

Urszula Gołaszewska-Kaczan

- ▶ University of Białystok
- ▶ e-mail: u.golaszewska@uwb.edu.pl
- ▶ ORCID: 0000-0003-2084-6268

Damian Sówka

- ▶ University of Białystok
- ▶ e-mail: d.sowka@uwb.edu.pl
- ▶ ORCID: 0009-0003-0260-6073

## THE USE OF THE NOSTALGY THEME IN MARKETING – A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

### | Abstract

- ▶ *Goal* – The aim of the article is to present the results of a bibliometric analysis of academic research on the use of the nostalgia theme in marketing.
- ▶ *Research methodology* – The authors conducted a bibliometric analysis based on publications identified in the Scopus database. They used built-in analysis tools available in the Scopus database and VOSviewer software.
- ▶ *Score/results* – The bibliometric analysis was conducted to examine interest in the use of the nostalgia theme in marketing. Its results showed that in the analysed years (1992–2024) 67 publications on this topic appeared in the Scopus database. The vast majority of them were published in English. An element of this analysis was to examine articles for the co-occurrence of keywords. This allowed the authors to identify 5 clusters that correspond to different areas of interest of researchers – Nostalgia, Nostalgia in consumer perception, Nostalgia marketing, Nostalgic brand and Nostalgic brand positioning and the consumer.
- ▶ *Originality/value* – The originality of the authors’ work lies in taking up a topic that has not been frequently discussed in the marketing literature yet.

| **Keywords:** nostalgia, nostalgia marketing, retro marketing, nostalgic advertisement, nostalgic brand.

## 1. Introduction

Companies are constantly looking for new ways to attract consumer attention and to stand out in the market. They are using newer and newer themes and strategies to reach their target audience. One such a theme, that is gaining popularity, is nostalgia. Nostalgia in marketing involves referring to positive memories from the past, which can evoke strong emotions and positive associations with the brand in consumers. This allows companies to build emotional bonds with current consumers and to increase their loyalty. These types of strategies can also attract new customers who are curious about products inspired by the past. At the same time, in times of crises and external threats (e.g. the COVID pandemic, war in Ukraine), there is a growing longing for what was, for “peaceful times”, which makes consumers more susceptible to feelings of nostalgia.

Nostalgia is an effective way to stand out from the competition. Companies that can skillfully use this theme can gain an advantage in the market. Therefore, it is necessary to observe how different brands introduce elements of nostalgia into their advertising campaigns and what results they achieve. According to the authors, it is also important to analyse whether and on what scale research is being conducted on the use of the nostalgia theme in marketing. This research can better explain the specifics of nostalgia’s impact on the consumer, and thus contribute to the more effective use of this theme in the company’s marketing activities.

Therefore, the aim of this study was to present the results of a bibliometric analysis regarding research on the phenomenon of nostalgic marketing. For the purposes of the study, the authors used VOSviewer software and data analysis tools available in the SCOPUS database. The analysis covered the years 1992–2024.

## 2. Nostalgia marketing, nostalgia branding and nostalgia advertising

The term nostalgia comes from the Greek words *nostos* and *algos*, meaning respectively return and suffering [Kessous, 2011: 425]. Some researchers, such as D. Hallegatte, attribute the introduction of this term to science to J. Hofer, a Swiss medical doctor, who in the 17th century studied pathologies among soldiers serving abroad [Hallegatte, 2017: 166]. The work of this doctor can be considered the first attempt in history that aimed to scientifically conceptualise the issue of

nostalgia, however, as M. Grębosz-Krawczyk points out, J. Hofer's approach influenced the fact that for a long period nostalgia was perceived as a kind of disease [Grębosz-Krawczyk, 2020: 59].

Due to the fact that the issue of nostalgia is currently discussed in many areas of science, many definitions of this concept can be found in the literature. Selected definitions are presented in Table 1.

