

# Exploring the Revival of Nostalgia and Retro Waves in Contemporary Marketing and Contagious Communication Research—Taking Contagious Möbius Strip as an Example

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**Abstract.** This essay explores the resurgence of nostalgia and retro waves in modern marketing and their viral impact on contemporary brand strategy. Nostalgia has gained immense importance as both an emotion and a marketing tool. This study chose to investigate this topic due to its growing relevance in shaping consumer behavior and brand perception, seeking to understand how nostalgia can enhance brand engagement and consumer loyalty. Through two case studies, this study examines the real-world application of nostalgia marketing. The first case study analyzes the retro wave created by the popular TV series “Stranger Things” and how it skillfully employed elements from the STEPPS model (Social Currency, Triggers, Emotion, Public, Practical Value, and Stories) to achieve successful viral marketing. The second case explores KFC China’s “Back to 1987 Prices” campaign, demonstrating how nostalgia can be leveraged on the product side to drive consumer engagement and brand affinity. The analysis dissects the strategies used in each case study, revealing the effectiveness of nostalgia in achieving viral marketing. In conclusion, this study underscores the profound significance of nostalgia marketing in contemporary brand strategies. By examining two distinct Möbius strip frameworks—Product-Based Nostalgic Marketing Möbius Strip and Media-Based Nostalgic Marketing Möbius Strip, this study unveils the enduring appeal of nostalgia in evoking consumer emotions and creating contagious marketing phenomena. Brands should grasp consumers’ emotional ties to the past to increase brand visibility, foster community, and drive long-term business growth in products and media, effectively triggering and riding the retro wave.

**Keywords:** Nostalgia, Contagiousness, Viral Marketing, STEPPS Model, Möbius Strip.

## 1. Introduction

In contemporary marketing, nostalgia, and retro waves are reviving with unprecedented momentum. This phenomenon has been fully reflected in different fields. The retro wave has aroused widespread resonance in their respective fields, from products and media to music and food. This paper will further elaborate on this theme’s commercial and social value by taking Contagious’s Möbius strip as an example to explore the revival of nostalgia and retro waves in modern marketing and its relationship with viral spread.

### 1.1. Research Background

The return of nostalgia and retro waves is no longer an accident but a noticeable trend. For example, in the product field, the well-known luxury brand Burberry re-adopted a retro LOGO after five years of flat design, leading to the trend of nostalgia. In addition, from twenty years ago, CCD cameras have become the favorite of photographers and Internet celebrities because they bring a shooting experience different from contemporary technology. Regarding media, Netflix’s TV series “Stranger Things” triggered a cultural renaissance in the United States in the 1980s, arousing viewers’ deep nostalgia for that era. The movie “Lalaland” takes the audience back to the past through its playful attitude towards time, evoking nostalgia for the present. The field of music is no exception. Doja Cat’s song “Say So” became a global hit, triggering a craze for sampling music from the last century and conveying the resonant power of classical music among people of all ages. Furthermore, Lana Del Rey brings people a solid nostalgic emotion with her luxurious retro style and lyrical lyrics. Even

in the food industry, while constantly innovating and updating, KFC also launches classic limited-time products from time to time, such as the 1966 and 1971 American Holiday Buckets that were re-launched during the 2020 epidemic, bringing consumers back to the gold era.

These nostalgia and throwback marketing techniques are inextricably linked to virality. Through the organic combination of Social Currency, Triggers, Emotion, Public, Practical Value, and Story elements in the social media and communication power model (STEPPS), the influence of nostalgia and retro waves is like a Möbius strip, periodically reaching its peak, and then come back again after a plateau [1]. This phenomenon highlights that retro and nostalgia are not only temporary trend but also a business strategy and a long-lasting social phenomenon.

## 1.2. Commercial and Social Value

The renaissance of the nostalgia and retro wave is commercially significant. First, it provides a unique market positioning opportunity for brands to stand out in a competitive market. Brands can win over consumers and build brand loyalty through product and marketing strategies that resonate with nostalgic emotions.

Second, the wave of nostalgia and retro is closely connected with social values. They help people regain good memories from the past and promote resonance across age groups and cultures. This helps narrow the generation gap, increases understanding and interaction between the public, and creates more social cohesion.

In short, the revival of nostalgia and retro waves in modern marketing has significant commercial value and brings more emotional resonance and cultural exchanges to society. This study will explore this phenomenon in depth, taking Contagious's Möbius strip as an example, analyzing its role in viral transmission and the STEPPS model, and providing valuable insights for understanding modern marketing trends and social and cultural phenomena.

## 1.3. Literature Review

In the viral marketing of contemporary music creation and dissemination, producers have successfully used nostalgic and retro elements to stimulate the emotional memory of listeners by using framing factors such as Stories, Triggers, and Emotions, thereby prompting people to talk about and share the relevant topics enthusiastically. This phenomenon is particularly evident in music, where Balay's research reveals the widespread application of nostalgia trends in 21st-century popular music. He describes Doja Cat's song "Say So" as a musical "trojan horse of nostalgia" that successfully transports listeners back to that era by using musical elements from 1970s CHIC and Nile Rodgers. This song was released in early 2020 and was hugely successful after Minaj's remix, topping the Billboard chart for a while. Balay emphasizes that the song's success is partly due to its careful design, which creates nostalgic emotional resonance while leading listeners into a specific musical era [2].

