

**The effect of influencer driven Nostalgia marketing on Gen Z purchase intention:
Examining the mediating roles of emotional engagement, influencer credibility, brand
relationship, and brand recommendation**

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Abstract

This study examines influencer-driven nostalgia marketing effectiveness on Gen Z consumers' purchase intentions, with the mediating roles of emotional engagement, credibility, brand relationship, and brand recommendation. Drawing on theories of the stimulus-organism response model, source credibility, and consumer behavior, the study investigates how nostalgia-based influencer content influences purchase intention. A quantitative research approach is proposed, using 307 data collected through a structured questionnaire from Gen Z social media users. "The study was tested using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM)". Findings from the study show influencer-driven nostalgia marketing has significant effects on brand relationship ($\beta = 0.656$, $t = 14.473$), brand recommendation ($\beta = 0.540$, $t = 10.523$), emotional engagement ($\beta = 0.600$, $t = 13.376$), and influencer credibility ($\beta = 0.487$, $t = 8.168$). Further, brand recommendation significantly influences purchase intention ($\beta = 0.367$, $t = 5.042$), while influencer credibility also exerts a significant positive effect on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.171$, $t = 2.335$). However, the effects of brand relationship on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.122$, $t = 1.585$), emotional engagement on intention of purchase ($\beta = 0.085$, $t = 1.126$), and influencer-driven nostalgia marketing on intention of purchase ($\beta = 0.078$, $t = 1.183$) are not statistically significant. This research recommends that influencer credibility and brand recommendations act as key mediating factors. Thus, research provides direction to the brands and marketers on the effectiveness of influencer-driven nostalgia marketing.

Keywords: Nostalgia Marketing, Influencer Marketing, Purchase Intention, Influencer Credibility, Brand Recommendation, Brand Relationship, Emotional Engagement, Generation Z

JEL Classification: M31, M37, D12

1. Introduction

Influencer marketing has transformed the marketing landscape, and effective strategies for brands to engage consumers who are active on social media platforms (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). Social media influencers (SMIs) are the opinion leaders who influence consumer perceptions, attitudes, and shape purchase decisions through creative content among the younger generation (Fakhreddin & Foroudi, 2022). Generation Z, defined as people who were born between 1996 and 2010, is among various generational cohorts, and among them, Gen Z consumers are highly influential and engaging due to high digital media usage and social media networking platforms (Erwin et al., 2023). Influencers are more relatable to Gen Z due to product discovery, brand evaluation, and shape purchase decisions, and Gen Z consumers perceive influencers as more trustworthy than traditional celebrity endorsers in broadcast advertising (Chiu & Ho, 2023). Nostalgia refers to the association with past experiences and memories. In marketing, it is a strategic use of memories, retro themes, emotional connection, and cultural positions to remind consumers about past experiences and feelings. Research studies state that nostalgia improves consumers emotional engagement, supports self-identity, and significantly affects consumers attitudes toward products and services (Ju et al., 2016). Further, marketers and brands employ nostalgia marketing to align consumers and brand attributes by developing emotional experiences (Youn & Doodoo, 2021). Some research suggests that nostalgia is basically associated with older generations due to recalling their old memories. Recent studies demonstrate that Gen Z consumers experience “vicarious nostalgia” through experiencing the retro aesthetics, vintage trends, and recreating the past using digital media, which is further posted on social media platforms, including Instagram, Facebook and YouTube. Furthermore, studies suggest that the influencers are encouraged to leverage nostalgic narratives to enhance audience emotional engagement and shape consumer purchase decisions (Jain et al., 2025). Studies state that the use of Influencers develops an emotional relationship between the products through branded content by integrating nostalgic elements, including retro-style fashion, childhood toys, old television references, vintage products, and cultural celebrations. Further, such strategies are highly effective through authentic content, emotional relationship and experiential consumption among Gen Z cohorts over functional product benefits (Dempsey, 2025). Nostalgic content enhances consumer psychological engagement through emotional experiences to influencers and brands, which further affects purchase intentions (Wen et al., 2019). Although the importance is still there is limited empirical research on how nostalgia-driven influencer campaigns affect Gen Z purchase intentions (Shah et al., 2023).

Present studies on influencer marketing focused on influencer attributes such as physical and social attractiveness, credibility, expertise, authenticity, and trustworthiness in shaping purchase

decisions (Ghosh et al., 2024). Previous studies on source credibility theory suggest that consumers who perceive influencers as credible, trustworthy, and knowledgeable are more likely to accept persuasive messages, which significantly affects consumer trust, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions among Gen Z consumers (Nugroho et al., 2022). In the context of nostalgia marketing, the relationship between emotional engagement and purchase intention (Babu et al., 2024).

In nostalgia marketing, emotional engagement is a key psychological factor that influences consumer behaviour through stronger loyalty, favourable attitudes, and higher purchase intentions (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). Influencer perceived as similar, relatable, emotionally supportive, and aligned with follower personal identities and experiences leads to higher emotional engagement. Further, studies found that nostalgic content strengthens follower emotional connections through warm memories and heartfelt feelings, familiarity, and belonging (Sedikides et al., 2022). Previous research states that the relationship between follower and influencer interaction increases the brand engagement and purchase intention mediated through emotional engagement (Shah et al., 2023). However, limited studies have investigated influencers' nostalgia marketing and Gen Z purchase intention through emotional engagement as a mediating variable. Furthermore, when measuring the influencer campaign effectiveness, the important constructs are message transparency, authenticity, and perceived credibility. Based on the literature, studies show that authentic content, trust, and informational value influence purchase decisions and affect consumer brand perceptions (Liu & Zheng, 2024). Therefore, scholars focused on how nostalgic content affects the influencer's credibility and Gen Z intention of purchase behaviour. Further, existing research in the digital media environment studies identified the research gap on how emotional engagement and influencer credibility act as a mediating role in the influencer-driven nostalgia marketing. In this study, the researcher applies the stimulus organism response model, source credibility theory, and emotional attachment theory to provide theoretical and practical implications on influencer-driven nostalgia marketing affects Gen Z consumer emotional engagement, influencer credibility, brand relationships and brand recommendations (Babu et al., 2024).