*Table 1.* Definition of nostalgia in consumer behaviour according to A. Kessous and E. Roux [2008]

Author and Year	Definitions of nostalgia
Davis [1979]	"A positively toned evocation of a lived past" [p. 18]
Belk [1990]	"A wistful mood that may be prompted by an object, a scene, a smell, or a strain of music" [p. 670]
Holbrook and Schindler [1991]	"A preference (general liking, positive attitude, or favourable affect) toward 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" [p. 330]
Stern [1992]	"An emotional state in which an individual yearns for an idealised or sanitised version of an earlier time period" [p. 11]
Baker and Kennedy [1994]	"A sentimental or bittersweet yearning for an experience, product, or service from the past" [p. 169]

Source: [Kessous, Roux, 2008: 195 – referring to the works of cited authors]

The analysis of the presented definitions allows to notice a certain evolution in the way of perceiving nostalgia. It is significant that the authors mostly perceive it as a longing for a past time, not a place. It should also be noted that some authors tried to present the elements, that were able to evoke this nostalgia and the objects, for which nostalgia could be felt.

The search for new, effective ways of influencing consumers led to the use of the nostalgia theme in marketing, which resulted in the creation of the concept of nostalgia marketing. This type of marketing "is a marketing tactic which refers to companies that give consumers a certain nostalgic element in marketing activities to stimulate and activate consumers' nostalgia, to evoke memories deep inside the consumer, and eventually to promote consumers' buying behavior" [Cui, 2015: 126]. It is worth noting that "the assumptions of nostalgic marketing are based

on sentiment for past times” [Czerska, Michalczyk, 2017: 114]. It should also be added that nostalgia marketing is sometimes referred to as retro marketing. This approach was adopted, for example, by L. Gajanova and V. Zdenka [Gajanova, Zdenka, 2020: 42].

As part of nostalgia marketing activities, companies often use the concept of a nostalgic brand. According to K.E. Loveland, D. Smeesters and N. Mandel, nostalgic brands are “brands that were popular in the past and are still popular now” [Loveland, Smeesters, Mandel, 2010: 393 as cited in Kessous, 2015: 188]. A similar definition of a nostalgic brand is proposed by M. Grębosz-Krawczyk, who defines a nostalgic brand as a brand that is associated “with a close or distant, own or historical past” [Grębosz-Krawczyk, 2020: 80]. She also divides nostalgic brands into two categories. Generational brands, which operate on nostalgia related to a person’s personal and immediate memories, and intergenerational brands, which may additionally operate on nostalgia related to other people’s memories or collective experiences [Grębosz-Krawczyk, 2020: 80].

Evoking a feeling of nostalgia in consumers is most often done through advertisements based on the theme of nostalgia. These advertisements often use different methods to achieve this goal. They can include for example showing “nostalgic characters, clothes and decorations” [Aytekin, Yapıcıoğlu Ayaz, 2018: 880] or using appropriately selected songs [Lefi, Gharbi, 2011: 193].

Basing marketing activities on the theme of nostalgia can bring significant benefits to companies. As M. Grębosz-Krawczyk points out, previous research “confirms the positive influence of nostalgia on consumer attitudes and behaviors, especially in the area of marketing communication” [Grębosz, 2016: 104]. An example of such activities would be the use of the nostalgia theme in advertisement. Such advertising can give companies the opportunity to influence, for example, consumers’ purchasing intentions [Hajlaoui, Gharbi, 2017: 129].

### 3. Marketing based on nostalgia theme in the literature subject

In order to assess the scale of interest in the issue of using the nostalgia theme in marketing in scientific literature, the authors decided to conduct a bibliometric analysis. To achieve the research goal, they searched for scientific publications indexed in the Scopus database, containing the following phrases in the title, abstract or keywords: “nostalgic advertising” or “nostalgia in advertising”, “advertising based on nostalgia”, “advertising using nostalgia”, “advertisement

appealing to nostalgia”, “nostalgic brands”, “nostalgia marketing” or “nostalgic marketing”. The search was not limited in time because the authors wanted to track interest in this topic from the moment the first publication indexed in the SCOPUS database appeared. Moreover, the search was not limited by the language of publication.

