

# Nostalgic Consumers: A Study of the Impact of Nostalgia Marketing on the Consumers

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## Abstract

“Nostalgia in marketing is a marketing strategy that brands use; they use themes or products from the past in their current marketing strategy to create a unique emotional feeling in customers.”(Jones, 2015) Nostalgia is a psychological phenomenon that many brands use by aligning their products and/or services with their consumers’ positive memories of the past. This paper offers evidence that nostalgia marketing works using the context of two popular brands sold in the Indian subcontinent: *Rasna & Tang*. It also analyses how various factors such as age, gender, and religious festivals impact nostalgia marketing. It investigates how nostalgia directly impacts consumers’ purchase behaviour, their repurchase decisions, their loyalty, their trust in the brands, and their product recommendations.

**Keywords:** nostalgic marketing, marketing, consumer culture, consumer behaviour, marketing psychology, brands

## 1. Introduction

Nostalgia refers to a yearning to return to one’s past. It is associated with the happy memories of a person. Nostalgia, hence, is widely used in marketing. Nostalgia marketing strategies portray brands as more down-to-earth, authentic, and relatable to the consumers. Articles like ‘Passion for the Past: Nostalgia Marketing and the

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Retro Revolution' expound that consumers tend to buy products or services that are associated with nostalgic feelings about their past, as they bring the viewers joyful memories instantly. According to Karla Hesterbeg (2020), nostalgia marketing as a strategy is different from others as it takes consumers back to their childhood and carefree days, while the other strategies focus on consumers' future. Critics like Lira Stone (2019) believe that nostalgia marketing advertisements help brands create an instant connection with consumers, making time disappear, and taking consumers back to their happy memories. Hence, nostalgia marketing is essentially a psychological phenomenon. The primary reason nostalgia marketing works is that "it evokes a feeling of social connectedness, which decreases/weakens consumers' desire for money" (Lasaleta, Sedikides, & Vohns, 2014). Literature suggests that it loosens consumers' grip on money and makes them more willing to spend it.

Brands use nostalgia marketing strategies to link their products or services with feelings of comfort and security to ultimately create engagement with their audience. Srinivas Pingali, in his article in Forbes, states that nostalgic marketing has the ability to build instant connections between the consumer and the brand, which ultimately increases the consumers' intent to purchase and recommend the brands' products or services.

Nostalgia marketing is a fascinatingly unique marketing strategy, since it relies heavily on products' ability to transport a consumer to their past, and affect their decision to purchase. The following paper analyses whether nostalgic advertisements work or not and if it does then in what ways it impacts a regular consumer's mind. The study has also considered various factors like the time of purchase, the age as well as the gender of the consumer, while determining the effects of nostalgic marketing on consumer behaviour and decision. Moreover, the pandemic has made consumers turn (more than ever in 2021) to their past for seeking comfort, and hence research in the workings of nostalgic marketing is more pertinent than it has ever been before.

This paper is divided into 5 sections. The first section provides a review of literature, the second section details the Data and Methodology which has been used in this research. The third

section provides the analysis, and the fourth section provides the results. Section 5 provides a final conclusion of the paper. The literature review section compiles findings from previous studies related to nostalgia marketing and develops the hypothesis. The data & methodology section explains what brands were chosen for the study, how the survey was conducted, and what questions were used in the survey. The analysis and results section explains the hypothesis, the findings, and their implications. The conclusion section sums up the paper and our findings.

## **2. Literature Review & Hypothesis Building**

Nostalgia, as defined by the Cambridge dictionary is “a feeling of pleasure and also slight sadness when one thinks about things that happened in the past and wishes that they could happen again”. The word "nostalgia" is derived from two Greek roots: "nostos" meaning to "return to one's native land" and "algos" referring to "pain, suffering, or grief" (Hofer 1688; Daniels 1985). As an emotion, it has two different sides: pleasant and unpleasant. It may evoke happy memories or those of stress and negativity. Brands usually try to capitalise on the pleasant and happy part.