Although the integrated influencer-driven nostalgia marketing is popular, research is short of several gaps in the existing studies. First, a limited empirical study on how influencers employ nostalgic content to influence consumer behavior in social media platforms (Jain et al., 2025). The emerging phenomenon of influencer-driven nostalgia marketing, particularly on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, remains underexplored within contemporary marketing literature (Ramaifo, 2024). Second, existing studies predominantly focus on influencer attributes such as attractiveness, expertise, trustworthiness, authenticity, and parasocial interaction, which influence engagement and intention of purchase. However, there is a limited attention has been paid to the emotional mechanisms through which nostalgic influencer content affects consumer decision-making (Zaman et al., 2025). Further, the mediating role of emotional engagement in explaining the relationship between influencer-driven nostalgia marketing and

purchase intention has not been sufficiently addressed in prior empirical studies (Santini et al., 2023). Third, the majority of nostalgia marketing studies have focused on older consumer segments who possess direct personal memories associated with nostalgic stimuli. However, Gen Z consumers often experience “vicarious nostalgia” through digitally mediated retro content, vintage aesthetics, and cultural trends they did not personally experience (Z. Chen et al., 2026). Existing literature provides a limited understanding of how influencer-generated nostalgic narratives influence Gen Z consumers, whose digital consumption behaviours and emotional responses differ substantially from previous generations (Srivastava, 2025). Fourth, although credibility has been identified as a significant predictor of consumer trust and persuasion effectiveness, few studies have examined its role within nostalgia-based influencer campaigns (Khandelwal et al., 2026). In highly commercialised social media environments where consumers are increasingly sceptical of sponsored content, understanding whether influencer credibility strengthens emotional attachment and purchase intentions is critically important (Ikpeazu & Ogbeide, 2026). Finally, research focuses on holistic empirical models explaining the psychological pathways through which influencer-driven nostalgia marketing influences Gen Z purchase intentions (Jiang et al., 2024).

Therefore, this study develops a comprehensive framework to address the research gaps by empirically testing the effect of influencer-driven nostalgia marketing on Gen Z purchase intentions, with emotional engagement, perceived credibility and social media platforms as key explanatory constructs. Furthermore, it aims to examine the mediating roles of brand relationship and brand recommendation in Gen Z purchase intentions. Finally, this study validates a conceptual framework that integrates nostalgia marketing, emotional engagement, brand relationship, brand recommendation, influencer credibility, and purchase intention in the context of Gen Z consumers, providing theoretical and managerial implications for marketers. This study advances the influencer marketing and consumer behavior literature by extending the “*Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Model*” to offer based on emotional and credibility mechanisms underlying nostalgia-driven digital marketing strategies. Thus, it has the following research questions (RQ).

RQ1: How does influencer-driven nostalgia marketing influence Gen Z consumers’ purchase intentions on social media platforms?

RQ2: Do emotional engagement and influencer credibility shape Gen Z behavioural outcomes through nostalgic content and influencer marketing?

RQ3: What is the mediating effect of brand relationship and brand recommendation between influencer-driven nostalgia marketing and purchase intentions among Gen Z?

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1 Influencer Marketing and Gen Z Behaviour

In digital media communication, social media platforms have transformed traditional marketing communication and become a prominent communication tool by facilitating content creators in shaping consumer perceptions and buying behavior. Influencer marketing is generally defined as individuals using social media platforms to create content to disseminate product information through creative messages to their followers. Content creators are perceived as similar, interactive, and authentic in developing cognitive and affective relationships with the audience over traditional celebrity endorsements (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Studies show that Gen Z consumers are highly engaged in social media and their purchase decision is shaped by influencer recommendations and promotional campaigns (Djafarova & Fouts, 2022). Further, with high digital literacy of Gen Z consumers, their purchase decision is characterised by a preference for authentic content, emotional engagement, and influencer advocacy in online communities. Freberg et al., (2011) study suggests that Gen Z consumers trust influencer advocacy due to a relatable and credible source of information over conventional advertising. Furthermore, in digital marketing campaigns, influencer emotional storytelling and tailored communication strategies shape consumer attitudes (Belanche et al., 2021). The literature suggests that influencer characteristics such as authenticity, trustworthiness, expertise, and parasocial interaction play a significant role in consumer purchase intention (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). However, in the context of underdeveloped economies, limited studies on the relationship between Gen Z emotional engagement and purchase intention mediated by influencer attributes in digital marketing environments. Therefore, studies further focus on integrating nostalgic content in influencer communication to understand consumer behavior among Gen Z.

2.2 Nostalgia Marketing

The concept of nostalgia marketing is the fundamental strategic use of emotional memories, retro themes, aesthetic imagery, previous experiences, and cultural references to remind positive emotional, cognitive, attitudinal, behavioural, and symbolic responses (Holbrook & Schindler, 1991). Previous studies state that nostalgia marketing is considered for older generations by reminding memories and experiences about products. The recent studies identify that nostalgic content significantly influences Gen Z consumers through “vicarious nostalgia,” where people feel emotionally attached to the time periods they did not experience (Merchant & Ford, 2008). The number of studies on the influence of nostalgia shows that the social media platforms enhanced nostalgic trend popularity through revitalising vintage fashion, aesthetic imagery, retro music, television references, and early internet search culture. Nostalgia marketing uses storytelling templates to increase the emotional engagement, similarity and develop a strong audience relationship (Muehling & Pascal, 2011). Further, nostalgic content often makes consumers feel comfort, familiarity, belongingness, and emotional connections. Accordingly, studies suggest that

nostalgia acts as an emotional marketing stimulus to enhance consumer attitudes, emotional engagement, and purchase intentions (Batcho, 2013). In the context of influencer marketing, nostalgic message appeals impact audience perceived receptiveness toward promotional messages through influencer content authenticity and emotional storytelling. Therefore, the present study focuses on how influencer-driven nostalgia marketing affects emotional engagement with parasocial interaction by creating a persuasive communication message to increase consumer attachment and shape consumer purchasing behaviour. With the increasing importance of nostalgic influencer content across social media platforms, empirical studies examining the direct relationship between influencer nostalgia marketing and Gen Z behavioural response. Existing research focuses on nostalgia in traditional advertising settings, leaving a gap in understanding its effects within influencer-based digital communication. Therefore, Empirical studies that examine the direct relationship between influencer-driven nostalgia marketing and purchase intention remain limited.