Using this formulated key, the authors identified only 67 publications. This shows that nostalgia in marketing is not yet a popular area of consideration. The oldest publication in this collection turned out to be B.B. Stern *Historical and Personal Nostalgia in Advertising Text: The Fin de Siecle Effect* [Stern, 1992], which was published in 1992. This article was devoted to the analysis of issues related to nostalgia in commercial texts such as advertisements, magazines and direct mail catalogues.

The analysis also showed that the next studies devoted to the issues of interest to the authors were published only in 2009, i.e. 17 years later. Since then, the number of publications on this topic has been increasing, but the growth has been slow. The number of publications devoted to the discussed issue in particular periods is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Number of publications in the Scopus database regarding the use of nostalgia theme in marketing in the years 1992–2024 [as of 6.12.2024]

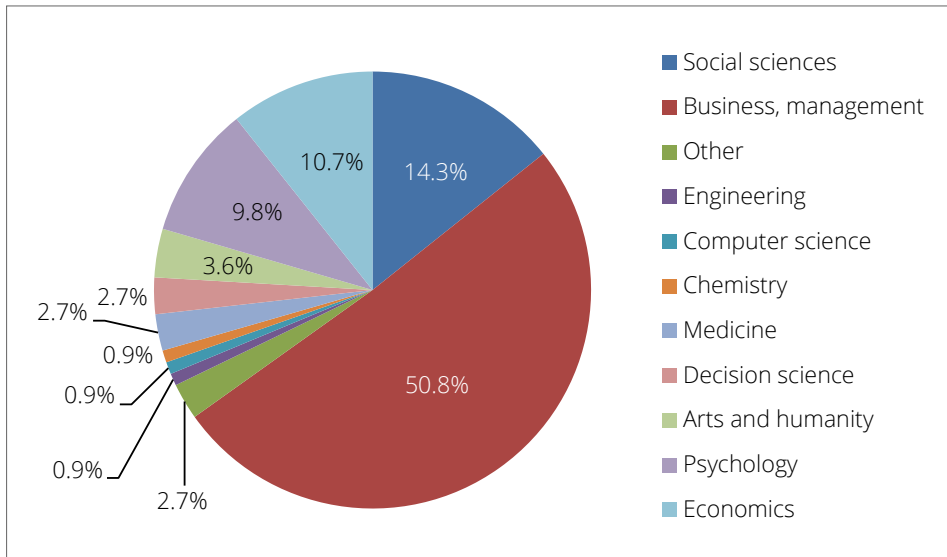
Years	Number of publications
1992–2008	1
2009–2010	3
2011–2015	11
2016–2020	22
2021–2024	30

Source: the author’s own work based on information obtained from the Scopus database.

Publications on issues related to the use of nostalgia theme in marketing appeared in 46 sources, most of them in “Journal of Advertising” (5), “Journal of Brand Management” (4), “Applied Cognitive Psychology” (3) and “Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics” (3). In the case of the remaining publications, 10 sources contained two publications each, and the rest contained one publication each.

Publications from the set of articles obtained during the analysis were classified into 13 thematic areas. More than half (50.9%) of the studies belong to the area Business, Management and Accounting, 14.7% to the area Social Sciences, publications in the field of Economics, Econometrics and Finance constitute 10.7%, and in the field of Psychology 9.8% of studies (Graph 1).

Graph 1. Subject area



Source: Scopus database.

The analysis also focused on the countries of origin of the authors publishing on the use of the nostalgia theme in marketing. It turns out that the articles came from 27 countries. The largest number of articles came from the United States – 28, from China – 15 and from India – 8. It should be emphasised that 3 articles were also recorded from Poland.

The publications were issued in three languages, with the majority of them (as many as 64) in English, 2 in Chinese, and one in Spanish.