At the same time, Berger's research proposed the concept of "building a Trojan horse", emphasizing the key role of stories in promoting products and ideas [1]. This concept suggests that elements of nostalgia can be naturally incorporated into stories to engage audiences more engagingly and humanly. Therefore, contemporary music, including Doja Cat's "Say So", The Weeknd's "Blinding Lights", and Dua Lipa's "Levitating", all create a music communication level through retro musical elements, lyrics, and images. The "Trojan horse of nostalgia" successfully used the STEPPS model to achieve viral spread on significant media platforms [1].

In media, Netflix's hit series *Stranger Things* provides a clear example of nostalgia fitting in with the STEPPS model. Griffith's research explores in depth how the show imitates the pop culture of the 1980s through imagery, music, narrative, and visual style, successfully bringing the audience back to that era [3]. At the same time, Relidzyńska's research also highlights that although the show mainly attracts young viewers aged 18 to 29, its target audience has complex emotional connections to the era depicted, proving the effectiveness of nostalgia elements in attracting audiences [4].

In the product realm, Ok's research highlights nostalgic elements in luxury advertising. He pointed out that luxury brands use personal nostalgia and historical nostalgia to attract different categories of consumers and build emotional connections [5]. Meanwhile, Taylor's reporting reveals how brands such as KFC are trying to attract consumers by launching products with a nostalgic element, especially during the pandemic. This phenomenon is based on people's collective feeling of losing many things, so they are more likely to be attracted by nostalgia, look back at the past, and feel comfort and joy [6].

Taken together, the findings from this literature demonstrate that nostalgia and retro waves play an important role in modern marketing. By stimulating nostalgia in consumers, these elements increase the appeal of products and media, promoting a viral effect. These findings provide valuable insights and implications for this article's exploration of the revival and viral spread of nostalgia and retro waves in modern marketing.

#### 1.4. Research Gap

In the laws of marketing, the traditional product life cycle model needs to go through four stages: Introduction, Growth, Maturity or saturation, and Decline. According to Peter and Alex's explanation, sales will continue to decline in the "decline" stage. Either the promotion strategy is not attempted, or the promotion strategy does not work, or the product becomes obsolete, and the only option is a replacement - the product is withdrawn from the market when it becomes unprofitable, or its substitutes are ready for the market [7]. The best choice is to continue to innovate and launch new products to maintain market competitiveness, but this also means abandoning the original products and concepts.

In media studies, most researchers have only studied two situations: Restorative Nostalgia and Nostalgia for the Present. This study mostly deals with what Boym calls "reflexive nostalgia." Using a form of nostalgia to flirt with the idea of traveling back in time. However, this study does not believe the past can be returned [8]. In this regard, Jameson proposed "A Nostalgia for the Present", which means that the current situation is described as if it were the situation at that time [9]. Lalaland uses this typical nostalgic technique, but it will inevitably lead to some logical paradoxes.

#### 1.5. Research Framework

According to the above logical concepts, when this study combines the two concepts, a unique situation will appear, which can explain why the retro wave returns again and again and becomes a special trend again and again. It is acceptable why people become more popular when products that have been launched are sold again; it is also acceptable why in the media industry, whether it is music, movies, TV series, or other different media, the ideology of retro and nostalgia is always a trend and is favored by the audience. From Introduction to Growth, then Maturity or saturation, and then Decline; after a period of depression, it returned to the starting point of introduction and started the cycle again, just like a Möbius strip about contagious. Therefore, in this paper, firstly, they will introduce the return of nostalgia and retro waves in contemporary viral marketing; secondly, they will explain Contagious's Möbius strip structure through two cases—it is different from the traditional model; Third, analyze how to achieve success in viral communication and marketing through STEPPS; finally, derive the correlation between nostalgia and viral marketing: STEPPS.

## 2. Case Description

This article will study different aspects of nostalgia, retro waves, and viral marketing through two cases and the connection of the STEPPS model in these cases.

### 2.1. The Retro Wave of Stranger Things

In terms of media, take "Stranger Things" as an example. The show uses a variety of means, including visuals, sounds, and effects, to bring audiences back to the United States in the 1980s. The

show drew extensively on the aesthetic and popular culture of the time. In terms of vision, different from modern cyberpunk and urban aesthetics, “Stranger Things” restores the appearance of the 1980s, including clothing, styling, merchandise, games, fashion, and scenes, presenting a nostalgic aesthetic [2]. In terms of hearing, “Stranger Things” takes the audience back in time through the music, lines, soundtrack, and sound effects that align with the 80s era [3]. This retro music atmosphere has aroused the audience’s enthusiastic pursuit, making the play successfully return to the public’s field of vision in all aspects, from the script to the music and peripheral products. The phenomenon, like a Möbius strip, has sparked nostalgia time and time again with great success.