2.3 Purchase Intention

Ajzen (1991) stated that intention of purchase is a willingness to purchase a product in the future and is considered to predict actual buying behaviour. The factors influencing purchase intention include consumers' cognitive, emotional, and social attitudes toward products, influencers' trust, previous experiences, and perceived value. Influencers increase the product awareness, perceived credibility and significantly shape the purchase intention through advocacy (De Veirman et al., 2017). However, a lack of transparency in sponsorship disclosure and peer validation during purchase decisions leads to Gen Z consumers being susceptible towards influencer recommendations. Research studies state that emotional engagement creates memorable experience influences purchase intention by creating emotional and meaningful consumer experiences (Kim & Kim, 2021). Nostalgic content has a strong effect on consumer willingness to buy products that are associated with emotional and symbolic meanings (Gu et al., 2021). Moreover, emotional engagement, identified as an important construct toward influencers and brand impact, includes behavioural responses, repurchase intention, brand advocacy, and purchase likelihood (Tarabieh et al., 2024). Although present studies show that influencer-driven nostalgia marketing has an impact on purchase intention through emotional engagement and influencer credibility, few empirical studies have integrated these variables in the research. More specifically, how influencer-driven nostalgia marketing influences purchase intentions through emotional engagement and credibility among Gen Z consumers.

2.4 Theoretical Foundation

This study employs various theoretical perspectives to describe the relationship between influencer-driven nostalgia marketing, emotional engagement, influencer credibility, and intention of purchase. “*The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model*” provides the foundational background for the study. According to the S-O-R model, external stimuli influence individual

internal emotional and cognitive states, which subsequently shape behavioural responses (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). In this study, influencer-driven nostalgia marketing acts as the stimulus, emotional attachment represents the organism's emotional state, and purchase intention constitutes the behavioural response. Second, Attachment Theory explains how emotional bonds develop between consumers and influencers or brands through emotionally meaningful interactions (Bowlby, 1982). Nostalgic influencer content may strengthen emotional attachment by creating feelings of familiarity, comfort, and emotional closeness. Third, Source Credibility Theory supports the role of influencer credibility in persuasive communication. Consumers are more likely to trust and respond positively to influencers perceived as authentic and credible (Hovland, 1959). Finally, Parasocial Interaction Theory explains the one-sided emotional relationships followers develop with influencers through repeated social media interactions (Horton & Richard Wohl, 1956). Such parasocial relationships may amplify emotional attachment and enhance the effectiveness of nostalgia-driven influencer marketing. The existing study suggests a set of hypotheses to examine the relationship between influencer-driven nostalgia marketing, emotional engagement, influencer credibility, and purchase intentions among Gen Z consumers based on the literature review. Based on the (S-O-R) Model, the study applies the external marketing stimuli that influence internal emotional states of consumers, leading to behavioural response (S. Wang et al., 2024). In this study, influencer nostalgic campaign acts as the external stimulus, emotional engagement represents the internal process, and further, purchase intention as a behavioural response. Overall, this framework provides a comprehensive understanding influencer-driven nostalgia marketing affects Gen Z consumers' purchase intentions through emotional factors.

2.5 Influencer's Nostalgia Marketing and Gen Z Purchase Intention

From a marketing perspective, nostalgia marketing is recognised as an effective promotional strategy to influence consumer attitudes and behavioural intentions through emotional connection. Influencer nostalgic content enhances positive brand associations with consumers through comfort, happiness, and emotional warmth (Ju et al., 2016). From an influencer marketing perspective, when influencers share nostalgic content on social media platforms, it enhances consumer willingness to buy recommended products, improves emotional resonance and relatability (Huang, 2026). Based on the literature, studies observed that Gen Z consumers are more responsive to emotionally engaging content shared on social media platforms. Hence, in this study, the researcher examines how influencer nostalgic content shared on social media affects Gen Z purchase intention. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Influencer-driven nostalgia marketing (INM) has a significant impact on purchase intention (PI) among Gen Z consumers.

2.6 Influencer Nostalgia Marketing and Emotional Engagement

Emotional engagement is referred to as the affective connection of individuals developing an emotional relationship towards an object, person, brand, or experience (Thomson et al., 2005). Based on the consumer behavioural studies, the emotional engagement construct is recognised as a predictor of brand loyalty, commitment, and purchase intention (Park et al., 2010). Emotional attachment develops when consumers perceive emotional relevance, personal meaning, and psychological comfort in their interactions with brands or endorsers. Within social media environments, emotional attachment can emerge through continuous interactions between influencers and followers. Influencers often share personal stories, daily experiences, emotional struggles, and lifestyle-related content, which fosters intimacy and strengthens parasocial relationships with audiences (Block & Lovegrove, 2021). Such interactions increase followers' feelings of emotional closeness and identification with influencers. Nostalgic content plays a significant role in intensifying emotional attachment because nostalgia evokes emotionally charged memories associated with happiness, comfort, social connectedness, and identity preservation (Sedikides et al., 2016). Previous studies suggest that nostalgic experiences increase emotional warmth and strengthen affective responses toward brands and communicators (Youn & Doodoo, 2021). Therefore, influencer-driven nostalgic content may serve as an emotional trigger that enhances consumers' attachment to influencers and promoted brands. Several scholars have identified emotional engagement as a mediating mechanism explaining how emotional marketing stimuli influence behavioural outcomes (Aeron & Rahman, 2025). Consumers who develop a stronger emotional attachment are more likely to trust influencer recommendations, engage with branded content, and exhibit favourable purchase intentions. However, limited empirical studies have examined emotional attachment specifically within the context of nostalgia-based influencer marketing targeting Gen Z consumers. Nostalgia has been identified as a powerful emotional stimulus capable of strengthening psychological and emotional bonds between consumers and brands or communicators (Rana et al., 2022). Influencers use nostalgic storytelling, retro aesthetics, and emotionally meaningful cultural references to create intimacy and familiarity with followers (Soto-Sanfiel et al., 2026). According to Attachment Theory, emotional experiences contribute to the development of attachment relationships. Nostalgic content is more likely to develop a stronger emotional attachment toward influencers and associated brands. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Influencer-driven nostalgic marketing (INM) has a significant impact on Gen Z emotional engagement (EE).

