorize past-themed offerings purely as ironic, hipsterian and quirky fashion items that can enliven the present.
Dominant nostalgia mode	<i>Reluctant nostalgia</i> Here understood as an era-focused melancholy and negative nostalgia that mourns experienced belonging and is firmly focused on past times.	<i>Progressive nostalgia</i> Here understood as a productive, reflective and anchoring nostalgia that brings past and present into dialogue.	<i>Playful nostalgia</i> Here understood as foregrounding the fun, ironic and ludic dimensions of nostalgia as cultural style and retro markers of taste firmly focused on the present.

Source(s): Adapted from Hartmann and Brunk, 2019: 675

Table A3 Ontology, methodology and axiology of marketing the past: Retro, heritage, nostalgia and vintage

Ontology, methodology, and axiology of marketing the past	Retro	Heritage	Nostalgia	Vintage
Ontology	Retro marketing is about promulgating a combination of old and new brand elements.	Corporations can use and leverage their heritage and brand history for marketing purposes.	Nostalgia is a bittersweet emotion experienced on the individual level and a market-mediated ideological infrastructure negotiating collective memory.	Vintage denotes curated objects from a bygone era.
Methodology	Is predominantly studied qualitatively through brand-level representations including interviews, netnography, autobiographical essays and document analysis.	Is predominantly studied qualitatively through corporate management actors and brand-level representations.	Is studied either quantitatively through generalisations of stimulated pastness (psychological perspective), or qualitatively by contextual immersion in pastness (socio-cultural perspective).	Is predominantly studied qualitatively by elucidating consumers' relations to object biographies through ethnography, but also occasionally through quantitative methods.
Axiology	Value outcomes on authenticity and brand meanings.	Value outcomes on authenticity, brand equity and trust.	Value outcomes on authenticity, enchantment and myths.	Value outcomes on authenticity, cultural capital, status and uniqueness.

Source(s): Adapted from Dam et al., 2024

Appendix 2

Interview Guide:

Brief background

Relayed to participants:

Historical nostalgia refers to feelings of nostalgia triggered by external sources from the past that are not part of one's personal experiences and can precede one's own birth (Holak and Havlena, 1991; Holak and Havlena, 1992; Holbrook, 1993; Stern, 1992).

SECTION A

Filter question

Have you ever experienced historical nostalgia?

SECTION B

Entertainment:

- Can you recall a time when a movie, TV show or other media made you feel historical nostalgia? If so, how did that affect your enjoyment or consumption of the media?
- In what ways, if any, do media representation of eras or events that you have not experienced shapes your perception of those times?
- Have you ever sought out products because of historical nostalgia induced by media? If so, can you describe that experience?

SECTION C

Aesthetics:

- Are there specific visual or aesthetic trends or elements that particularly trigger historical nostalgia feelings for you? If so, what are they, and why do you think they have that effect?
- Can you describe how visual elements in media or products, if any, have evoked a sense of historical nostalgia for you?

- If you've noticed any visual or aesthetic historical nostalgia trends or elements, how, if it all, have they impacted your buying decisions or media consumption habits?

SECTION D

Education:

- Have you ever consumed educational content around periods that you felt historical nostalgia towards? If so, how did that knowledge influence your perception of that period?
- In what ways do you think accuracy and authenticity in media representing these periods affects your nostalgic experience, if at all? Would accuracy enhance your nostalgic experience or deflect from the positive aspects of this period?

SECTION E

Escapism:

- How often, if it all, do you engage with historical nostalgia content or products as a form of escapism? If so, where do you seek out this content or these products and can you give an example?
- Do you find yourself seeking out historical nostalgia subjects during times of stress or uncertainty? If so, why is this?
- How does the desire to escape to a simpler or different time that you haven't experienced through media or products effect your purchase and consumption habits or decisions, if it all?

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