## 2.2. KFC China’s “Back to 1987 Prices” Campaign

Regarding products, this study studied KFC’s “Back to 1987 Prices” campaign in China, which was held in 2017, the 30th anniversary of KFC’s entry into the Chinese market [10]. The campaign is designed to spark a collective nostalgic feeling. During the week-long event, KFC offered previous prices, such as mashed potatoes for only 0.8 yuan and plain chicken for 2.5 yuan. At the same time, KFC launched the topic “I have fried chicken, do you have a story to share?” stimulating people’s nostalgia for childhood and turning the event into a topic. The topic generated huge traction on social media, generating 2.116 million reads and 3,272 discussions [10]. This marketing campaign became a hot topic and increased KFC’s traffic and sales. From a consumer perspective, these prices are a bargain, so customers invite friends over and inadvertently order more food as a nostalgic reminiscence of their childhood. Therefore, the campaign triggered customers to share their youthful nostalgia on KFC’s social platforms.

These two cases show how nostalgia and retro elements can be combined with viral marketing in different fields and how to use the STEPPS model to achieve success. These cases highlight the connection between nostalgia and viral marketing and how this connection can effectively attract consumers, filling the research gap mentioned above.

## 3. Analysis on the Cases

### 3.1. The Analysis of the “Stranger Things” Retro Wave

The TV series “Stranger Things” has become a prominent phenomenon in modern pop culture, especially for its ability to elicit nostalgia for the 1980s and achieve viral marketing. This section will examine the current situation surrounding the retro wave of Stranger Things and explore how it uses Berger’s STEPPS framework to drive viral marketing [1].

#### 3.1.1. Social Currency

Stranger Things plays with the concept of social reputation by providing the audience with a sense of belonging and cultural relevance. The series fully embraces the 1980s aesthetic, emulating pop culture artifacts of the era, including the music, visuals, narrative, and opening credits. This integration creates a common experience among the audience, especially for the target audience of young adults aged 18 to 29 [3]. Viewers strengthen their social reputation by participating in discussions and sharing their enthusiasm for the show on social media platforms. They become part of a larger community of fans who appreciate the retro elements, thus increasing the show’s viral potential.

#### 3.1.2. Triggers

Berger defines triggers as prompts that guide people to think about a particular topic or idea [1]. Stranger Things utilizes triggers using 1980s references and elements that naturally trigger viewers’ memories and associations with specific themes or ideas. The show is set in the 1980s and references the time’s music, fashion, and technology, which trigger viewers to connect to the era or become familiar with its cultural details. At the same time, some songs, such as “Running Up That Hill”, serve as triggers in “Stranger Things” because they are classical music from the 1980s and fit in with the

era background of the show [2]. When the audience hears these familiar tracks in the play, the music becomes a triggering event, triggering their memories and emotions of that era. The songs serve as triggers for the musical elements, making the audience more deeply involved in the plot and motivating them to share content about the music and plot on social media. Additionally, each new season release serves as a triggering event that sparks discussion and excitement on social media platforms. These triggers keep the show in viewers' minds, contributing to its virality.

### 3.1.3. Emotion

Emotion plays a crucial role in *Stranger Things*' virality. The series combines nostalgia, suspense, and horror to trigger various emotions in viewers. The production team of *Stranger Things* reproduced that era's cultural, fashion, and technological elements by setting the story background in the 1980s. This throwback sensibility triggers nostalgia for the era, especially for viewers who grew up in that era [2]. Audiences can find familiar elements in the characters, costumes, music, and props that create a deep emotional connection. Thus, the show draws on the audience's emotional connection to their childhood or the 1980s to make them deeply invested in the plot and characters [3]. The gripping and often disturbing plot generate emotional anticipation and excitement, encouraging viewers to share their emotional reactions online. This emotional engagement enhances the show's infectiousness.

### 3.1.4. Public

The "public" aspect of STEPPS concerns the visibility of an idea or product [1]. *Stranger Things* benefits from being widely recognized and discussed. Viewers who share musings, fan theories, and even jokes about the show make it part of the public discourse. This visibility created a snowball effect as more people became aware of and curious about the series. *Stranger Things* has made the most of its public presence, encouraging fans to participate in promotional events and role-playing, further cementing its place in pop culture.

### 3.1.5. Practical Value

Although "*Stranger Things*" relies primarily on emotion and cultural appeal, it also offers practical value to viewers. The series' compelling narrative and well-built characters provide entertainment and practical value through escapism. Additionally, references to the history and culture of the 1980s may arouse the viewer's interest in learning more about that era, providing an educational aspect.