Further, Consumers who are emotionally attached towards brands promoted by influencers show higher trust and willingness to purchase products (N. Chen & Yang, 2023). According to the S-O-R framework, internal emotional stimuli impact behavioural response. In this study, the researcher focuses on how influencer-driven nostalgia marketing acts as a stimulus that enhances emotional engagement, which further affects purchase intention. Hence, emotional engagement is expected

to function as an important construct in enhancing Gen Z purchase intention. The following hypothesis is developed:

H3: Emotional engagement (EE) has a significant impact on purchase intention (PI) among Gen Z consumers.

2.7 Influencer Credibility

In the context of influencer marketing, credibility refers to content creators as trustworthy, knowledgeable, authentic, and reliable sources of information. The construct evolved from source credibility theory, which states that the information is communicated from an authentic and reliable source (Wu & Wang, 2011). Influencer credibility is a core characteristic of an influencer, which includes trustworthiness, expert knowledge, authenticity, and message attractiveness. In social media marketing, credibility affects consumer trust, attitudes, engagement levels, and purchase intentions towards promoted brands (P. N. Chin et al., 2020). Individuals perceived as honest, transparent, and knowledgeable influencers are more likely to accept recommendations and promotional messages (Kapitan et al., 2022). Further, the study states that when the over-commercialisation of influencer promotional content occurs, consumers tend to become more sceptical. Furthermore, credibility is a key factor in shaping consumer perception and views on influencer recommendations as authentic or manipulative. Research suggests that followers' emotional connection is built through credible influencers, which can make their messages more persuasive (Lou et al., 2023). Nostalgic content is more receptive when consumers view an influencer as a credible source. Further, influencers' authentic content, reliable source and emotional content help consumers to feel more sincere, which enhances willingness to increase buying decisions. Although influencer credibility is recognised as an important factor, there are limited studies that have examined the role in nostalgia-driven influencer campaigns on credibility. Gen Z consumers are increasingly sceptical of overly commercialised social media promotions and tend to favour individuals who appear genuine and reliable. Individuals with high credibility are therefore more likely to influence consumer attitudes and purchase decisions positively. Based on this the following hypothesis is developed:

H4: INM has a positive effect on influencer credibility (IC).

Influencer credibility also strengthens the effectiveness of Gen Z purchase intention when nostalgic influencer content or messages are delivered by credible influencers. On the contrary, low influencer credibility weakens the emotional effectiveness of nostalgic content when consumers perceive the communication as commercially motivated or insincere. Therefore, how perceived credibility influences the relationship between influencer-driven nostalgia marketing and purchase intention.

H5: Influencer Credibility (IC) positively influences the relationship between influencer-driven nostalgia marketing and purchase intention (PI).

2.8 Nostalgia Marketing and Brand Relationship

Influencer-driven nostalgia marketing has emerged as a significant strategic approach in digital branding, particularly among Generation Z consumers who actively engage with social media content and influencer communications (Jain et al., 2025). Nostalgic narratives are often embedded within digital storytelling, retro aesthetics, cultural references, and emotionally resonant content shared by influencers among the young, which enhances consumer emotional connection with brands and contributes to stronger brand relationships. According to Song et al., (2024) nostalgic feelings often create a sense of comfort, connection, and emotional security, playing an important role in consumer–brand relationships. Nostalgic messages delivered by influencers can foster an emotional connection to a brand among Gen Z consumers through authentic and emotionally engaging content, which contributes to a stronger connection with the brand and improves the overall quality of the consumer–brand relationship (Gonzalez-Cavazos et al., 2025). Nostalgia marketing and brand relationships are understood through relationship marketing theory, which highlights the importance of emotional connections and sustained consumer engagement (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In addition, Influencers use nostalgic content to promote positive outcomes by encouraging consumers to connect the brand with shared experiences and symbolic meanings, leading to greater trust, attachment, and loyalty (Srivastava, 2025). Existing studies have increasingly explored nostalgia branding; limited attention has been given to integrating influencer-driven nostalgia content on brand relationships and purchase intentions. Current literature has investigated nostalgia in the context of traditional advertising, with comparatively little empirical attention given to influencer-driven nostalgia marketing. In addition, the mediating role of brand relationships between nostalgic influencer content and Gen Z consumer purchase intentions remains underexplored.

H6: Influencer-driven nostalgia marketing (INM) has a significant effect on brand relationship (BR)

H7: Brand relationship (BR) significantly mediates the relationship between influencer-driven nostalgia marketing (INM) and purchase intention (PI)

2.9 Nostalgia Marketing and Brand Recommendation

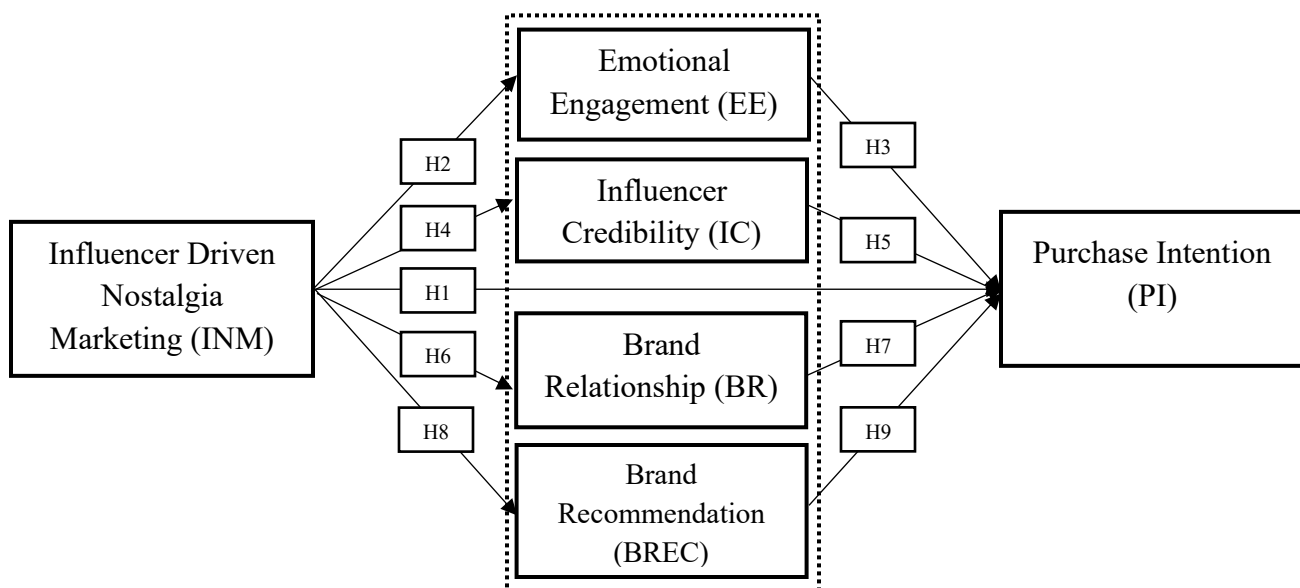
The existing literature demonstrates that nostalgic experiences provide favourable emotional responses, including feelings of comfort, joy, and connectedness, shaping brand perceptions (Sedikides et al., 2022). Integrating nostalgic themes in influencers' content can help consumers feel emotionally connected to a brand, improve consumer perceptions and recommend the brand to others. (Grappi et al., 2024). When consumers recommend a brand to people in their social networks, it often reflects a strong level of engagement and a positive relationship with that brand (Youn & Doodoo, 2021). Further, nostalgic content often reminds consumers of meaningful past experiences, creating a sense of shared connection that strengthens their relationship with both the brand and like-minded communities (Yadav et al., 2025). Furthermore, research suggests that

