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Introduction

Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012 (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021, p. 489), is a unique demographic group with distinct attitudes, values, and behaviors. Marketing researchers have shown increased interest in understanding their preferences and attitudes towards various products, including nostalgia marketing. Nostalgia marketing refers to using nostalgic themes, images, and symbols to evoke feelings of nostalgia and a longing for the past among consumers (Cui, 2015).

It has recently started to achieve popularity in marketing due to the consumption trend of renewed products, vinyl records, 2000s fashion, old music, and fashion shows (Bunch, 2022). Nostalgic marketing has been especially successful among Generation Z, who are “digital natives” trying to find ways to escape the oversaturated & overcrowded media world (Turner, 2015). By consuming the products from eras they have not been a part of, they see an escape from the everyday world. Thus, it is expected that nostalgic marketing effects will have a favorable effect on this generation, resulting in more favorable attitudes toward the brand, reinforcing the idea that nostalgia is a strong advertising strategy. Studies show that nostalgia has a positive impact on life satisfaction and can be used to counteract feelings of social disconnectedness, particularly among younger generations (Liu-Thompkins, 2019; Chark 2022).

Given the current digital and fast-paced nature of society, Gen Z is facing new challenges in terms of social connectedness and satisfaction with life. As a result, they are turning to nostalgia as a way to connect with their past and feel a sense of comfort and familiarity. Nostalgia often serves as a psychological buffer by providing people with a temporary escape from reality through the idealization of the past. Reminiscing results in the feeling of gratitude, warmth, joy, and affection in that way eliciting a sense of being loved (Wildshut et al., 2006). All of this leads to an assumption that Generation Z, proclaimed a

lonely generation (Merchant & Rose, 2013), will be more likely, from a marketing standpoint, to consume nostalgic material.

However, despite the increasing popularity of nostalgia marketing among Gen Z, there is limited research exploring the specific relationship between life satisfaction, social disconnectedness, and historical nostalgia marketing among this demographic. This research aims to fill this gap by examining the influence of life satisfaction and social disconnectedness on the consumption of historical nostalgia marketing among Gen Z consumers. This study will contribute to the existing literature by exploring the motivations and emotions behind the consumption of nostalgia marketing among the younger generation.

Thus, this paper presents the following research question: *How does historical nostalgia marketing influence Generation Z's attitudes towards ads and brands, taking into account the moderating role of life satisfaction, social disconnectedness, and dispositional nostalgia?*

To address the research question raised above, a study is conducted on the participant's attitudes toward that ad and advertised brand. Furthermore, the impact of their current satisfaction with life, social (dis)connectedness, and their tendency for nostalgia are assessed indirectly. This paper starts with an overview of existing theoretical knowledge on the topic continuing with the hypothesis derived from the theoretical framework and framed before the research model of this research. Afterward, the experimental research of this study is presented, assessed, and debated. The limitations of the study and recommendations for future studies are provided at the end.

Literature review

Historical nostalgia marketing

Holbrook and Schindler (1991, p. 330) defined nostalgia as “a preference (general liking, positive attitude, or favorable effect) 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)”. It serves as a tangible link to peoples’ past in which they find a sense of familiarity and security making them more prone to purchase those products to relive those memories (Boym, 2007).

Studies have shown that nostalgia can play a significant role in shaping consumer behavior and attitudes (Arndt & Hong, 2016). For example, research has shown that nostalgia can increase positive attitudes toward brands and increase brand loyalty (Holbrook & Schindler, 1991).

Additionally, Stern (1992) and other scholars (e.g Havlena and Holak, 1991) further specified this conceptualization by proposing that nostalgic thoughts may be generated from either a personally remembered past (personal nostalgia) or from a time in history before one was born (historical/communal nostalgia). Nostalgic themes can evoke emotions and memories associated with a particular period, which can increase the perceived value of products (Cui, 2015). These findings suggest that historical nostalgia marketing has the potential to significantly impact consumer behavior, making it an important area for further research. Memory processes (i.e., thought processing and retrieval) are also important in understanding nostalgia's effects, even if most conceptions of the construction strongly emphasize its affective and emotional foundations (e.g., Belk, 1990).

However, it should be highlighted that nostalgia is different from autobiographical memory, or memories of self and life events (also referred to as episodic or personal memory; Baumgartner, Sujan, and Bettman, 1992). The nature of affect or emotion associated with nostalgia is unique in that it is frequently seen as an idealized recollection of the past,

expressed as a distinctive and frequently bittersweet association with a past to which we can never return (Baker and Kennedy 1994; Havlena and Holak 1991; Hirsch 1992; Holak and Havlena: 1992). Additionally, nostalgia may be linked with vicariously experienced events (i.e., historical nostalgia), which, by definition, are not contained in autobiographical memories (Sprott, 2004).

Feelings of nostalgia presented as a way of longing for the past often occur in times of uncertainty and heightened levels of anxiety and stress (e.g., Davis, 1979; Hirsch, 1992). Those times create a desire to return to the past as an escape, which can be temporarily achieved through the consumption of products that people connect with past experiences (Goulding, 2002). Perhaps it's not a coincidence that many marketers and advertisers are urging Americans to "return to their pasts" at a time when they are feeling more insecure and worried about the future (Sprott, 2004).

A lot of research focuses on nostalgia as a remembrance of events that are personally momentous (e.g., the birth of children, weddings, birthdays; Madoglou et al., 2017; Wildschut et al., 2006) focusing on the presence of meaning in people's lives. Furthermore, there has been a disregard or a lack of focus on the second aspect of nostalgia, that which is not based on personal longing but rather for the times before individual existence. All this research confirms the strong, positive correlation between personal nostalgia and meaning and life satisfaction (Steger, 2018) it is important to explore the relationships between the latter and historical nostalgia, especially with the rise of the nostalgic consumerism trend within Generation Z (Merchant and Rose, 2013; Wildschut et al., 2006).

In conclusion, the study of historical nostalgia marketing is an important and under-researched area within academia. By exploring the psychological and cultural factors that drive consumer nostalgia and the impact of nostalgic marketing on consumer behavior, researchers can help companies make informed decisions about how to use nostalgia in their

marketing efforts, as well as contribute to a deeper understanding of the role that nostalgia plays in consumer behavior.