### 3.1.6. Stories

*Stranger Things* excels at storytelling, an important part of viral marketing [1]. The series weaves compelling storylines that engage viewers and encourage them to discuss and speculate on various plot elements and character development. These stories became the basis for online discussions and fan-generated content, fueling the show's viral growth. At the same time, *Stranger Things* uses classic songs as music and an important element in the story [2]. In the play, songs are often tied to specific situations and emotions, adding depth to the characters' experiences and plot development. When audiences hear these songs in the show, they resonate emotionally because the lyrics and music fit the characters' experiences. This emotional resonance prompted viewers to share stories on social media about the songs' role in the plot and their emotional role, which further spread the word about the series.

In conclusion, *Stranger Things* has effectively utilized the STEPPS framework to create a viral marketing strategy. Using elements such as social reputation, triggers, emotion, public visibility, practical value, and compelling stories, the show has transformed its retro wave into a viral phenomenon in modern marketing. The series' ability to elicit strong emotions, trigger memories, and engage audiences on multiple levels has contributed to its continued success and importance in popular culture.

### 3.2. The Analysis of KFC China's "Back to 1987 Prices" Campaign

According to Berger's STEPPS framework, this study can interpret how KFC China's "Back to 1987 Prices" campaign uses social reputation, triggers, emotions, public, practical value, and stories to drive viral marketing effects [1].

#### 3.2.1. Social Currency

KFC China's campaign leverages the brand's social reputation. The event celebrated KFC's 30th anniversary in China, which added to the brand's historical and cultural relevance [11]. Consumers are willing to participate in this activity because it is associated with a brand with a strong social reputation [1]. The public's active participation and sharing form the driving force for word-of-mouth communication. When friends, family, and colleagues hear about KFC's activities, they may be influenced by their friends' positive comments and go to KFC to participate. This kind of word-of-mouth communication accelerates the spread of the event.

#### 3.2.2. Triggers

The "Back to 1987 Prices" in the campaign acted as a trigger [10]. This prompt triggers people's nostalgia and inspires an emotional connection with the brand. KFC China cleverly used this trigger to make people rethink and discuss the brand.

#### 3.2.3. Emotion

KFC China's activities attract people by triggering their nostalgia. Consumers connect emotionally with their childhood or the 1980s as campaigns remind them of the good old days of this period. Emotional engagement facilitates the spread of activities [1].

#### 3.2.4. Public

In terms of social sharing, once consumers feel the practical value of the price and nostalgic experience, they tend to share their KFC experiences on social media platforms. They might post photos, comments, or status updates expressing their satisfaction and nostalgia. These shares spread the word of the event to the wider public. Regarding public topics, through the topic "I have fried chicken, do you have a story to share?" on social platforms, people began to discuss their KFC experiences, share their nostalgic memories, and celebrate KFC's 30th anniversary with others [10]. This public nature made the event spread rapidly on social media, attracting more people's participation and attention.

#### 3.2.5. Practical Value

The most apparent practical value of this nostalgic marketing is the price discount. During the event, KFC China lowered the prices of some food products, such as plain chicken and mashed potatoes [10]. This allows consumers to enjoy KFC's products at lower prices, saving them money. This price advantage attracts many customers to KFC stores because they think it is profitable [11]. In fact, in addition to affordability in terms of price, the event also provides consumers with the practical value of nostalgia. Those who lived through it in the 1980s may feel nostalgic for this event. They can recall their youthful experiences by tasting KFC products at that time. This nostalgic experience is a practical value that has nothing to do with the price, but it inspires an emotional connection to KFC and draws them to the event.

#### 3.2.6. Stories

KFC China's campaign creates a compelling story around nostalgia and the brand's history. People started sharing their experiences with KFC, and their connection to 1987, and the stories spread widely on social media.

Taken together, KFC China's "Back to 1987 Prices" campaign cleverly leveraged elements of Berger's STEPPS framework to capture attention, spark emotional resonance, and spark virality on social media Effect. The campaign successfully linked nostalgia to the brand, making KFC's 30th-anniversary celebration in China a high-profile event.

## 4. Investigation and Suggestions

### 4.1. The First Type of Möbius Strip: Product-Based Nostalgic Marketing

Based on the product-based STEPPS nostalgia marketing of KFC China's "Back to 1987 Prices" campaign, this study can draw the first type of Möbius strip: product-based nostalgia marketing type.

The product-based Möbius strip is a linear structure that forms viral marketing through the development process of the product and consumers' nostalgia. It combines STEPPS with the product to achieve a "palindrome" effect. Symmetrical complete loop, thus forming a Möbius strip effect.

Based on case 2.2, KFC China's "Back to 1987 Prices" Campaign, and 3.2 The Analysis of KFC China's "Back to 1987 Prices" Campaign, this study can summarize this product-based nostalgia marketing Möbius Ring model and development steps.

1. Product launch: The Möbius strip takes product launch as the first node. When a new brand or product is launched, its freshness and uniqueness, or Unique Selling Point, will attract the first batch of consumers, thereby beginning to accumulate word-of-mouth and create commercial value. In the case of KFC China launching "Back to 1987 Prices" on the occasion of its 30th-anniversary celebration, the KFC brand first landed in China 30 years ago, and the fast-food business model brought freshness to Chinese consumers. Launch a product by arousing potential consumers' curiosity and harvesting the first batch of loyal consumers.