exposure to nostalgic influencer content can increase consumer likelihood of engaging in positive electronic word-of-mouth and recommending brands to others within their social networks. In influencer marketing, recommendations driven by nostalgic engagement can strengthen consumer confidence in a brand and lower perceived purchase risk, particularly among Gen Z consumers who often depend on social validation and peer opinions when making purchasing decisions (Jiang et al., 2024). Thus, nostalgia marketing in influencer contexts facilitates emotional engagement, consumer brand relationships, promotes brand advocacy, and contributes to higher purchase intentions. Despite increasing research, limited empirical studies have examined how influencer-driven nostalgia marketing influences brand recommendation and subsequently affects purchase intention among Gen Z consumers (Sukumaran et al., 2026). Therefore, further investigation is necessary to develop a comprehensive understanding of how nostalgic influencer content shapes recommendation behavior and consumer purchasing outcomes in digital marketing contexts.

H8: Influencer-driven nostalgia marketing (INM) has a positive and significant effect on brand recommendation (BREC) among Generation Z consumers.

H9: Brand recommendation (BREC) positively mediates the relationship between influencer-driven nostalgia marketing and Generation Z consumers' purchase intention (PI).

Figure 1. Conceptual Model



Source: Author's literature review

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study aims to examine the impact of influencer-driven nostalgia marketing on Gen Z purchase intentions. This research employs a quantitative research design to empirically test hypothesised

relationships with latent constructs using statistical analysis techniques (J. F. Hair et al., 2019). The study employs the S-O-R Model that how external marketing stimuli influence consumer internal emotional connection shape behavioural responses (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974).

3.2 Sample and Data Collection

This study used purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method, targeting Gen Z respondents with relevant characteristics associated with influencer engagement and exposure to nostalgic content. Purposive sampling is used in social media research, in which respondents meet predefined criteria (Etikan et al., 2016). The study employed “*structural equation modelling (SEM)*” and collected 300 valid responses. According to Hair et al., (2019), a minimum sample size of 200 is generally acceptable for SEM analysis, while larger samples improve reliability and model stability. Primary data are collected using a structured questionnaire survey from Gen Z consumers on influencer-driven nostalgia marketing, emotional engagement, perceived credibility, brand relationship, brand recommendations and purchase intention item-wise and demographic traits. Before collecting the data from respondents, researcher assessed the questionnaire reliability and validity through pilot study. A five-point Likert scale was employed to assess all measurement items, where 1 represented “Strongly Disagree” and 5 represented “Strongly Agree.”

3.3 Common Method Bias

Since the study is dependent on the respondents’ survey data collected, common method bias (CMB) might occur. To minimise this issue, procedural remedies such as anonymity assurance, item randomisation, and simple question wording are implemented (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Additionally, “*Harman’s single-factor test and variance inflation factor (VIF)*” analysis is conducted to assess the common method variance. The results indicated that the possibility of common method variance is low, because the variance explained by the first factor was below 50%, which could not be considered the dominant source of variation, as recommended in behavioural studies. Influencer-driven nostalgia marketing, purchase intention, emotional engagement, perceived credibility, brand relationships and brand recommendations among Gen Z consumers are most accurately measured based on self-reported data, as these are subjective and internal psychological and evaluative constructs that cannot be directly observed and measured by anyone other than the individual concerned. Moreover, certain procedural and statistical controls were also implemented in the current study to reduce the possibility of common method bias. These include ensuring anonymity, reducing evaluation apprehension, implementing the psychological separation of constructs, and conducting Harman’s single-factor test.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Preliminary Data Analysis

Initially, descriptive statistics are used to analyse respondent demographic characteristics, including age, gender, social media usage, and preferred influencer platforms. Missing values,

outliers, and normality are also assessed before hypothesis testing. Table 1 shows the preliminary data analysis results of 307 Gen Z respondents with demographic profiles and social media habits.

Table 1: Gen Z Respondent (n = 307)

Demographic Factors	Group	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	203	66%
	Female	102	33%
	Prefer not to say	2	1%
Age	16–18	3	1%
	19–21	51	17%
	22–24	230	75%
	25–27	19	6%
	28 and above	4	1%
	Facebook	2	1%
Most preferred social media	Instagram	229	75%
	Other	5	2%
	Snapchat	3	1%
	X/Twitter	5	2%
	YouTube	63	21%
Average usage of social media	1–3 hours	192	63%
	4–6 hours	63	21%
	Less than 1 hour	29	9%
	More than 6 hours	23	7%
Do you follow influencers?	Yes	179	58%
	No	71	23%
	Sometimes	57	19%

Source: Researcher's primary data

4.2 Reliability and Validity Analysis

Table 2 presents the reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha (α) value for influencer-driven nostalgia marketing (INM), which is 0.786, indicating that the construct is reliable. Emotional engagement (EE) is 0.795, indicating strong internal consistency among the items measuring EE. Brand relationship (BR) 0.893, influencer credibility (IC) 0.808, and brand recommendation (BREC) 0.845, which represent internal consistency, are highly reliable, suggesting that items of the respective constructs are strongly aligned with the constructs. Based on the results, the data was also checked for multicollinearity, which shows the "*Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)*" value is less than 5, which implies that the exogenous variables are not highly correlated. Further, the

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO = 0.934) was high, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ($p < .001$), indicating that the data were suitable for factor analysis.