Understanding Generation Z and their consumer behavior

Gen Z consumer behavior & buying habits

Generation Z, this consumer cohort was born between the mid-1990s and the mid-2000s and represents a socially active group inclined towards culture and education (White, 2017; Dimock, 2019). This has made them, compared to other consumer cohorts, more conscious of social issues, and, as consumers, they expect to see the same social consciousness from the brands (Dabija et al., 2019).

In his research, Hope (2023) suggests that the 21st century is peculiar in its trends due to the much greater usage of social media as an advertising tool characterized by the sharing and remixing of existing products and services in a very short period. These constant changes and various available materials make it almost impossible for marketers to produce original marketing content that would spike interest within their target group. They have approached this problem by restructuring their strategies to achieve longing for the past, essentially, to produce nostalgic material. What is interesting is that their target group has been mainly Generation Z, a younger demographic who has not even personally lived through the times popularized in shows, fashion, or music (Home P., 2023).

People see nostalgia as one of two things, either as a) a form of emotional escapism or b) authentic experiences for a generation overwhelmed and jaded by modern oversaturated media environments (Rumsey, 2019). One would see why this would be appealing to a generation referred to as “digital natives” as the first generation to be born into a world where the internet and mobile devices were no longer a privilege but rather something widely

available to the masses (Turner, 2015). It is notable to explore the connection between nostalgic marketing and Gen Z as major consumers of nostalgic marketing efforts.

Belk (2003) argues that because younger generations sometimes find it harder to navigate the era they live in, they associate themselves with objects from the past, the times they were not even born. The sense of authenticity that those products/services bring value because they represent everything this era is not, and everything they are often trying to escape from. This was supported by findings suggesting that “for a consumer to bond through nostalgic experiences, the past must represent a dramatic contrast to the present” (Belk et al., 2003, p.335).

In Amatulli et al.,’s (2023) research it is visible that Gen Z consumers have shifted their consumption approach to focus on personal well-being, quality of life, and balance with nature. This shift is a response to lockdown periods, driven by resilience and nostalgia. Lockdowns activated a strong sense of resilience, leading to a desire for self-protection, health, and family values. As a result, Gen Z consumers grew self-conscious, leading to a new desire related to education and culture. They also seek a positive reorganization of their lives, learning from bad situations while maintaining their lifestyle. Additionally, nostalgia triggers happy memories and a desire for freedom, particularly associated with nature and close family members. This new form of responsible hedonistic consumption approach is based on resilience and nostalgia, reflecting a more responsible way of consumption (Amatulli et al., 2023).

Nostalgia as a coping mechanism in times of crisis

Due to psychological distress and vulnerabilities exposed and triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic nostalgia has proven to convey tangible psychological and physical health benefits (Wildschut & Sedikides, 2022). In those times of social distancing friendships

and other social support systems were not fostered. Alternatively, virtual social relations may have relieved stress from some individuals, while others have found it to be even more challenging. Thus, this has raised a need to further investigate more reliable and stable ways of compensating for the feeling of support that gets lost when the population is stripped of face-to-face interactions.

Wildschut & Sedikides focus on combating psychological distress with nostalgic recollections and they have found out that nostalgia is inherently egoistical feeling based on personally meaningful memories. It mostly surrounds the individual with others making it the “memories of people” (Sedikides & Wildschut, 2018). Another interesting finding suggests that nostalgia nourishes intrinsic motivation (Van Dijke et al., 2019), the pursuit of activities one would find inherently interesting and enjoyable (Deci et al., 1989), in situations of low interactional justice. Low (vs. high) interactional justice addresses the feeling of impoliteness, disrespect, or deceptive treatment by organizational authorities (Mayer et al., 2012).

It is also important to draw attention to the connection between nostalgia and existential and social insecurity. Zhou et al. (2013) have employed Freud’s psychological defense theory, further developing his idea that individuals ease their anxiety and pain through compensation and are therefore more likely to buy nostalgic products that provide them with a sense of security and familiarity. Research has long emphasized that nostalgia usually occurs in the context of fear, dissatisfaction, uncertainty, and anxiety (e.g., Davis, 1979; Hirsch, 1992).

Hypotheses

The study of the influence of life satisfaction, and social disconnectedness on historical nostalgia marketing among Gen Z has significant social relevance in today's society. As digital technology continues to shape our lives and create new social norms, younger generations are facing unique challenges related to their sense of well-being and social connectedness. The increasing prevalence of social media, for example, has been linked to higher levels of anxiety, depression, and loneliness among young people (Bowler, 2020).

In this context, nostalgia marketing can be seen as a way for Gen Z to cope with these challenges and find a sense of comfort and familiarity. Nostalgia has been shown to have a positive impact on mood and well-being and can provide a sense of connection to one's past, particularly among younger generations who are facing a rapidly changing world. This is because nostalgia allows individuals to reminisce about positive memories and experiences from their past, providing a sense of comfort and security (Cui, 2015).

Nonetheless, despite the growing appeal of nostalgia marketing among Gen Z, little research has been done examining the relationship between social disconnectedness, life satisfaction, and historical nostalgia marketing within this demographic. This study aims to close this gap by examining the reasons underlying the younger generation's consumption of nostalgia marketing.

The relationship between life satisfaction, social disconnectedness, dispositional nostalgia, and nostalgia marketing among Gen Z is an important topic of study as it has significant implications for marketers and advertisers. Understanding the motivations behind Gen Z's consumption of nostalgia marketing can help marketers create more effective and appealing advertising campaigns that resonate with this demographic. This information can also be used to develop targeted marketing strategies that address the specific needs and challenges of younger generations.

Therefore the following research question was determined:

- *How does historical nostalgia marketing influence Generation Z's attitudes towards ads and brands, taking into account the moderating role of life satisfaction, social disconnectedness, and dispositional nostalgia?*

To answer this research question, the following hypothesis was compiled taking into account already existing research on the listed phenomenon:

H1 Historical nostalgia marketing impacts Gen Z's ad attitude

- *H1a: Historically nostalgic Instagram post has a stronger impact on ad attitude than the control Instagram post*

H2 Historical nostalgia marketing impacts Gen Z's brand attitude

- *H2a: Historically nostalgic Instagram post has a stronger impact on brand attitude than the control Instagram post*

In previous studies, nostalgia has been shown to have three major advantages: it increases social connectedness (Wildshut et al., 2006), meaning in life (the subjective sense that one's life has a purpose and meaning; Routledge et al., 2011), and self-continuity (the subjective sense of continuity between one's past and present; Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, & Arndt, 2015).