The largest number of publications devoted to the analysed issues and indexed in the SCOPUS database (as of 6 December 2024) was published by I. Ju and it was a total of 6 articles. Table 3 presents the authors who published more than two articles on the use of nostalgia theme in marketing in the years 1992–2024.

Table 3. The authors of the largest number of publications

Author	Number of publications
I.Ju	6
S.Bluck	4
M.Grękosz-Krawczyk	3
S.S.Maheswarappa	3
J.Morris	3
B.Sivakumaran	3
E. Srivatava	3

Source: the author's own work based on information obtained from the Scopus database.

The analysis of the obtained set of publications showed that all articles by I. Ju were written in co-authorship (including as many as 4 studies written in co-authorship with S. Bluck). Of the 6 articles by I. Ju, the article with the highest number of citations was *Nostalgic Marketing, Perceived Self-Continuity, and Consumer Decisions* co-authored with S. Bluck, J. Kim and M.J. Chang [Ju, Kim, Chang, Bluck, 2016]. This article has been cited 40 times. The next author indicated in the table, i.e. S. Bluck, wrote all his articles in co-authorship with I. Ju, which is why the publication cited above is also his article with the highest number of citations. None of the articles by the other authors listed in Table 3 exceeded 25 citations. This indicates that the number of the written articles does not translate into an increased number of citations.

Interestingly, the article with the highest number of citations is the one mentioned earlier, the oldest one by B.B. Stern from 1992. Other articles that received more than 50 citations are shown in Table 4. There were 8 such articles. The table also presents the topics of individual articles.

Table 4. Articles with the most citations

Authors	Title	Journal	Number of citations	Discussed topics
B.B. Stern	Historical and personal nostalgia in advertising text: The <i>fin de siècle</i> effect	<i>Journal of Advertising</i> , vol. 1, nr 4, 22 December 1992	311	This is an analysis of issues related to nostalgia in commercial texts such as advertisements, magazines, and direct mail catalogues.
D.D. Muehling, D.E. Sprott, A.J. Sultan	Exploring the boundaries of nostalgic advertising effects: A consideration of childhood brand exposure and attachment on consumers' responses to nostalgia-themed advertisements	<i>Journal of Advertising</i> , Vol. 43, No. 1, 2014	99	This study examines empirically the differential influence of past brand associations on consumers' reactions to nostalgia-themed advertisements.
D.D. Muehling, V. Pascal	An empirical investigation of the differential effects of personal, historical, and non-nostalgic advertising on consumer responses	<i>Journal of Advertising</i> , Vol. 40, No. 2, 2011	97	This study investigates whether and/or to what extent consumers' information processing tendencies and ad-based responses are differentially influenced by the introduction of nostalgic cues (either "personal" or "historical" in nature) embedded in an advertisement.
A. Kessous, E. Roux, J.L. Chandon	Consumer-brand relationships: A contrast of nostalgic and non-nostalgic brands	<i>Psychology and Marketing</i> , Vol. 32, Issue 2, February 2015	76	This research examined how consumer-brand relationships change when one contrasts brands perceived as nostalgic with brands perceived as non-nostalgic.

Authors	Title	Journal	Number of citations	Discussed topics
S. Youn, S. V. Jin	Reconnecting with the past in social media: The moderating role of social influence in nostalgia marketing on Pinterest	<i>Journal of Consumer Behaviour</i> , Vol. 16, Issue 6, November/December 2017	67	Study conducted to examine the effects of nostalgia and social influence on consumers' judgments in the brand management.
B.J. Hartmann, K.H. Brunk	Nostalgia marketing and (re-) enchantment	<i>International Journal of Research in Marketing</i> , Vol. 36, Issue 4, December 2019	66	This study examined how nostalgia marketing creates enchantment for consumers.
E. Cattaneo, C. Guerini	Assessing the revival potential of brands from the past: How relevant is nostalgia in retro branding strategies	<i>Journal of Brand Management</i> , Vol. 19, Issue 8, June 2012	55	This study focuses on retro branding practices, that is, the revival of brands belonging to a prior historical period.
M. Heinberg, C.S. Katsikeas, H.E. Ozkaya, M. Taube	How nostalgic brand positioning shapes brand equity: differences between emerging and developed markets	<i>Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science (Open Access)</i> , Vol. 48, Issue 5, September 2020	54	The authors tried to explain how nostalgic brand positioning creates brand equity.