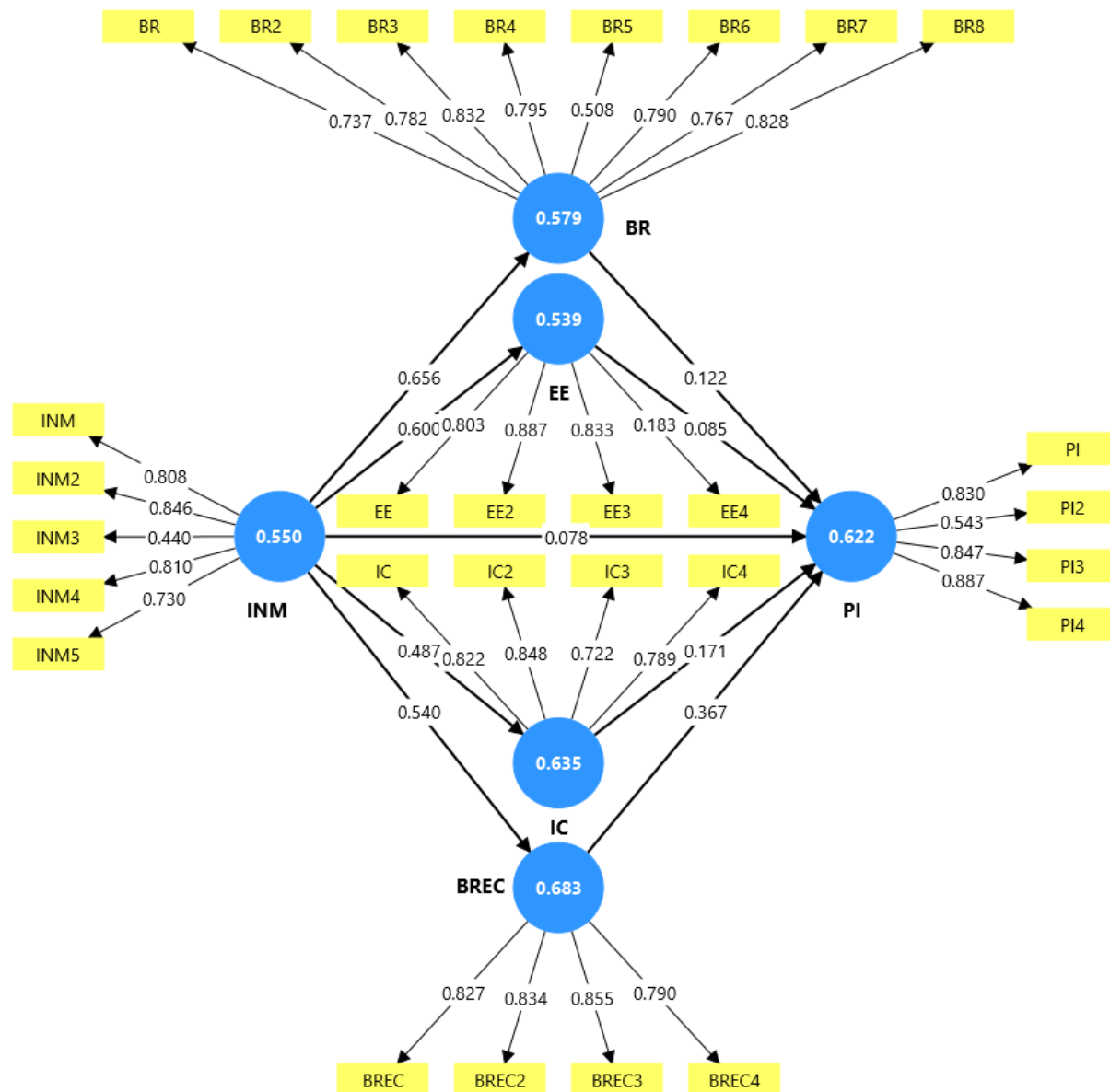
Table 2: Reliability and Convergent Validity

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)	Interpretation
BR	0.893	0.916	0.579	Highly reliable and adequate convergent validity
BREC	0.845	0.896	0.683	Highly reliable and strong convergent validity
EE	0.795	0.799	0.539	Reliable and adequate convergent validity
IC	0.808	0.874	0.635	Highly reliable and strong convergent validity
INM	0.786	0.854	0.550	Reliable and adequate convergent validity
PI	0.787	0.865	0.622	Reliable and strong convergent validity

Source: Authors' own creation

This study used Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) to assess the reliability test and convergent validity of the constructs. Table 2 presents a reliability and convergent validity report, showing the CR values are from 0.799 to 0.916, which indicates good internal consistency reliability. Further, AVE values confirming convergent validity, which ranged from 0.539 to 0.683 is adequate. Brand recommendation shows the highest reliability Cronbach alpha value of 0.893 (CR = 0.916). BREC is the strongest convergent validity (AVE = 0.683). In this study, all constructs met the recommended thresholds of CR and AVE. Hence, the measurement model determines strong reliability and convergent validity, which supports structural model analysis (J. F. Hair et al., 2019).

Figure 2. Path Diagram of Structural Model Result



From Figure 2, the path diagram of the structural model result was used to evaluate the coefficient of determination (R^2) value. Based on the guidelines proposed by Chin (1998), the results reflect a moderate to high level of explanatory power, indicating that the model demonstrates considerable predictive strength (J. Hair & Alamer, 2022). INM explains the variance of 57.9% in BR ($R^2 = 0.579$), EE variance is 53.9% ($R^2 = 0.539$), and IC variance is 63.5% ($R^2 = 0.635$). Further, the model explains that BREC variance is 68.3% ($R^2 = 0.683$) and PI variance is 62.2% ($R^2 = 0.622$). From the structural relationships model, INM has a strong positive effect on BR ($\beta = 0.656$), EE ($\beta = 0.600$), and IC ($\beta = 0.540$). The estimated coefficients reveal that increases in INM contribute significantly to better outcomes in BR, EE, and IC. The results indicate that BREC is the strongest determinant of PI, as reflected by its highest direct effect coefficient ($\beta = 0.367$). Although IC also

positively influenced PI ($\beta = 0.171$), its effect was considerably smaller. The impacts of BR ($\beta = 0.122$) and EE ($\beta = 0.078$) were relatively weak, suggesting a less pronounced role in driving purchase intention.