“As life satisfaction reflects one's evaluation of his or her present life, it colors the lens through which one evaluates past life events as positive or negative and subsequently influences the reconstructed emotions evoked by nostalgia” (Khoshghadam, Kordrostami, Liu-Thompkins, 2019). As highlighted by Zhao, Muehling, and Kareklas (2014), consumer-focused literature has not given much attention to how consumers' current state, whether it be happy or sad, could differentiate the effects of nostalgic response. As costs of advertising are becoming greater with the growth of competition in the advertising field, it is

important to find ways to maximize the effectiveness of an advertising campaign. The quote mentioned above serves as a reminder not to disregard the audience's state of mind when implementing nostalgic appeals in advertising, but on the contrary leveraging the current state of life satisfaction to increase the effectiveness of advertising (Khoshghadam, Kordrostami, Liu-Thompkins, 2019).

Some research has discovered that positive life satisfaction has been correlated to greater receptivity of nostalgic advertising. The study (Ju et al., 2017) argues that people are influenced more by nostalgia in advertising when they are happy. Based on those findings, it can be suggested that marketers place nostalgic ads in places or times when people are more likely to be in a positive mood, e.g., during the holiday season. Furthermore, Khoshghadam, Kordrostami, and Liu-Thompkins, (2019) researched the effectiveness of nostalgic music in advertisements and also suggested that nostalgic music creates a positive effect on people with high life satisfaction and a negative on those who are not satisfied with their current state.

On the contrary, the major triggers of nostalgia were identified as negative moods and loneliness. This finding is somewhat consistent with the claim that nostalgic advertising gains popularity during an economic crisis (Elliott, 2009).

For individuals with high life satisfaction, nostalgic marketing can help reinforce positive memories and emotions associated with a brand or product, leading to increased brand loyalty and customer retention. It can also create a sense of familiarity and comfort that appeals to consumers who prefer traditional or classic products over newer, trendier offerings.

For those with low life satisfaction due to negative moods, loneliness, fear, dissatisfaction, uncertainty, anxiety, and economic crisis, nostalgic marketing can provide a temporary escape from current stressors and offer a sense of connection to happier times. It can evoke positive emotions that help alleviate negative feelings and serve as a coping mechanism for those going through tough times.

In conclusion, it is beneficial to explore whether nostalgic marketing should be leveraged in individuals with high life satisfaction or those with low life satisfaction as a result of negative moods, loneliness, fear, dissatisfaction, uncertainty, anxiety, and economic crisis. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H3 Effects of historical nostalgia marketing are stronger for lower life satisfaction

- *H3a Effects of historical nostalgia marketing on ad attitudes are stronger for lower life satisfaction*
- *H3b Effects of historical nostalgia marketing on brand attitudes are stronger for lower life satisfaction*

Chark (2022) finds that the social-disconnectedness effect contributes to consumers' preference for nostalgia. Social disconnectedness in its essence is a displeasing feeling and this motivates individuals to find direct or indirect ways to cope with this unpleasant feeling. Other research that supports this notion also shows that people become more sensitive to nostalgic experiences when socially isolated. For instance, it was discovered that those who were shunned remembered more happy childhood experiences (DeWall and Richman, 2011). In a different study, the manipulation of expectations of future social disconnectedness was observed to produce higher levels of state nostalgia (Seehusen et al., 2013). Also, it was discovered that consumers who are socially isolated are more prone to feel nostalgic after consuming brand history (Merchant and Rose, 2013).

Furthermore, studies show that due to early and constant exposure to digital media Gen Z has increased rates of chronic stress, depression, and anxiety (Turner, 2015). Access to massive amounts of media content and continual social media connectedness has led to the contradictory effect of Generation Z feeling isolated. All of these emotional states lead to the individuals feeling lonely, like they do not fit in, and isolated from society making them more

likely, from a marketing standpoint, to consume nostalgic marketing efforts (Merchant and Rose 2013; Wildschut et al., 2006).

Consequently, it may be theorized that socially isolated consumers have a strong tendency to indulge in nostalgic consumption whenever it is possible. One is more likely to use nostalgia as an indirect coping mechanism for social isolation the greater the gap between one's demand for belongingness and pleasure in interpersonal interactions (Lasaleta, Sedikides, & Vohs, 2014).

The study done by Wildshut et al. (2010) essentially examined whether nostalgia can strengthen social connectedness and how this effect might differ in individuals with attachment-related differences. It has long ago been discovered that social networks are not static, and as such are deemed to change. In a more negative scenario, the separation from valued social bonds that often accompany life transitions, or in the recent scenario, the measures of COVID-19 prevention, result in individuals feeling lonely and adrift (Colson, 1971; Sedikides, Wildschut, Gaertner, et al., 2008; Van Tilburg & Vinger- hoets, 1997).

Prior research findings (Zhou, Sedikides, Wildschut, and Gao, 2008) are consistent with their results displaying the regulating effect nostalgia has on loneliness by strengthening social connectedness. These findings suggest that lonely individuals may gravitate towards nostalgia in the absence of social interactions. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H4 Effects of historical nostalgia marketing are stronger for higher social disconnectedness