Source: the author's own work based on information obtained from the Scopus database.

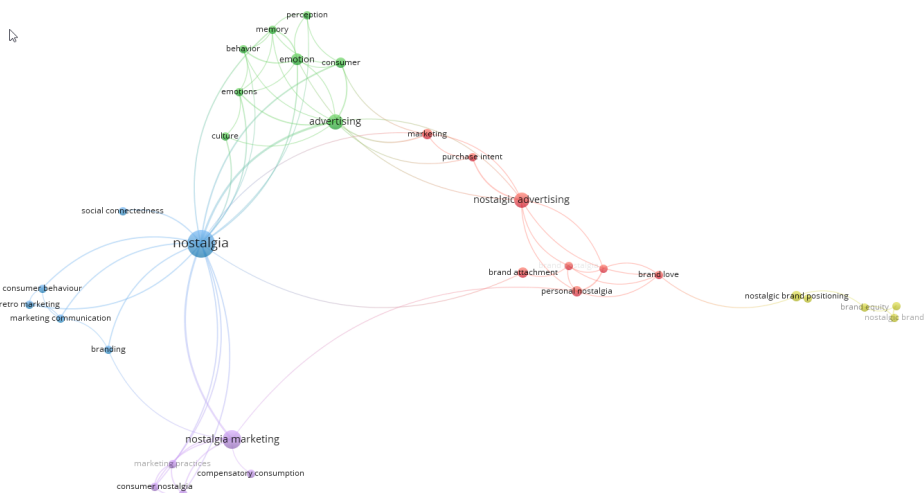
The next element of the bibliometric analysis conducted by the authors was the analysis of keyword co-occurrence, which allowed for the creation of a map of term co-occurrence and, on this basis, the extraction of clusters reflecting research sub-areas. For this purpose, VOSviewer software was used, which enables working on files containing descriptions of bibliographic records exported, among others, from the SCOPUS database.

Exporting the previously generated 67 publications from the SCOPUS database to VOSViewer helped to obtain 252 co-occurring keywords. For further analysis, it was assumed that the same keywords should appear at least twice in the obtained texts. As a result of this procedure, the number of obtained keywords decreased to 42. This demonstrates the great diversity of topics discussed in the generated articles.

Then, terms that were not substantively related to the analysed research area were eliminated from the set of keywords, such as: article, human, adult, male, female, priority journal, Poland, experimental design, Chinese consumer, human experiment. This reduced the number of the analysed words to 32.

Taking into account 32 words allowed the authors to generate a network of connections between them and to distinguish five clusters. These clusters reveal research sub-areas concerning the issue of using the nostalgia theme in marketing. VOSviewer uses colors to visualize connections into clusters, making it easier to locate a given term in a given cluster. The map of connections is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Map of connections



Source: the author's own work based on information obtained from the Scopus database.

The first cluster, yellow, includes 5 elements: nostalgic brand positioning, brand equity, nostalgic brand, consumer attitudes, brand resurrection. Publications within this cluster focus primarily on the issues of nostalgic brand positioning. For example, issues such as the impact of nostalgic brand positioning on its value and brand equity are considered, e.g. [Heinberg et al., 2020; Grębosz-Krawczyk, 2019], the impact of nostalgic brand positioning on consumer purchasing intentions, e.g. [Gonzales-Cavazos, Quintanilla, Ayala, 2023], and even the possibility of nostalgic brand positioning through the shared use of the brand by people in the early stages of relationships [Vredeld, Kara, 2020]. The authors propose to call this cluster *Nostalgic Brand*. This cluster included 7 articles.