Table 3. Results of the Model Fitness Test

Fit Index	Obtained Value	Recommended Threshold	Assessment
Chi-square (χ^2)	1030.532	Lower values indicate a better fit	Significant
p-value	< 0.001	> 0.05 (desirable)	Significant
χ^2/df	2.8	< 3.00	Acceptable
RMSEA	0.077	≤ 0.08	Acceptable
RMSEA 90% CI (Upper)	0.082	≤ 0.08 preferred	Marginally acceptable
SRMR	0.067	< 0.08	Good
GFI	0.801	≥ 0.90	Below threshold
AGFI	0.765	≥ 0.80	Below threshold
NFI	0.798	≥ 0.90	Below threshold
TLI	0.844	≥ 0.90	Below threshold
CFI	0.859	≥ 0.90	Marginally acceptable

Table 3 presents the model fitness test, which indicates the acceptable thresholds are based on J. Hair & Alamer (2022) RMSEA values below 0.08 and SRMR values below 0.08, while CFI, TLI, NFI, GFI, and AGFI values above 0.90 are considered a good fit. The normed chi-square value was below the recommended threshold limit of 3.0 ($\chi^2/df = 2.800$), RMSEA value of 0.077 (90% CI: 0.071–0.082) and SRMR value of 0.067 met the recommended criteria for acceptable model fit. Although the CFI (0.859), TLI (0.844), and NFI (0.798) values were lower than the suggested cutoff of 0.90, and the GFI (0.801) and AGFI (0.765) also failed to meet recommended standards, the model had an acceptable overall fit. As such, it was deemed appropriate to proceed with hypothesis testing of the study variables by evaluating the structural relationships.

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing Result

Hypothesis	Path	β (Path Coefficient)	T-value	VIF	Decision
H1	INM $\rightarrow$ PI	0.078	1.183	2.038	Not Supported
H2	INM $\rightarrow$ EE	0.6	13.376	1	Supported
H3	EE $\rightarrow$ PI	0.085	1.126	1.971	Not Supported
H4	INM $\rightarrow$ IC	0.487	8.168	1	Supported
H5	IC $\rightarrow$ PI	0.171	2.335	1.779	Supported
H6	INM $\rightarrow$ BR	0.656	14.473	1	Supported
H7	BR $\rightarrow$ PI	0.122	1.585	2.327	Not Supported
H8	INM $\rightarrow$ BREC	0.54	10.523	1	Supported
H9	BREC $\rightarrow$ PI	0.367	5.042	2.364	Supported

Table 4 shows that the Bootstrapping procedures with 5,000 resamples are employed to assess the significance of mediation and moderation effects, as recommended in contemporary SEM research (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The results show that six hypotheses are supported. BREC influences on PI ($\beta = 0.367$, $t = 5.042$), IC significantly affects PI ($\beta = 0.171$, $t = 2.335$). Furthermore, INM has significant positive effects on BR ($\beta = 0.656$, $t = 14.473$), BREC ($\beta = 0.540$, $t = 10.523$), EE ($\beta = 0.600$, $t = 13.376$), and IC ($\beta = 0.487$, $t = 8.168$). However, the effects of BR on PI ($\beta = 0.122$, $t = 1.585$), EE on PI ($\beta = 0.085$, $t = 1.126$), and INM on PI ($\beta = 0.078$, $t = 1.183$) are not statistically significant.

Table 5. Mediation Analysis of Purchase Intention (PI)

	Effect (β)	T-value	P-value	2.5%	97.5%	Mediation Result
INM $\rightarrow$ IC $\rightarrow$ PI	0.083	2.249	0.025	0.01	0.156	Significant mediation
INM $\rightarrow$ EE $\rightarrow$ PI	0.051	1.119	0.263	-0.033	0.147	No mediation
INM $\rightarrow$ BREC $\rightarrow$ PI	0.198	4.892	0	0.118	0.278	Significant mediation
INM $\rightarrow$ BR $\rightarrow$ PI	0.08	1.587	0.113	-0.019	0.177	No mediation

Bootstrapping results revealed that the indirect effect of INM on PI through IC was significant ($\beta = 0.083$, $t = 2.249$, $p = 0.025$, 95% CI [0.010, 0.156]), indicating mediation. Similarly, the indirect effect through BREC was significant ($\beta = 0.198$, $t = 4.892$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.118, 0.278]). However, the indirect effects through EE ($\beta = 0.051$, $p = 0.263$) and BR ($\beta = 0.080$, $p = 0.113$) were not considered significant based on the analysis, as their confidence intervals included zero.

4.4 Discussions

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From Table 4, the research examined the relationship between influencer's nostalgic marketing (INM), emotional engagement (EE), influencer credibility (IC), brand relationship (BR), brand recommendation (BREC), and purchase intention among Gen Z consumers. Hypothesis 1 tests that the effect of INM on PI is not significant, and also that there is no mediation effect. Hypothesis 2 shows that the INM has a significant effect on EE among Gen Z consumers. Hypothesis 3 states that the effect of EE on PI is not significant. Further, the INM show a significant effect on IC (H4), BR (H6), and BREC (H8). Additionally, IC and BREC have a significant effect on PI (H5, H9). However, BR does not show a significant effect on PI. This finding extends prior research demonstrating that nostalgia functions as a powerful emotional resource capable of strengthening brand relationships, credibility and brand recommendations to Gen Z consumers. The results suggest that influencer credibility plays an important role in converting nostalgic marketing messages into purchase intentions, particularly when consumers view the influencer as trustworthy, knowledgeable, and genuine (Z. Wang et al., 2025). Therefore, nostalgic marketing messages are more likely to resonate with consumers when they are shared by influencers known for their authenticity and credibility. These results suggest that INM content contributes to the development of stronger brand relationships among Gen Z consumers by creating nostalgic experiences in brand storytelling, thus influencers support emotional closeness, commitment, and favourable attitudes toward the brand. These results demonstrate that when influencers incorporate nostalgic elements into their marketing content, consumers become more responsive to brand recommendations, which positively influences their purchase intentions (Freberg et al., 2011). This outcome reinforces existing evidence that consumers tend to rely on influencers as credible opinion leaders, with their recommendations simplifying the decision-making process and lowering perceived risk (De Veirman et al., 2017).