In literature, recognised types of nostalgic sentiments include personal nostalgia, interpersonal nostalgia, cultural nostalgia, and virtual nostalgia (Holak, Havlena, & Matveev 2006). The feelings invoked by nostalgia are used advantageously by a majority of brands as a marketing strategy, “where events, experiences, and products from the past are used to evoke certain emotions in consumers”. It involves not only “adding the nostalgia element”, but also “combining the products/services with that factor”. Nostalgia marketing is an effective strategy used to advertise products that are found commonly in the consumer basket (Holak, Havlena, & Matveev 2006).

“Nostalgia Marketing is the advertising equivalent of comfort food”, and it takes consumers back to a place of comfort and stability that they yearn for (Karla Hesterberg, Hubspot 2021).

From the point of view of consumer psychology, while most marketing strategies focus on the future, nostalgia marketing tends to take consumers back to ‘the good old days’- their carefree and

happy childhood days, without problems of adult life. It essentially makes time disappear when consumers are taken back to the time of their memories. Moreover, nostalgia tends to make consumers more optimistic about the future.

Jenna Gross (Forbes 2018) suggests that nostalgia marketing gives good results when executed in the right way. In the case of emotional advertising, it triggers an emotional response from the consumers. This has been regarded as a powerful strategy by the experts. According to Libby Margo, nostalgia-based advertising acts in a similar manner as emotional advertising, where appeals are made to the emotions associated with the past lived experiences of the individuals.

“Nostalgia evokes a feeling of social connectedness, which decreases/weakens consumers’ desire for money” (Lasaleta; Sedikides, 2014). Literature suggests that it makes people more generous to strangers and more tolerant of outsiders. Nostalgia marketing strategies portray a more authentic, down-to-earth, and relatable image of brands to the consumers. Furthermore, brands tend to create an instant connection by reminding the consumers of their happy memories.

According to Deepak Netram’s article by Business World, there is a surge in spending by Indian consumers during the festive season due to festive purchases. Deepak Netram believes that during this time, people tend to recall happy memories with their loved ones, and cherish these memories.

**Hypothesis 1:** The consumers will be more nostalgic during the festival season, in comparison to normal days; they would also tend to spend more during this period as festivals tend to bring families together, they experience joy and nostalgia, and tend to care less about the budgets and spend more.

In the Indian market, one of the most prominent and well-known example is the brand ‘Paper Boat’. Paper Boat attempts to make Indians relive the unadulterated memories of their childhood through ethnic flavours in their cold beverages such as Jal Jeera, Aam Panna, Jamun, etc. Paper Boat’s products have a unique identity of being indigenous; they feel like they are home-made,

and hence instil a sense of nostalgia. Even the brand name 'Paper Boat' embodies the feeling of nostalgia. It signifies the childhood activity of making paper boats and floating them in water.

In contrast, brands like Rasna, Mother Dairy, Amul, Mother's Recipe, etc. have launched their nostalgia marketing campaigns only recently. Mother Dairy started a campaign: #khushbooapnepanki. As the name of the campaign suggests, it aims to trigger the memories associated with the taste and aroma of the food prepared with pure ghee by one's mother or grandmother. The campaign brings out the nostalgia associated with 'maa kehaath ka khaana', which takes the consumers down the memory lane. It coincides with their overall brand idea - 'Mother Dairy, Rishton ka Swad Badhaye.'

Mother's Recipe, a pickles brand, launched its campaign 'Your Traditions, Our Pickles' to evoke the nostalgia associated with traditions. In Indian society, there is a feeling of nostalgia associated with the process of making pickles. This brand, realising the significance of such traditions in India, started this campaign to provide the same pickles made with old traditional recipes. Their pickles resemble the ones made with "daadi maa ki recipe" (grandmother's recipe). This campaign strikes an emotional chord with its consumers since a majority associate it with the emotional and physical process of making pickles together with one's entire family. Amul reinstilled a sense of nostalgia by going back to their old catchy jingles. It brought back some of its classic advertisements, like the advertisements for Amul Butter from the "bygone era".

Rasna started a new digital campaign: #LoveURasnaRecipes which taps into nostalgia by roping in some popular food influencers to create videos about childhood memories around the popular tagline "I Love You Rasna".

In the above examples, Paper Boat has an explicit nostalgia associated with it. A significant portion of its marketing strategy is nostalgia. Paper Boat's use of nostalgia is quite apparent to its consumers. However, brands like Rasna, Mother Dairy, and Tata Sampann have a more implicit use of nostalgia in their advertising. In fact, such brands do occasionally use nostalgia for their

campaigns, but their marketing approach isn't entirely based on nostalgia marketing.