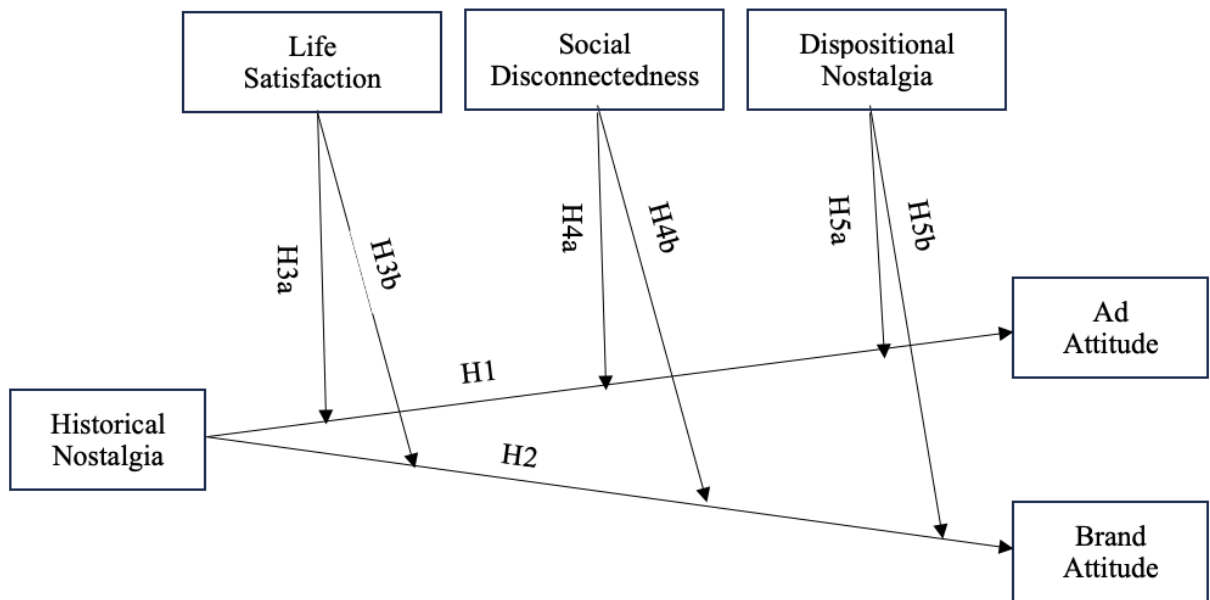
- *H4a Effects of historical nostalgia marketing on ad attitudes are stronger for higher social disconnectedness*
- *H4b Effects of historical nostalgia marketing on brand attitudes are stronger for higher social disconnectedness*

The positive activity model (Lyubomirsky and Layous, 2013) proposes that activity increases a person's well-being if well-suited to the person practicing it. In agreement with this, people are likely to report greater well-being over time if the activity they are taking part in feels natural and enjoyable to them (Dickerhoof, 2007). Thus, it is important to account for this as in the case of nostalgic stimuli, people who already readily engage in nostalgia in their everyday life might find nostalgic materials more appealing. To consider this aspect this study plans to utilize a scale (Jiang, 2023) to assess dispositional nostalgia - “the degree to which people value nostalgia and engage in it frequently”. Those who score highly on that scale may find greater enjoyment in consuming nostalgic marketing materials which would consequently have a greater impact on them.

Other research has shown that weekly nostalgic reflection has temporary positive benefits for all participants, while beyond that it was shown to affect positively the well-being of those high on dispositional nostalgia (i.e., well-suited to the nostalgia intervention) and had negative effects on the well-being of those low on dispositional nostalgia (Layous, Wildshut, Sedikides, 2021). Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H5 Effects of historical nostalgia marketing are stronger for higher dispositional nostalgia

- *H5a Effects of historical nostalgia marketing on ad attitudes are stronger for higher dispositional nostalgia*
- *H5b Effects of historical nostalgia marketing on brand attitudes are stronger for higher dispositional nostalgia*

Figure 1*The model*

Methodological approach

Pre-test

This study aims to test the legitimacy of the stimuli material. Specifically, whether the historical nostalgic Instagram post vs. non-nostalgic (control) Instagram post is perceived as described (see Appendix). Participants were recruited from the researcher's social network. The questionnaire was distributed to a total sample of 17 people via WhatsApp messages. They were presented with two fictitious Kodak Instagram posts. Photographs were long before connected to nostalgia (Holak and Havlena, 1992) making Kodak ads desirable stimuli for this research. The posts consist of the girl in a bucket hat in the center, surrounded by retro sneakers, old mobile phones, and, of course, an analog Kodak camera. A non-nostalgic post is similar in contents and formatting of the picture, caption length, structure, and the display of the camera with a few changes adapted from Muehling et al. (2014) to differentiate the nostalgic effect.

Nostalgic manipulations were created by adding a graining effect to the nostalgic ad simulating the appearance of an old film photo, followed by a caption "Re-live the Moment" in the center of the photo in a retro, yellow font. On the contrary, the control ad has a more present-alluding caption "Capture the Moment" in a fairly neutral, white font. Additionally, the caption under the post is designed to trigger reminiscing with sentences like "a timeless portal to cherished moments" and "a journey to a simpler time" with the tagline "And, Kodak was there." as opposed to "And, Kodak is there." in the control post.

After participants viewed the ad, they were asked to rate it on a 5-point historical nostalgia scale, adapted from Marchegiani & Phau (2007), ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5) rating the five items ("It makes me feel positive about a time before I was born", "It's about past eras", "It makes me fantasize about the good old days before I was born", "It makes me imagine what previous generations were like", "It existed before I was

born”) to establish whether the posts can be used in the main study to measure historical nostalgia marketing effects on Generation Z.

Statistical results indicated that the manipulation of historical nostalgia performed as expected with participants reporting higher levels of nostalgia ($M=4$) if exposed to historical nostalgia post as opposed to those exposed to non-nostalgic (control) post ($M=3.3$). By doing this statistical test, this study can continue to implement tested stimuli to explore the relationship between historical nostalgia and brand/ad attitudes.

Main study

An experiment using a 2 (high vs. low historical nostalgia) x 2 (ad and brand attitude) design to examine how historical nostalgia influences participants ad and brand attitudes, taking into account the potential moderating effect of life satisfaction, social disconnectedness, and dispositional nostalgia.

Procedure

Instagram posts developed for the pretest were used in the 2x2 between-subject experimental survey, which consisted of one independent variable (historical nostalgia) measuring ad and brand attitudes. The participants were presented with a historical nostalgic Instagram post or a non-manipulated post, making that part of the sample a control group, after that, both groups had to rate their attitude towards the ad and the brand.

The participants were members of the Gen Z cohort and they were recruited via various social media and WhatsApp to create a sampling snowball effect. Additionally, a QR code with a short description of the study was displayed around different university facilities gathering even more participants for the study. In total, 198 people completed the questionnaire, and after filtering for age (12-28 years) a final sample of 187 participants was gathered. The questionnaire was created in English on the survey program SoSci Survey.