The second red cluster corresponds to the first cluster and includes 8 elements: brand love, personal nostalgia, brand attachment, nostalgic advertising, purchase intent, marketing, brand nostalgia, historical nostalgia. The articles included in this cluster mainly concern the impact of nostalgic positioning on the consumer's relationship with the brand and their attachment to the brand, e.g. [Grappi et al., 2024; Sadeghvaziri, Shafeie, 2024; Jiang, Ge, Yao, 2024; Youn, Doodoo, 2021; Ju et al. 2016]. The authors titled this cluster *Nostalgic Brand Positioning and the Consumer*. It includes 15 articles.

The third, purple cluster includes 5 elements: nostalgia marketing, marketing practices, compensatory consumption, consumer nostalgia, nostalgia mechanism. The authors named this cluster *Nostalgia Marketing*. It consists of 11 articles. This cluster includes articles on the development of nostalgia marketing, e.g. [Zhao et al., 2014; Rana et al., 2022; Mukhopadhyay 2024], and those devoted to the influence of nostalgia marketing on consumers, e.g. [Ju et al., 2016; Jun, Park, Kim 2022] and describing the effectiveness of nostalgia marketing activities in various life situations of the consumer, e.g. [Li et al., 2024; Bi et al., 2024; Hoang et al., 2024].

The fourth green cluster includes 8 elements: perception, memory, behavior, emotions, culture, emotion, advertising, consumer. It includes 12 articles. It consists of articles exploring the essence of nostalgia, e.g. [Ju et al., 2016; Ju, Bluck, Liao, 2018; Migliorati, 2014], analysing the impact of using the nostalgia theme on the intensity of word-of-mouth marketing, or linking nostalgia with social influence, e.g. [Liao, Xu, Gong, 2019; Barbery-Montoya, Lavayen-Leon, Vera-Suarez, 2019; Huang, Yang, Liu, Wu, 2024]. This cluster was named *Nostalgia*.

The last cluster, blue, includes 6 elements: nostalgia, consumer behaviour, retro marketing, marketing communication, branding, social connectedness. This is a cluster very diverse in terms of topics. It includes articles describing the use of historic brands and historic places in the marketing strategies of companies, e.g. [Holotová et al., 2024], as well as the effect of using the nostalgia theme with different types of products, e.g. [Ju et al. 2016; Gong et al., 2023] or differences in the reception of nostalgia marketing activities by representatives of different generations and cultures, [Kim, Yim 2018; Merchant et al., 2016; Kessous, 2015]. This cluster can be called *Nostalgia in Consumer Perception* and it includes 22 articles.

#### 4. Conclusions

The conducted bibliometric analysis allowed us to demonstrate the limited interest of researchers in the issue of using nostalgia in marketing activities. It seems that practice in this case outpaces scientific publications on this topic. However, it can be predicted, that with the success of subsequent advertising campaigns based on the theme of nostalgia, more and more scientific studies on this issue will appear.

The analysis of the co-occurrence of keywords, which allowed to identify of five clusters corresponding to five research areas within the issue of nostalgia in marketing, was an important element of this analysis. These are the areas that the authors titled: *Nostalgia*, *Nostalgia in Consumer Perception*, *Nostalgia Marketing*, *Nostalgic Brand* and *Nostalgic Brand Positioning and the Consumer*. The fewest articles were found in the *Nostalgic Brand* cluster, which may indicate that this area of considerations is still developing. However, most of publications were found in the most diverse cluster *Nostalgia in Consumer Perception*.

The possibility of distinguishing clusters shows that researchers approach in different ways the issue of using the nostalgia theme in marketing. As business practice in this area develops, new clusters will certainly emerge, and the existing ones will be divided into more specialised ones (e.g. cluster *Nostalgia in Consumer Perception*).

The authors are aware of the limitations of the conducted analysis, related to the use of only one SCOPUS database in the study. At the same time, since bibliometric analysis is quantitative in nature, in order to better understand

the research areas related to the use of nostalgia theme in marketing, a more in-depth substantive analysis of publications in this field should be carried out in the future.

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