We expect the consumers to feel more loyal and trustworthy toward brands that evoke nostalgic feelings in them, and also have a more distinct memory of those brands. So, we hypothesize:

**Hypothesis 2:** Consumers would be more loyal and trustworthy to brands that evoke positive nostalgic feelings in them.

**Hypothesis 3:** Nostalgic advertisements would lead to consumers having a better memory of the brand.

N. N. Hidayati's research in this area also shows that there is a relation between the emotion of nostalgia and the repurchase decisions of the consumer (Turkish Journal of Computer and Mathematics Education 2021).

Hence we can hypothesize:

**Hypothesis 4:** Consumers tend to repurchase more from a brand that evokes nostalgic feelings in them.

Literature also shows that consumers recommend products to others only when they like them or have a distinct memory of them and nostalgia affects these decisions.

**Hypothesis 5:** Nostalgia would play a key role in consumers' product recommendations to others.

**Hypothesis 6:** Consumers who are more sentimental than others would also be more nostalgic and thus buy products that evokes nostalgia in them.

Brands see millennials as attractive consumers as they have higher purchasing power (Giang, 2014). For a long time, brands have unsuccessfully tried different strategies to strike a chord with millennials and grab their attention, but a nostalgia-centric campaign is the only strategy that resonates well with the millennials. Millennials, who are swamped with their work in life, love to relive old positive memories to relieve stress. Hence, they associate with the brands that evoke positive memories from their childhood. Such strategies then tend to form a positive brand image for their product. (Friedman, 2016). According to Lammersma &

Wortelboer (2017), the intensity of the emotions while being nostalgic about one's past is not affected by the age of millennials. All younger or older millennials resonate with nostalgia, and hence nostalgic advertising are more attractive and captivating for them than non-nostalgic advertisements.

However, millennials are not the only attractive consumer group. According to Digital Media Solutions, Generation X has a lot of spending power and they move a lot of money, outspending all other generations in real estate, entertainment, and consumables. Gen Xers are also the founders of nearly 55% of start-ups. Furthermore, brands are capitalising on these emotions by celebrating anniversaries of authentic brands from the past and recreating or releasing new versions of beloved games from the past.

Even though nostalgic marketing seems as an attractive method for advertising, it is important to note that it only works with planning and timing, and is dependent on what consumers like. According to Laura Friedman's article in Forbes, the key to master nostalgic marketing is to strike a balance between evoking emotions in millennials and introducing something new.

The past years (2020-2021) of social distancing, lockdowns, and working from home have led to consumers finding comfort in their past, through old songs, movies, TV shows, products, etc. Past research has shown that nostalgia is a feeling which helps counteract loneliness, boredom, and anxiety (Tilberg et. al. 2013; Sedikides & Wildschut (2016). However, according to Forbes India, due to the pandemic hitting hard, everything pre-covid seems to evoke nostalgia. This contrasts with the more 'traditional' approach to linking products with consumers' childhood memories.

### **3. Data & Methodology**

#### **3.1. Survey**

The data is obtained from a survey conducted between August 2021 and October 2021, which received responses from 43 people belonging to different age groups. Before conducting the survey, a pilot survey was conducted among 7 people. The survey was filled

out by different age groups: 18 and below, 18-24, 25-32, 33-40, 41-50, and 51-65. However, the majority (38%) of the audience belonged to the age group of 41-50.

This was taken as the target audience in order to obtain more accurate results, because this age group, and all age groups above 18, experience nostalgia to an extent when it comes to anything from their childhood. While the age group below 18 does not have strong feelings of nostalgia for products or experiences, we expect that at a younger age, they're more likely to have experienced less in comparison to other age groups.

The respondents to the survey are diversified in terms of sex, place of residence, and education level. 88.1% of the respondents surveyed are female. A majority (64.29%) of the respondents have a postgraduate degree, while others surveyed have completed matriculation or have undergraduate or Ph.D. degrees.