At the start of the online questionnaire, participants were confronted with an informed consent concerning the purpose of the study, its requirements, procedure, and their rights regarding their participation as well as how their data will be treated in the scope of the study. Also, the contact information of the researcher was provided in case of further questions. After agreeing to the online informed consent, participants were asked to carefully examine one of the two Instagram posts depending on which group they belonged to, subsequently, they had to answer a questionnaire. The first part of the questionnaire referred to the posts rating them on historical nostalgia scale, as well as, expressing the attitudes towards the ad and the advertised brand (Kodak). In the second part of the survey, the participants were measured on potential moderators in the model, them being, life satisfaction, social (dis)connectedness, and dispositional nostalgia. Lastly, the demographics of the sample have been gathered, such as age, gender, level of education, nationality, and country of living.

To measure ad attitudes, Muehling's (1987) scale was implemented with Cronbach's Alpha being 0.929. It consists of three items that are rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 'bad' to 'good', 'negative' to 'positive', and 'unfavorable' to 'favorable'.

Brand attitudes were measured by a 5-point scale (Spears and Singh, 2004) ($\alpha = 0.905$) on five items ranging from "The brand is appealing", "The brand is good", "The brand is pleasant", "The brand is favorable" to "The brand is likable".

Aside from dependant variables (ad/brand attitude), the participants were also questioned about their satisfaction with life, social (dis)connectedness, and level of dispositional nostalgia, which serve as moderators in the tested model. Their satisfaction with life was measured with a 7-point scale (Diener, 1985) at a reliability of $\alpha = 0.82$ measures satisfaction with life along 5 dimensions "In most ways my life is close to my ideal", "The conditions of my life are excellent", "I am satisfied with my life", "So far I have gotten the important things I want in life", and "If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing". For social connectedness, statements implying isolation and disconnection from

their surroundings created by Lee & Robins (1999) were used ($\alpha = 0.948$), where participants had to rate their agreement with them on a 6-point scale. Lastly, to measure dispositional nostalgia a 6-point scale ($\alpha = 0.731$) by Jiang (2023) was used to rate 6 different nostalgic statements (see Table 1 below).

Table 1

Scale Statistics - Results of Reliability Analysis

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
Historical Nostalgia	.801	3.23	1.01	1	5
Life Satisfaction	.82	4.99	1.23	1.11	5
Social Disconnectedness	.948	2.46	1.72	1.31	8
Dispositional Nostalgia	.731	4.23	.89	.95	6
Ad Attitude	.929	5.27	1.87	1.37	3
Brand Attitude	.905	3.77	.67	.81	5

Sample descriptives

Gen Z sample consists of 187 cases, of which females comprise 126 (67.4%) and 61 (32.6%) males. The average age of participants was 23.29 with a minimum of 19 years and a maximum of 28 years old ($SD = 1.927$). Regarding participants' nationality, 51.9% were Croatian, 14.4% were Austrian, and 12.3% were German, with similar percentages corresponding to the sample's country of living, 51.3% living in Croatia, 37.55% in Austria, and 4.3% in Germany. Regarding people's education, most of the sample has obtained a college or university degree (52.4%), followed by a high school diploma (44.4%), and only 1.6% completed secondary school.

Results

Data check

A manipulation check was conducted to test whether the stimulus worked efficiently. Table 2 (see below) shows that manipulation worked with visible mean differences between the control and manipulated groups. Means between groups are different as the Levene test is insignificant. The average rating of the Instagram post as historically nostalgic from the people with the control post was 2.75 ($p < 0.001$) and the rating from the participants who received a nostalgic post was significantly higher at 3.76 ($p < 0.001$).

Table 2

Independent Samples Test

					Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		
	RG01	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.	t
Historical_Nostalgia	control	99	2.75	.93			
	nostalgic	88	3.76	.79			
Historical_Nostalgia	Equal variances assumed				3.09	0.80	-7.98

Additionally, a randomization check was conducted between the age, nationality, country of living, and education or degree of participants. From the tests, no significant differences ($p > 0.05$) between the groups were found. Thus, the participants were randomly assigned between the stimulus groups (see Table 3).

Table 3*Pearson's Chi-Square tests of independence*

Variable	df	<i>p</i>	N
Gender	1	.698	187
Education	3	.739	187
Nationality	21	.620	187
Country of living	9	.121	187
Age	9	.664	187

Descriptive statistics for Historical Nostalgia (HN) reveal an overall mean score of 3.226 (SD= 1.003). This shows a high historical nostalgia tendency among Generation Z. HN01_04 has the highest mean of 3.34 indicating that the target audience often imagines what previous generations were like. Moving on, descriptive statistics for Life Satisfaction (LS) with an overall mean score of 4.99 (SD= 1.11), display a high life satisfaction among Generation Z. LS01_02 has the highest mean of 5.34 indicating that the target audience sees the conditions of their life as excellent. Further, when we analyze descriptive statistics for Social Connectedness we reveal an overall mean score of 2.46 (SD= 1.31). This shows a higher social connectedness among Generation Z. All of the items of the scale score under the mean value indicating that the sample disagrees about the sentences expressing disconnectedness from their surroundings. SC01_08r scored the lowest with a mean of 2.18 indicating that Gen Z feels a strong belonging and participation with a group. Lastly, dispositional nostalgia revealed an overall mean score of 4.23 (SD = 0.95) displaying a high nostalgia tendency among Generation Z. NS01_04 has the highest mean of 4.74 which tells us that the participants feel most nostalgic when they listen to songs from their past. This goes along with a lot of research (Garrido, 2016; Juslin et., al., 2008; Wildschut et., al., 2006) deeming music a strong nostalgia evocator.

Analysis results

Table 4 (see below) shows that the inclusion of historical nostalgia accounted for 31.2% variance in Gen Z's attitudes toward the ad ($R^2 = 0.312$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.312$, $F(1, 185) = 83.9$, $p < .001$), and the analysis showed a significant effect of historical nostalgia on ad attitudes ($\beta = 0.76$, $CI = 0.58, 0.92$, $p < .001$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 is accepted.

It was hypothesized that including life satisfaction, social (dis)connectedness, and dispositional nostalgia would moderate the effect historical nostalgic marketing has on ad and brand attitudes. As research suggests (Hayes, 2020) proper moderated multiple regression calls for mean centering of the predicting values before computing an interaction term. Further, that means that we have extracted the mean of the variable from each case which reduced the possibility of multicollinearity between the variables (Aiken & West, 1991). This consequently increased the power of significance tests in multiple regression reducing the possibility of variables canceling each other out.