2. Stories: Brands or companies use Stories in the STEPPS framework based on product launches, use advertising and other methods to integrate products into stories, and convey product information through advertising, social media, video content, and other methods to emphasize the brand. History and product value win word of mouth and achieve viral marketing effects. KFC launched non-local products such as original chicken 30 years ago by telling American stories, advertising, and spreading word-of-mouth through these fascinating stories.

3. Public: The brand attracts more consumers to learn about and purchase the product through Stories and new products, increasing the number of consumers. According to the brand development model and word-of-mouth spread from person to person, it becomes popular in the market. Through these methods, KFC attracts a large number of consumers, becomes a public topic with the labels of "fast food" and "Western-style catering", and increases the brand's visibility and social reputation through the strategy of rapid expansion of stores.

4. Practical Value: Cheap and affordable prices will attract more potential consumers. When brands and companies launch products, they will enter the market at a suitable price and set prices based on consumer conditions. In this case, China's consumption level 30 years ago was relatively low, so KFC's pricing of its products was relatively cheap. In addition, KFC also provides price discounts through some activities and promotional coupons, attracting more consumers to KFC, saving their expenses, creating Practical Value, further gaining a reputation on price, defeating competitors, and becoming the market leader.

5. Social Currency: When a product reaches the maturity stage with its launch, and with the marketing brought about by viral marketing and word-of-mouth, the product's sales will reach their peak, thus creating a Social Currency. KFC's sales have gradually stabilized at a peak over time, and some Unique products and activities have become a kind of social currency. Consumers are willing to share their experiences to demonstrate their taste and participation.

6. Triggers: Through time accumulation, some product images become deeply rooted in people's hearts and become Triggers. For example, in KFC China, a product called "Tenniu Wufang" was once popular but later withdrawn from the market due to other reasons, but people have always missed this product; for Chinese consumers, "Tenniu Wufang" It is a trigger that consumers have for KFC from more than ten years ago out of nostalgia. These products or activities will trigger people's nostalgia, establish a profound image of the product in consumers' minds, and strengthen their emotional connection with KFC.

7. Emotion: Emotion becomes the center of the Möbius strip. With the development of the economy and changes in GDP and GNI, commodity price increases are a common situation in the

market, and old products will also go through the decline stage. At the same time, launching new products will diversify consumers' choices, neglecting some long-standing but expensive classic products. However, after a period (which may be short-term or long-term), consumers will miss the original products and their low prices, thus generating a nostalgic emotion and making consumers desire to buy again. KFC China successfully capitalized on nostalgia and launched the "Back to 1987 Prices" campaign on its 30th-anniversary celebration, providing consumers with a nostalgic experience, stimulating the emotional resonance of old consumers, and re-attracting new consumers. Create a new reputation and capitalize on the old reputation.

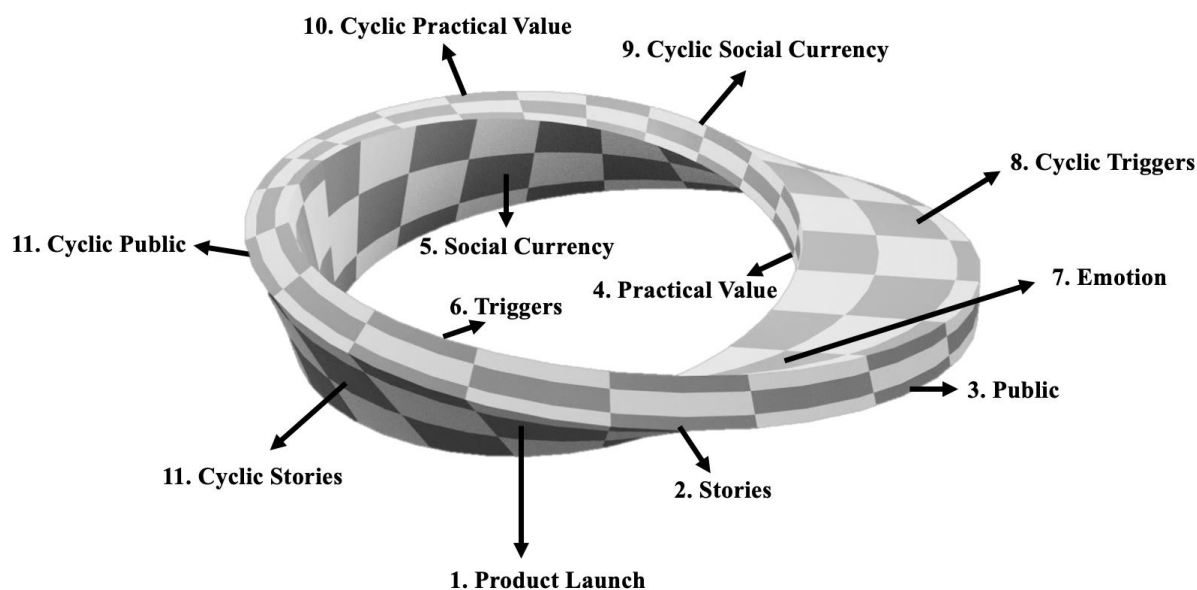
8. Cyclic Triggers: After experiencing viral spread in the SPPSTE sequence after product launch, it returns to Triggers in a palindromic linear pattern. This means that brands or products use Triggers in a way that takes advantage of people's nostalgia to re-launch the product, return it to its original price, or conduct limited-time sales returns. KFC is constantly using triggers. For example, in a case, it brought the price of a product back to 30 years ago, triggering people's memories of 30 years ago at a low price, arousing positive nostalgia, and making consumers buy and maintain interest. This approach can be summarized as the brand launching similar activities using nostalgic elements, such as brand history and emotional connections, to re-ignite consumers' interest, forming Triggers.