The data obtained using the questionnaire was compiled and analysed. The approach of analysis this paper employed is descriptive analysis. We compiled the data into tables and tested our hypothesis by analysing the responses of the majority in order to understand how respondents replied to our questions. Then we found out the percentage of responses that supports our hypothesis, which we further explained using empirical evidence available in the extant literature.

### **3.2. The Two Brands**

The brands under the study include Tang and Rasna. Rasna, launched in the mid-seventies, is a soft drink concentrate brand owned by Pioma Industries which is based in Ahmedabad, India. Tang is an American drink mix brand, which officially began to be sold in India in 2006-2007. Rasna was already a long-established player in the soft-drink market of India when Tang entered the Indian market in 2006. Since Rasna is an older brand, Indians have their childhood memories associated with it, which led to the choice of Rasna as a brand for research. Tang, being a competitor of Rasna, and a relatively new product in the market, was chosen as the other brand.

The nostalgia associated with Rasna is implicitly stated by the people. For the majority, no other emotions than nostalgia are involved in the case of Rasna. While in the case of some brands, like Maggi, popularity and other emotions play a dominant role. In choosing Rasna, we can assume that other emotions do not play as dominant of a role as nostalgia. Moreover, Rasna can be related to by many Indians, while Tang is relatively newer for them. This helps to determine whether nostalgia plays a role or not in consumer buying behaviour.

Rasna reminds the millennial generation of their good old days of childhood. In contrast, Gen-Zers don't have any strong nostalgic feelings for the product. The millennials have memories of their childhood, of the 'I love Rasna' tagline, and of their television commercials and advertisements. Since they have certain nostalgic feelings, it can be determined to what extent nostalgia affects their decisions. Recently, Rasna started a campaign 'Love your Rasna Recipes' to evoke a sense of nostalgia among its consumers. It was done with a set of influencers (mostly millennials) through videos on social media, where they enjoy Rasna and re-created memories of 'I love Rasna'. This campaign re-jogged the memories of this generation. We expected that when they would fill out the questionnaire, there would be a surge of emotions (predominantly nostalgia), and they would reminisce about the 'good old days'. This would lead to better results and an accurate conclusion.

### **3.3. Sections of the Survey**

The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first one was general demographic questions; the second was questions related to the impact of nostalgia; the third was about specific questions related to Rasna and Tang. The first section consisted of questions on age, gender, city of residency, family types, etc. The second section comprised questions related to nostalgia evoked due to some brands, and its positive/ negative connotations. The second section also included questions based on the Likert scale of 1 to 5 (effect of the popularity of the brand, changes in the festive season, brand loyalty, etc). The third section consisted of questions specific to Rasna and Tang. The questions inquired about the month of last purchase, the nostalgia associated with the two

brands in respect to their advertisements, brand loyalty, product recommendations, and more.

### **3.4. Analysis & Results**

The impact of nostalgia marketing on various factors has been examined. Firstly, two questions were asked to examine whether consumers feel nostalgic during the festive season and the effect of nostalgic feelings on spending. The questions were: Do consumers feel nostalgic during the festive season? And if so, do they witness a surge in their spending during this time?

It was hypothesised that the consumers will be more nostalgic during the festival season, in comparison to normal days. It was expected that the consumer would spend more during the festivals, as festivals tend to bring families together and spread joy. Festivities are the time when people tend to care less about the budgets and spend more.

Out of 28 consumers who, on a scale of 1-5, have high nostalgic feelings (score of 4), 18 'agree' with the statement that they witness a surge in their spending during the festive seasons. Out of 5 consumers with very high nostalgia (score of 5), 4 'strongly agreed' with the second question and 1 'agreed' with the second question. The data proves the hypothesis. We can, therefore, conclude that a majority of consumers who are nostalgic during the festive season witness a surge in their spending.

To examine the relationship between consumers who feel loyal to brands that reminds them of their younger selves and their loyalty towards the two brands under study, 2 questions were asked: Do consumers feel more loyal to the brands that remind them of their younger self. Which of the two brands (Tang & Rasna) do consumers feel more loyal to? It was hypothesised that consumers would be more loyal and trustworthy to brands that evoke positive nostalgic feelings in them. On a scale of 1-5, consumers with a higher loyalty standard of 3 and 4, who feel loyal to brands that remind them of their younger selves, feel more loyal towards Rasna. Whereas, those with a lower loyalty standard tend to be more loyal towards Tang. In fact, 90.48% of the people who feel more loyal towards Rasna have high loyalty standards, proving the

hypothesis that people with higher loyalty standards feel more loyal to Rasna because it evokes nostalgic feelings in them.