As seen in Table 4 below, the inclusion of moderators has significantly affected the effect historical nostalgia has on ad attitudes, and the inclusion accounted for an additional 3.5% variance in predicting Gen Z's ad attitudes ($R^2 = 0.347$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.35$, $F(3, 182) = 31.846$, $p < .023$). Thus, Hypothesis H3 is accepted. Moving on, only the inclusion of life satisfaction in the model significantly increases the effect of historical nostalgia on ad attitudes ($\beta = 0.21$, $CI = 0.092, 0.44$, $p < .003$) resulting in the acceptance of Hypothesis H3a. That is, historical nostalgia and life satisfaction interacted in explaining a person-to-person variation in ad attitudes.

Table 4*Tests of Between Subjects Effects*

Model	Change Statistics						
	R Square	Adjusted R Square	R Square				Sig. F Change
			Change	F Change	df1	df2	
1	.312	.308	.312	83.902	1	185	<.001
2	.347	.333	.035	3.250	3	182	.023

a. Predictors: (Constant), Historical_Nostalgia_Cent

b. Predictors: (Constant), Historical_Nostalgia_Cent, DispNost_x_HN, LifeSatis_x_HN, SocialConn_x_HN

c. Dependent Variable: Ad_Attitude

Moving on, a model was also included testing the effect of historical nostalgia on Gen Z's attitudes toward the brand. Table 5 shows that the inclusion of historical nostalgia accounted for a 14.7% variance in Gen Z's attitudes towards the brand ($R^2 = 0.147$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.147$, $F(1, 185) = 31.946$, $p < .001$). Additionally, historical nostalgia had a significant effect on brand attitudes ($\beta = 0.31$, $CI = 0.2, 0.42$, $p < .001$). Consequently, Hypothesis 2 is accepted. Furthermore, including life satisfaction, social (dis)connectedness, and dispositional nostalgia did not significantly affect historical nostalgia affects brand attitudes.

Table 5*Tests of Between Subjects Effects*

Model	Change Statistics							
	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	R Square				Sig. F Change
				Change	F Change	df1	df2	
1	.384 ^a	.147	.143	.147	31.946	1	185	<.001
2	.389 ^b	.151	.132	.004	.269	3	182	.848

a. Predictors: (Constant), Historical_Nostalgia_Cent

b. Predictors: (Constant), Historical_Nostalgia_Cent, DispNost_x_HN, LifeSatis_x_HN, SocialConn_x_HN

c. Dependent Variable: Brand_Attitude_Cent

Since historical nostalgia affects ad and brand attitudes significantly, it was explored whether the difference between low vs. high historical nostalgia would have a different effect on participants' ad/brand attitudes or whether there is even a difference. Multivariate ANOVA was conducted (MANOVA) with 2 dependent variables (ad & brand attitudes) and one independent (Historical_NostalgiaR). Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis shows that the historical nostalgia scale has an $\alpha = 0.801$. Alpha Cronbach's value above 0.7 is considered a highly reliable and highly acceptable index. All items of the scale are thus reliable. The analysis also met the assumptions of multicollinearity as tolerance values range from 0.8 to 1 while the value inflation factor (VIF) ranges from 1 to 1.2 indicating that there is no multicollinearity problem in this study.

Since reliability is proven and the correlation matrix shows that none of the items would have a higher alpha, an index/new variable was computed that is made up of the reliable items from the historical nostalgia scale, and its frequencies and descriptives were examined. As the median is 3.4 historical nostalgia was recoded to low_HN (1) and high_HN (2).

As it is visible in Table 6 the differences in the means between the groups are significant, which allows the interpretations of those differences. Participants with higher historical nostalgia scored a higher mean in ad attitude ($M = 6.01$). This displays a more favorable attitude towards the ad as they were those who rated the items more closely to the good/positive/favorable extremes of the scale. On the contrary, participants who have low historical nostalgia rated their attitudes towards the ad closer to the bad/negative/unfavorable extreme of the scale ($M = 4.73$). Similarly, participants who are more historically nostalgic also scored a higher mean in their attitudes toward the brand (mean = 4.09), thus, rating the brand as more appealing, good, pleasant, favorable, and likable than those participants who ranked lower on historical nostalgia scale ($M = 3.53$). This leads to the conclusion that by

leveraging historical nostalgia in their ads, brands can ultimately foster more favorable attitudes both to that ad and the brand as a whole.

Table 6

One-way analysis of variance

	(I)	(J)	Mean		95% Confidence Interval for	
Dependent Variable	Historical_Nostalgia	Historical_Nostalgia	Difference (I-J)	Sig. ^b	Difference ^b	
	R	R			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Ad_Attitude	1.00	2.00	-1.284*	<.001	-1.638	-.930
	2.00	1.00	1.284*	<.001	.930	1.638
Brand_Attitude	1.00	2.00	-.559*	<.001	-.783	-.335
	2.00	1.00	.559*	<.001	.335	.783