9. Cyclic Social Currency: The secondary word-of-mouth brought by Triggers and the nostalgic connotation given to the product. This Emotion allows people to accelerate the communication effect due to the accumulated social reputation and word-of-mouth after hearing about it, making the product nostalgic. It has become a social currency, triggering a retro wave in the product world. In KFC's viral marketing, the Public's active participation and social sharing form the driving force for word-of-mouth communication, making KFC's nostalgic marketing, the reappearance of old products, price returns, and other activities a hot topic.

10. Cyclical Practical Value: Activities driven by nostalgic marketing. Low prices or limited-time returns of products will attract more consumers, create a price difference, create a sense of contrast and freshness, and make people think they are profitable, thus forming Practical Value. KFC's prices have returned to those of 30 years ago, and the most truly demonstrated economic advantage is its price advantage. Lower prices will lead to lower profits, but through activities, more consumers will be attracted again, making products that have no longer sold well become popular again and making consumers think this is a profitable opportunity.

11. Circular Public: Because of this actual value, people and brands or suppliers begin to share and spread on social platforms at the same time, causing people to discuss this actual value and nostalgia, history, or products. Through these activities, the number of consumers has been re-accumulated for the brand. The Public began to share their KFC experiences and nostalgic memories, and social media was flooded with event-related discussions.

12. Cyclic Stories: The cyclical spread of word-of-mouth allows more and more stories between people and products to spread virally through the media. Not only do consumers tell their own stories, but products also create nostalgia through advertising stories that connect nostalgia to the brand. KFC's activities triggered people's emotional involvement in the product and incorporated product advantages and marketing methods into the story by recording, collecting, and creating stories, forming a Trojan horse spread through the media to strengthen the brand and nostalgia. Get in touch and win the word of mouth again.



**Figure 1.** Product-Based Nostalgic Marketing Möbius Strip

(Photo credit: Origin)

Therefore, this study can summarize the first type of Möbius strip in Figure 1: Product-Based Nostalgic Marketing Möbius Strip. This Möbius strip reflects the continuity and circularity of the product-based STEPPS nostalgia marketing strategy. The entire Möbius strip cycle is based on the repeated launch of products, starting with Stories to create value, achieving communication effects through the Public, and then using Practical Value to attract more potential consumers to join, and creating Social Currency as the product and word-of-mouth reach the maturity stage. Classic activities and products have become the triggers of the brand, reaching the center of the Möbius strip: Emotion, successfully forming brand value through viral marketing and word-of-mouth, and over time, it has inspired people to nostalgia. In the Möbius strip of product-based nostalgic marketing, after experiencing the central Emotion, the development process returns to Triggers as a palindrome. This is the second time that the brand or product is carried out in the way of people’s nostalgic psychology. Marketing, and making the nostalgic product itself become another kind of social currency, and then creating practical value through low prices and other marketing methods to make consumers think they are profitable, and then use Public to spread again, and give it again through Stories It increases the nostalgic emotional value of the product and achieves a contagious effect. Therefore, this Möbius strip can be summarized as the Emotion-centered palindrome of SPPSTETSPPS. This contagious Möbius strip enables brands to continuously capture consumers’ attention, inspire emotional resonance, achieve viral effects, and remain popular in the market.

#### 4.2. The Second Type of Möbius Strip: Media-Based Nostalgic Marketing

Compared with the palindromic Möbius strip based on product-based logic, the media-based nostalgic marketing Möbius strip is a logical model like “big rings within small rings”. This can be explained by the fact that after the six elements of STEPPS are arranged and combined in sequence, different elements in the media, such as products, clothing, images, and music displayed in the media, are driven through the improvement of word-of-mouth and popularity, thus through people The nostalgia complex achieves a contagious effect. However, this model is more flexible compared to the product-based nostalgia marketing Möbius strip. In the early cycle of the Möbius strip, the six elements of STEPPS can be carried out according to the media and nostalgia. Different permutations and combinations can achieve the most contagious effect that suits the media. By creating a retro wave layout, the old and possibly even outdated products, music, and clothing in the media can be brought back into trend, creating a nostalgic and popular label, like a Möbius strip, that returns to the public eye after experiencing the “dark side”.