Overall, by integrating nostalgia marketing, influencer marketing, and consumer behavior, this research extends the existing literature on the S-O-R model (Mukhopadhyay, 2026). Previous studies have largely examined nostalgia marketing and influencer effectiveness as distinct phenomena. In contrast, the present findings demonstrate how these elements work together, showing that influencer-driven nostalgia marketing affects purchase intention through credibility, brand relationship, and brand recommendation, as well as emotional, cognitive, and relational pathways. The framework provides a more comprehensive understanding of digital persuasion by highlighting nostalgia's role in stimulating emotional engagement, fostering trust, increasing receptiveness to recommendations, and strengthening consumer-brand relationships. Findings from this study suggest that, from a managerial perspective, the effectiveness of influencer-driven nostalgia marketing enhances the brand relationships and brand recommendations through authentic storytelling among Gen Z consumers.

5. Conclusion, Implications, Limitations, and Future Research Directions

Grounded in the S-O-R theory, this research contributes to the literature by explaining how influencer-led nostalgic marketing affects purchase intention through several key mechanisms, including emotional engagement, credibility, brand recommendation, and brand relationship. The analysis of data from 307 Gen Z consumers revealed that nostalgic content shared by influencers plays a significant role in increasing emotional involvement, building trust in influencers, improving the acceptance of brand recommendations, and cultivating stronger consumer–brand relationships, which in turn drive purchase intention. Although INM and EE do not directly predict purchase intention, the findings contribute to the growing body of research integrating nostalgia marketing and influencer marketing. Specifically, the results demonstrate that nostalgic experiences can stimulate positive emotions, build trust in communicators, encourage acceptance of brand recommendations, and strengthen enduring consumer–brand relationships. In addition, the findings suggest that influencers play a crucial role in converting nostalgic brand messages into engaging and meaningful experiences for consumers. As social media becomes a dominant force in shaping consumer perceptions and purchasing behavior, influencer-driven nostalgia marketing emerges as a valuable strategy for building emotional engagement and long-term brand relationships.

5.1 Implications of the Study

This research contributes to the theoretical development of marketing, consumer behavior, and digital communication by providing new insights into the relationships examined in the study. First, the results emphasise the importance of nostalgia marketing in digital and social media platforms, moving beyond previous studies that have mainly explored its role in traditional forms of advertising (Mukhopadhyay, 2026). The findings indicate that nostalgia can be successfully evoked through influencer-generated content, extending the application of nostalgia theory to contemporary digital marketing contexts. Second, this research extends existing knowledge by identifying credibility, brand recommendation, and brand relationship as important pathways through which nostalgic influencer content shapes consumer responses, emphasizing the value of trust and authenticity in digital marketing (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Third, this research advances relationship marketing literature by highlighting nostalgia as a mechanism that promotes emotional bonding, reinforces trust, and strengthens consumer–brand relationships over time (Dempsey, 2025). Finally, this study develops a comprehensive framework that combines influencer-driven nostalgic content with key communication, emotional, advocacy, and relational factors that shape consumer behavior.

The findings provide managerial implications for marketers, brand managers, and influencer marketing practitioners that nostalgia is a strategic communication tool to enhance consumer emotional engagement. Selecting credible influencers who possess strong audience trust and authenticity to the effectiveness of nostalgic messaging, brands should prioritise long-term

partnerships with influencers whose personal values, communication styles, and audience demographics align with the brand's nostalgic positioning (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Further, the marketers encourage influencers to employ personal narratives, experiences, and nostalgic content to engage emotionally (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). Recommendations embedded within nostalgic narratives may be perceived as more trustworthy and relatable, thereby enhancing consumer acceptance and purchase intention. Finally, brands should focus on cultivating long-term consumer–brand relationships through nostalgia-driven influencer campaigns.

5.2 Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study considers the following limitations when analysing and interpreting the findings. Nostalgic content sometimes may bring negative emotions, leading to brand outrage and does not influence purchase intention. The questionnaire is self-administered, and measurement may be biased are the major limitation. Findings are influenced by respondent characteristics, and a sample concentrated within a specific demographic group, age category, geographic region, and cultural context may limit the generalizability of the results to broader populations. Consumer responses to nostalgia are often shaped by cultural experiences, generational differences, and individual nostalgia proneness (Sedikides et al., 2016). The study relied on respondents reported behaviour instead of actual purchasing behavior. While purchase intention is widely recognised as a strong predictor of consumer behavior, intentions do not always translate into actual purchase actions due to contextual factors (Ajzen, 1991). A potential limitation of the study is that the effectiveness of nostalgia-based marketing depends on social media platform dynamics, as influencer and consumer interactions differ across various social media platforms, usage contexts and time. Based on these considerations, future research is encouraged to implement longitudinal and experimental research designs to understand the causal relationships between influencer-driven nostalgia marketing and consumer behavioural responses. Future investigations should consider the role of moderating variables, such as Gen Z demographic profile, cultural differences, and social media usage patterns in shaping consumer behavioural responses to nostalgia marketing. In addition, comparative analysis of various social media platforms helps to identify factors that influence consumer engagement and marketing decisions. To extend the present framework, future studies should incorporate additional mediators, including parasocial relationships, perceived authenticity, consumer trust, brand loyalty, and social identification, to provide insights into Gen Z psychological processes. Finally, future research focuses on actual purchases, brand value, electronic word-of-mouth, customer advocacy, and customer lifetime value. Exploring these outcomes would present a complete understanding of the long-term effectiveness of influencer-driven nostalgia marketing strategies and their implications for sustainable brand growth.

Generative AI Use Disclosure Statement

Generative AI tools, including ChatGPT (GPT-4, OpenAI) and GrammarlyGO, were used to enhance grammar and language clarity during manuscript preparation. All conceptualisation, analysis, and interpretation of the research were conducted solely by the authors.

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