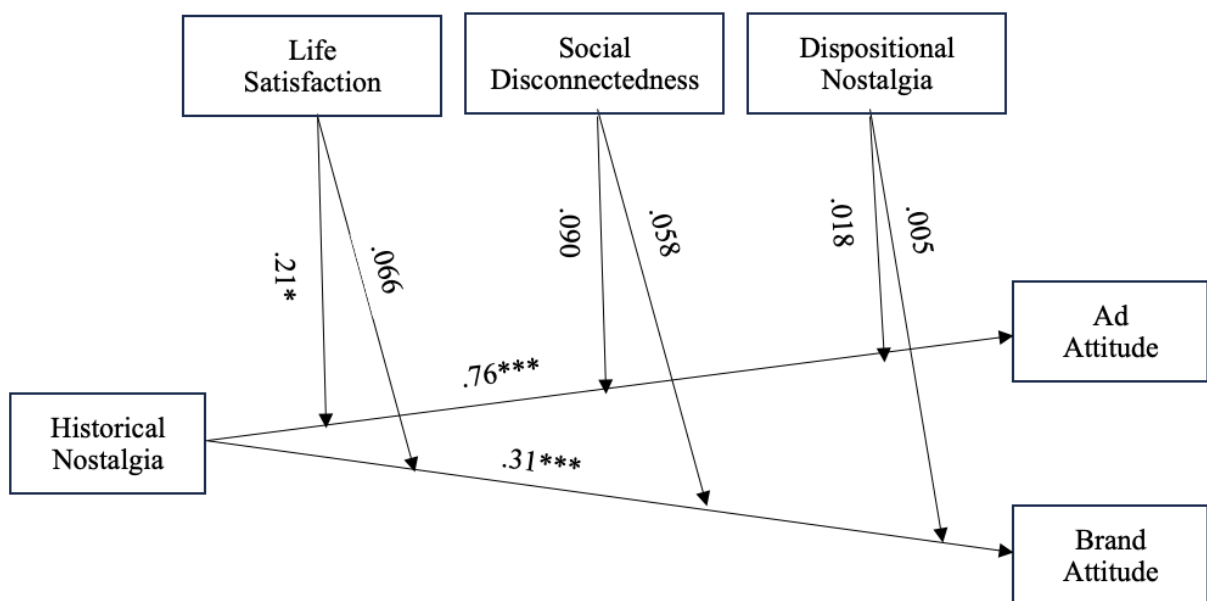
Based on estimated marginal means

*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

b. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Least Significant Difference (equivalent to no adjustments).

Figure 2

The final model



Note. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

Discussion

Within the parameters of this study, a theoretical framework was developed to closer explain the effect of historical nostalgia in marketing, more specifically, its' effects on ad and brand attitudes. What is more, there are some theoretical implications stating that such a relationship can be moderated by the current states of the target group, such as their state of satisfaction with life, their connection or disconnection with the world around them as well as their nostalgic tendencies. The theoretical framework is built on previously published literature that offered trustworthy perspectives and data related to the purpose of this study. The major goal of this study was to prove to what extent historical nostalgic material influences ad and brand attitudes as well as to explore what role life satisfaction, social dis(connection), and dispositional nostalgia play in the effectiveness of the effect of historical nostalgia on ad & brand attitudes.

The first significant finding of the study was the effect that historical nostalgia has, both, on the ad and brand attitudes. These findings go along with already existing research that has confirmed the effect nostalgia, mostly personal, has on fostering positive attitudes toward marketing efforts. Additionally, it further expands it by putting the focus on the historical aspect of nostalgia among an under-researched young cohort of Generation Z. After further exploring this relationship it was revealed that Generation Z had more favorable attitudes towards the ad that was rated as more historically nostalgic resulting in the acceptance. This goes along with research that has continuously revealed the significance of nostalgia in shaping consumers' behavior and attitudes, more often than not leading to an increase in brand loyalty, as well as an increase in positive attitudes towards the brand (Arndt & Hong, 2016; Holbrook & Schindler, 1991). As "digital natives" Gen Z often seek an escape from the oversaturated media world, and they see an escape in consumption of the products that represent everything that this era is not (Turner, 2015). Thus, based on the literature (Merchant & Rose, 2013), that has found interchangeable results among other cohorts, it was

expected that historical nostalgia would play a significant role in predicting the attitudes of Generation Z toward the ad and the brand, resulting in a more favorable, likable, appealing, and pleasant impression.

Contradictory to existing literature, social connectedness, and dispositional nostalgia have not had a significant effect in explaining the effect of historical nostalgia on ad and brand attitudes. Previous studies have argued that social disconnectedness contributes to a preference for nostalgia, with consumers who are socially isolated being more prone to feel nostalgic (Chark, 2022; Merchant and Rose, 2013). With Gen Z being reported as isolated, anxious, and lonely, social disconnect with a preference for nostalgia was expected (Merchant and Rose 2013). This study could have yielded the opposite results due to various factors this and previous research differ in. Some of the research has measured the role of social disconnectedness in preference to historical nostalgia during a very vulnerable and peculiar period of the Covid-19 pandemic. This could have led to an intensified level of social disconnect among the tested sample that this survey lacked. In addition, the stimuli used in the research have not been intensively researched, and as such, it could lead to potential inconsistencies in the findings. However, this study has still revealed more significant and beneficial findings that will be further discussed.

In line with theory, satisfaction with life did have a significant effect in moderating the effect historical nostalgia had on ad attitudes, but not on brand attitudes. Even though the research revealed the significant effect of life satisfaction on ad attitudes, it did not go in line with scholars (Merchant and Rose 2013; Wildschut et al., 2006) claiming that people are more sensitive to nostalgic effects when socially isolated. Thus, the results of this study indicate a positive correlation between life satisfaction and attitudes towards the ad. Generation Z scored high on the satisfaction with life scale, which goes against the hypothesized stronger effect of historical nostalgia for lower life satisfaction. There have been contradictory findings on whether low or high life satisfaction has been correlated with greater receptivity of nostalgic

advertising. The greater scope of research connecting nostalgic marketing tendencies with times of heightened anxiety, psychological distress, and existential, and social insecurity, led to base the hypothesis following those findings. By rejecting H3, this study contributes to the theoretical portion connecting positive life satisfaction with higher receptivity of nostalgic advertising. More specifically, it contributes to a further understanding of Generation Z as a consumerism cohort. Previous studies have revealed that Gen Z consumers are taking a more hedonistic approach to their consumption habits, by putting a focus on personal well-being, health, and self-protection (Amatulli et al., 2023). This study clarified that they are more prone to practice those habits, and to consume historically nostalgic materials, in a happier, more satisfied state.

Contribution to practice

Marketers targeting Generation Z can leverage historical nostalgia in advertising campaigns to foster more favorable attitudes toward both the ad and the brand. Understanding the inclination of this generation towards historically nostalgic content provides insights for developing marketing strategies that resonate with their preferences. Lastly, I am immensely proud of the contribution this study makes to the practice as it represents a significant milestone in understanding the dynamics of marketing to Generation Z. I am confident that its findings will shape the future marketing strategies targeted at Generation Z as it offers valuable insights for marketers aspiring to resonate with this cohort.

The study suggests that Gen Z's satisfaction with life affects their receptivity to nostalgic advertising. Marketers can tailor messages that tap into historical nostalgia for younger generations with high life satisfaction recognizing that it is highly effective and engaging for the cohort in that state. Moving on, as historical nostalgia increases the positive view of the ad and advertised brand, companies can capitalize on this by incorporating

elements that evoke a sense of nostalgia in their marketing efforts. This could foster stronger connections between the brand and the customer, possibly leading to increased brand loyalty.