For example, in case 2.1, The retro wave of *Stranger Things*, *Stranger Things*, a phenomenally popular TV series set in the United States in the 1980s, was used as a medium to analyze the products, popular factors, music, clothing, and even mantras have the effect of “adding value”. Through people’s nostalgia or curiosity about that era, this nostalgia makes these concrete and abstract points contagious again. From this, this study can summarize the model and development steps of this media-based nostalgic marketing Möbius strip.

1. Stories: “*Stranger Things*” sets the plot’s background in the 1980s. The background of Stories is created through retro elements such as brightly colored costumes and disco music, nostalgic visual effects of American towns and ice rinks, and the background of the era. Thus, it created a Trojan horse, integrating the spiritual values of “freedom, love, innocence, and unity” that it wants to express and the creative staff’s nostalgia for music, times, and objects into it, weaving a fascinating storyline that makes the audience Actively participate in and share their plot interpretations and emotional experiences.

2. Triggers: *Stranger Things* further uses social currency to create trendy old objects, such as the song “*Running Up That Hill*”, roller skates, rock long hair, and *Dungeons and Dragons* games, combined with cultural elements through tech-nostalgia techniques. As a trigger, it triggers the audience’s memories and emotions of that era and gives it the emotional value of hope, redemption, freedom, love, and hate.

3. Emotion: Audiences develop deep emotional connections with the characters, costumes, music, and props in the play because these elements remind them of their childhood or experiences in the 1980s. This kind of nostalgia causes people to have positive or negative emotions. Positive emotions can motivate people and establish an emotional connection with the media, while negative emotions can also make people nostalgic.

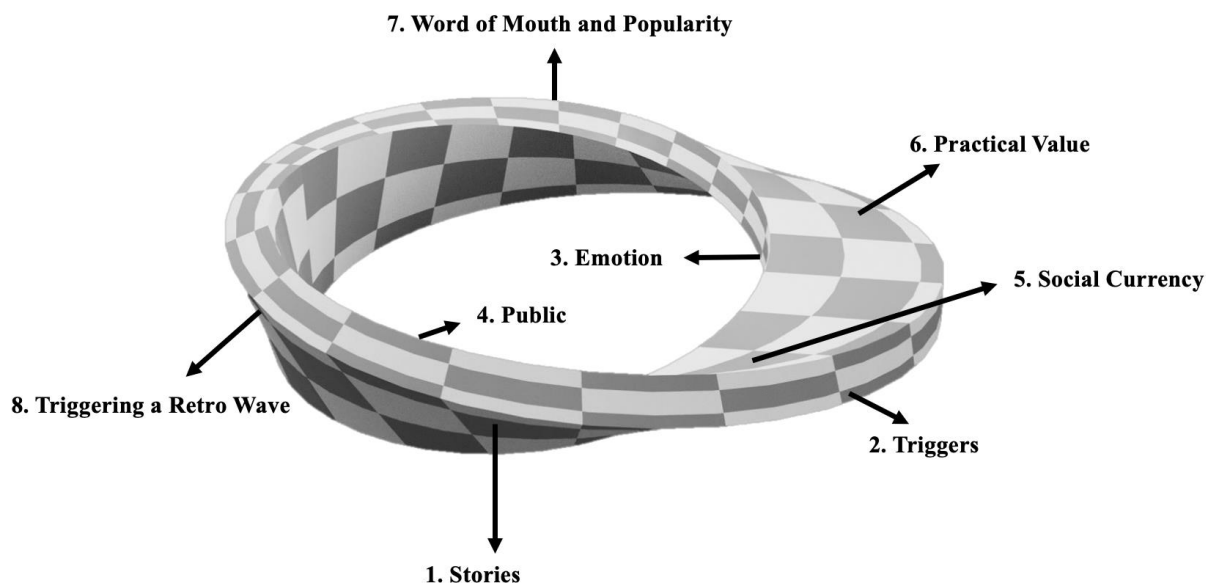
4. Public: The audience shared their enthusiasm for the play, forming a public topic. They discuss the plot, characters, and nostalgia on social media, further expanding the show’s popularity and visibility.

5. Social Currency: *Stranger Things* has created a social reputation by setting a unique era background, the exposure of retroelements, and the nostalgic visual and auditory effects. This is conducive to the audience’s willingness to participate in the play because it is associated with that era of solid social reputation, and the media creates social currency through tech nostalgia, making the audience feel like they are insiders.

6. Practical Value: “*Stranger Things*” provides the audience with the practical value of entertainment and escapism and inspires the audience’s interest in old-era culture and activities that have gradually disappeared, including rekindling childhood games represented by *Dungeons and Dragons*.

7. Word-of-mouth and popularity: Through the interaction of STEPPS and the effect brought about by nostalgic marketing, audiences will share and discuss it extensively, helping the reputation and popularity of “*Stranger Things*” to continue to increase and attract more viewers. Achieve the effect of connecting the past and the next through the media to drive development.