To understand the effect of nostalgic advertisements on the consumer's memory of the brand the question asked was: After looking at the advertisements of Rasna, do the consumers have a stronger memory of Rasna in comparison to other brands like Tang, RoohAfza, Glucon-D, etc. It was hypothesised that nostalgic advertisements would lead to consumers having a better memory of the brand. 34.88% of the respondents are neutral, 32.56% agree and 9.3% strongly agree with the statement that they have a stronger memory of Rasna in comparison to other brands after looking at its advertisements. This leads to a conclusion that nostalgic advertisements have a neutral and positive effect on the memory of a majority of consumers. The hypothesis was partly proven.

To examine the relationship between repurchase decisions due to nostalgic feelings in accordance with Rasna and Tang, two questions were asked: 'Do consumers often repurchase an item from a brand that reminds them of their younger self?' and 'Do consumers repurchase products more often from Rasna or Tang?' It was hypothesised that consumers tend to repurchase more from a brand that evokes nostalgic feelings in them. Out of 9 respondents who 'agree' with the statement that they repurchase from brands that remind them of their past, 5 prefer to repurchase from Rasna. However, out of 11 respondents who disagree with the statement that they repurchase from brands that remind them of their past, 7 prefer to repurchase from neither. This leads to a conclusion that a majority of consumers who repurchase from brands do so because they evoke nostalgia in them.

To examine the relation between product recommendations and nostalgic feelings, respondents were asked if they recommend products to other people from Rasna or Tang: And If they do, they recommend products from Rasna to people because they remind them of their younger self? It was hypothesised that nostalgia would play a key role in consumers' product recommendations to others. Out of 9 respondents who recommend Rasna's products, 5 'agree' that they recommend products due to nostalgia. They do so,

because of the nostalgic feelings these products evoke; consumers tend to associate the product with their past. While, those who recommend Tang's products or neither of the two products, disagree with the statement that they do so because of nostalgia. This indicates that a majority of consumers who recommend Rasna's products do so because of nostalgic feelings. Hence, based on the response of the consumers, we accept our hypothesis that nostalgia plays a key role in consumers' decision making.

Now, do people with a higher sensitivity level tend to be affected by nostalgic advertisements more, and hence are more prone to purchasing the products from that brand? For this, we have to understand the sentimentality level of the audience. The survey asked whether the respondent is more sentimental than most people or not. It was hypothesised that a majority of the respondents would agree that they tend to be more sentimental than others. 39.53% of the respondents agree and 18.6% strongly agree with the statement that they are more sentimental than other people. This indicates that a majority of the consumers surveyed are more sentimental than most people.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The findings and results lead us to the conclusion that nostalgia marketing does work. Nostalgia marketing advertisements influence consumers' decisions to a significant extent. Findings indicate that the Indian festival season leads to a surge in spending, and nostalgia plays a role in influencing consumers' decisions. It helps brands gain the trust and loyalty of their consumers with higher loyalty standards. It also leads to repurchases from consumers. Nostalgic advertisements tend to have a neutral or positive effect on consumers' memories of brands. These inferences suggest that nostalgia marketing influences repurchase decisions, product recommendations, consumer loyalty and trust, consumers' memory of brands, etc.

The limitations of this study are: the sample size is quite small. Moreover, we have not done any other quantitative analysis to show the robustness of our conclusion. Thus, the reliability of the results needs to be further strengthened through further research.

However, our conclusions are in tandem with the established research.

Nostalgia is an extremely powerful emotion that can sway consumers' decisions. Linking products or services to happy memories from consumers' past leads to favourable results, as seen in the case of Rasna. The influence of the emotions involving nostalgia on consumer behaviour and purchase decisions should be taken more seriously. Practitioners can use nostalgia marketing to their advantage and influence consumers' decisions, but only if nostalgia marketing campaigns are carried out in the correct way. While capitalising on nostalgia, brands and marketers need to be wary of these factors and align memories from the past with their products/services in the best and the most useful way possible.

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