The findings emphasize the importance of staying attuned to the evolving preferences of Generation Z. Scholars, marketers, and businesses can benefit from continuous research of the emerging trends and preferences of this cohort. By tailoring their strategies accordingly, marketers can ensure they remain relevant and appealing to this dynamic consumer group. Additionally, scholars can use this and other relevant studies to further build their understanding as well as to spark interest in this very recently researched cohort in the context of the new findings.

All of the above contributes to the theoretical understanding of historical nostalgia and Generation Z as a consumer cohort. It has challenged existing notions about the impact of life satisfaction on the receptivity of nostalgic advertising. Results of similar studies in the past have suggested a negative correlation when it comes to the relationship between nostalgic efforts and life satisfaction, concluding that the impact of nostalgic efforts is greater for lower satisfaction with life. This study is different in the sense that it has put a focus on historical, rather than personal nostalgia, and has tested its implications on a fairly young consumer group fostering a different verdict that Generation Z, despite high life satisfaction, was still drawn to historically nostalgic content.

It is important to note that this study specifically draws conclusions that can be implemented on the younger, Generation Z since that was the researched sample in this study.

Ultimately, the results of this research represent a significant breakthrough in our understanding of historical nostalgia and how it affects Generation Z consumers. I am incredibly proud of the insights gained and the implications they have both for industry and academia. Moving forward, I am interested as to how these findings might influence the current practices and inspire future studies.

Limitations and future studies

The study exhibits a significant gender imbalance, with 67% female and 33% male participants. This gender skew may limit the generalizability of the findings, as attitudes towards historical nostalgia and advertised brands could differ based on gender. Additionally, the younger part of the cohort was underrepresented by the sample. The youngest participant of the study was 19 years old, which left the 16/17/18 years olds underrepresented. Lastly, the study focuses on a European sample, with a disproportionate representation of participants with 65% of the sample being from Croatia & Austria. This regional bias may impact the applicability of the findings to a broader international context.

While stimuli material was pretested and showed a mean difference between manipulated and controlled versions, long-term testing could provide a more robust assessment of its stability and effectiveness. Thus, potential limitations this could have brought to the study need to be accounted for.

Future studies should also aim for a more balanced representation by including a more diverse age range and a more stable dispersion of the sample's gender to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the entire target population. They should also consider expanding the geographic scope of the sample to include participants from various regions worldwide. This approach would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how historical nostalgia influences attitudes toward advertising and brands across diverse cultural contexts.

What is more, the 90s have been very popularized. wide-spread, marketed era. This study has put effort into making the stimuli represent and reminisce about that era. Future research could employ stimuli depicting eras other than the 90s. This would help determine whether historical nostalgia's impact on attitudes is era-specific or a more generalized phenomenon. Testing with less popularized eras could also reveal insights into the durability of nostalgic effects.

One of the items of the dispositional nostalgia scale revealed that the sample feels the most nostalgic when listening to songs from the past. Given the significant impact of music on nostalgia future research should specifically investigate the role of music stimuli or a combination of visual and musical in shaping Gen Z's attitudes towards the ad/brand. This will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of multisensory influences on nostalgia.

All in all, irrelevant to these limitations, this study has succeeded in fulfilling its aim of contributing to an even more rounded idea of this dynamic, young, and interesting cohort.

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Appendix

Nostalgic stimuli



Control stimuli



[Photos: Deon/[Unsplash](#), Girl with red hat/[Unsplash](#), Mark Bishop/[Unsplash](#), Sebastian Pociecha/[Unsplash](#), Bagus Hernawan/[Unsplash](#)]

Abstract

To stand out among competitors in an oversaturated and overcrowded media world, companies need to come up with ways to effectively catch consumer's attention. As 'digital natives', Generation Z is and has been constantly online and continuously presented with various ads making them a challenging cohort to target successfully. To purpose of this study is to further investigate historical nostalgia as a marketing strategy that has, over the past years, been established as popular among various brands for advertising purposes. This paper aims to discuss whether that strategy will have a significant effect on Generation Z's attitudes toward the advertised ad and brand, as well as if those effects will be moderated by their current satisfaction with life, dis(connect) to society, and nostalgic tendencies. The findings suggest that historically nostalgic marketing efforts do foster more positive attitudes toward both the ad and the brand in question. However, only life satisfaction moderated those effects, connecting higher life satisfaction to a greater reception of nostalgic advertising.

Keywords: Generation Z, historical nostalgia, nostalgic marketing, life satisfaction, social disconnectedness, dispositional nostalgia.

Zusammenfassung

Um sich in einer übersättigten und überfüllten Medienwelt von den Mitbewerbern abzuheben, müssen Unternehmen Wege finden, um die Aufmerksamkeit der Verbraucher zu gewinnen.

Als "Digital Natives" ist und war die Generation Z ständig online und wurde kontinuierlich mit verschiedenen Werbemitteln konfrontiert, was ihre erfolgreiche Ansprache zu einer Herausforderung macht. Ziel dieser Studie ist es, die historische Nostalgie als Marketingstrategie näher zu untersuchen, die sich in den letzten Jahren bei verschiedenen Marken zu Werbezwecken als beliebt erwiesen hat. In dieser Arbeit soll erörtert werden, ob diese Strategie eine signifikante Auswirkung auf die Einstellung der Generation Z gegenüber der beworbenen Anzeige und Marke hat und ob diese Auswirkungen durch ihre aktuelle Lebenszufriedenheit, ihre fehlende Bindung an die Gesellschaft und ihre nostalgischen Neigungen moderiert werden. Die Ergebnisse deuten darauf hin, dass historisch nostalgische Marketingbemühungen eine positivere Einstellung sowohl gegenüber der Werbung als auch gegenüber der betreffenden Marke fördern. Allerdings moderierte nur die Lebenszufriedenheit diese Effekte, indem sie eine höhere Lebenszufriedenheit mit einer größeren Rezeption nostalgischer Werbung verband.

Schlüsselwörter: Generation Z, historische Nostalgie, nostalgisches Marketing, Lebenszufriedenheit, soziale Unverbundenheit, dispositionelle Nostalgie.