8. Triggering a retro wave: Through the media, nostalgia and viral marketing methods will drive the works to achieve contagious effects. Their nostalgic emotions and cultural elements will further drive those long-dormant products; clothes, music, and images have returned to fashion, interpreting classics that never go out of style and becoming part of contemporary culture.



**Figure 2.** Media-Based Nostalgic Marketing Möbius Strip  
 (Photo credit: Origin)

Therefore, this study can summarize the second type of Möbius strip in Fig. 2: Media-Based Nostalgic Marketing Möbius Strip. This Möbius strip uses “Stranger Things” as the core medium in each round. It integrates nostalgia through the model of “Stories - Triggers - Emotion - Public - Social Currency - Practical Value - Word of Mouth and Popularity - Triggering a Retro Wave.” Emotional and cultural elements trigger and spread, constantly expanding the influence of the media, and through the audience’s emotional resonance and sharing, nostalgic elements become a widespread phenomenon again. This model successfully combines emotion, social communication, and cultural influence to create a lasting cultural phenomenon, bringing sustained influence and visibility to the brand or medium.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1. Key Findings

Overall, the analysis of the “Stranger Things” retro wave and KFC China’s “Back to 1987 Prices” campaign demonstrates the power of nostalgia marketing in driving viral success. In the case of “Stranger Things,” the series effectively used Berger’s STEPPS framework to trigger viral marketing by leveraging Social Currency, Triggers, Emotion, Public, Practical Value, and Stories. This approach has transformed the show’s retro wave into a contagious phenomenon in modern marketing, cementing its importance in pop culture.

Through these two cases, this study has summarized through investigation two Möbius strip models that combine nostalgia with STEPPS in viral marketing. The first type of Möbius Strip is a Product-Based Nostalgic Marketing Möbius Strip. This model presents a palindromic linear model effect, summarizing “Product Launch - Stories - Public - Practical Value - Social Currency - Triggers - Emotion - Cyclic Triggers - Cyclic Social Currency - Cyclic Practical Value - Cyclic Public - Cyclic Stories - Product Launch” forms a sustainable business and communication model.

The second type of Möbius Strip is a Media-Based Nostalgic Marketing Möbius Strip. The basic logic of this model is “Stories - Triggers - Emotion - Public - Social Currency - Practical Value - Word of Mouth and Popularity - Triggering a Retro Wave.” Compared with the product-based model, the media-based model pays more attention to the interaction of STEPPS to maximize the effect according to specific cases and achieve contagious effects through people’s nostalgia, triggering a retro wave in the market.

## 5.2. Research Significance

The study's significance is to explore nostalgia marketing's business value in contemporary marketing strategies. Both cases illustrate how leveraging nostalgia can profoundly impact brand visibility, consumer engagement, and market success. Nostalgia marketing not only serves as a bridge between the past and present but also connects consumers emotionally.

In the case study of "Stranger Things," this study found that the retro wave phenomenon not only revived interest in the 1980s but also created a sense of community among fans and consumers. It drives discussion and social media sharing, making it a powerful tool for content creators and marketers looking to connect with their target audience. The media-based Möbius strip model explains why the media that generates people have almost "timeless" characteristics, creating a multi-dimensional and multi-faceted retro wave.

On the other hand, KFC China's campaign demonstrates how brands can use nostalgia to celebrate their history and resonate with consumers. By offering real value at discounted prices and leveraging consumers' emotional connection to the past, nostalgia was evoked by creating an obvious and memorable event that became contagious through a product-based Möbius strip model.

In summary, the research highlights the potential of nostalgia marketing in contemporary marketing strategies to influence consumer behaviour, enhance brand recognition, and drive business growth. Drawing on two Möbius strip models derived from research, it highlights the importance of understanding consumers' emotional connections to the past and leveraging this in marketing strategies.

## 5.3. Limitations and Future Studies

While the research reveals the effectiveness of nostalgia marketing, it is necessary to acknowledge its limitations. One limitation is the focus on a specific case, which may not fully represent a more diverse range of marketing strategies. Furthermore, the analysis relied primarily on secondary data, and future research could gain insights into the emotional aspects of nostalgia by including primary data such as consumer surveys and interviews.

Future research in this area should explore nostalgia in different cultural contexts and its impact on different populations. This may involve cross-cultural comparison because, in different eras, people from different cultural backgrounds have different understandings and emotions of contemporary nostalgia; for example, in the 1980s, the United States was experiencing a golden age, but some Southeast Asian countries were experiencing Poverty. Therefore, the definition and emotional output of nostalgia are also different. In future research, this study will explore the changes in the appeal of nostalgia in various eras to better correct and integrate the Möbius strip model. In addition, studying the ethical implications of nostalgia marketing and its potential to manipulate consumer emotions are also directions for future research.

In summary, this study highlights the importance of nostalgia marketing in contemporary marketing strategies. By understanding consumers' emotional connections to the past, companies can harness the power of nostalgia to drive viral success and foster brand loyalty. However, future research should continue exploring nostalgia's complexities in marketing and its broader impact on society.

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