

Emotional Memory as a Marketing Tool: Analysing the Role of Nostalgia in Shaping Consumer Behavioural Intentions

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Abstract

Nostalgia has emerged as a powerful affective construct in contemporary marketing, enabling brands to activate consumers' emotional memory and influence behavioural outcomes. This study examines emotional memory as a strategic marketing tool, focusing on how nostalgia shapes consumer behavioural intentions such as purchase intention, brand attachment, and word-of-mouth advocacy. Drawing upon affective conditioning theory and autobiographical memory frameworks, the research explores how nostalgic cues embedded in advertising, packaging, and brand storytelling stimulate positive emotions, reinforce identity continuity, and enhance perceived authenticity. The study proposes a conceptual model linking nostalgia proneness, emotional resonance, brand trust, and behavioural intentions. Empirical analysis is designed to test the mediating role of emotional attachment between nostalgic stimuli and consumer responses. The findings are expected to demonstrate that nostalgia-driven marketing not only strengthens cognitive evaluations of brands but also deepens emotional bonds, thereby increasing consumers' intention to purchase and recommend. The study contributes to strategic marketing literature by positioning emotional memory as a measurable and actionable construct.

Keywords: *Emotional Memory; Nostalgia Appeal; Consumer Behaviour; Purchase Intention; Brand Attachment; Self-Identity; Marketing Communication*

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1. Introduction

In increasingly competitive and emotionally saturated marketplaces, brands are shifting from purely functional differentiation toward affect-driven positioning strategies. Among these, nostalgia has emerged as a powerful mechanism for activating emotional memory and influencing consumer decision-making processes. Emotional memory refers to stored autobiographical experiences accompanied by affective associations that can be reactivated through symbolic, sensory, or narrative cues in marketing communication. When brands incorporate retro design elements, heritage storytelling, or culturally embedded references, they stimulate self-continuity and social connectedness, which in turn shape consumer evaluations. A growing body of empirical research confirms that nostalgic appeals generate favorable affective states and positively influence consumer attitudes and behavioral outcomes (Santini et al., 2023). Moreover, scholarly syntheses indicate that nostalgia enhances persuasion effectiveness in advertising contexts, particularly when the appeal aligns with consumers' identity structures (Cheng & Yan, 2022). This study positions nostalgia not merely as a creative device but as a measurable psychological construct embedded within consumer behavior theory. From a theoretical standpoint, nostalgia operates at the intersection of affective conditioning, autobiographical memory retrieval, and

self-congruity theory. By reactivating emotionally significant past experiences, nostalgic cues reduce psychological distance and enhance perceived familiarity with brands. This familiarity often translates into increased trust and authenticity perceptions, which are critical determinants of purchase intention. Research in consumer psychology demonstrates that nostalgia strengthens emotional bonds between consumers and brands, reinforcing relational constructs such as attachment and loyalty (Weingarten & Wei, 2023). Furthermore, the persuasive impact of nostalgic messaging has been shown to vary according to product type and situational framing, suggesting that nostalgia's effectiveness is context-dependent rather than universally applicable (Koh, 2022). These theoretical insights underscore the need to conceptualize emotional memory activation as a structured pathway leading toward behavioral intentions rather than treating nostalgia as a superficial aesthetic strategy.

In practical marketing environments, nostalgia is increasingly deployed across digital and Omni channel platforms. Anniversary campaigns, revival of discontinued product lines, premastered brand icons, and throwback social media content exemplify how firms strategically leverage past-oriented cues. However, managerial practice often emphasizes engagement metrics likes, shares, or emotional reactions without systematically examining whether nostalgic activation translates into purchase or advocacy intentions (Gaikwad, 2024). Meta-analytic evidence suggests that while nostalgia consistently enhances affect, its influence on behavioral outcomes depends on moderators such as cultural context, individual nostalgia proneness, and the nature of the stimulus (Santini et al., 2023). Additionally, advertising research highlights that nostalgic appeals improve ad persuasiveness primarily when they are congruent with brand meaning and consumer expectations (Cheng & Yan, 2022). This indicates that effective nostalgia marketing requires alignment between emotional triggers and brand positioning.

Despite increasing scholarly attention, a comprehensive framework integrating emotional memory activation with consumer behavioral intentions remains underdeveloped. Prior studies have largely focused on attitudes or emotional responses rather than examining intention-based outcomes such as purchase likelihood, recommendation behavior, or brand advocacy. Contemporary research emphasizes that nostalgia-driven attachment and identity reinforcement can significantly shape long-term consumer relationships (Weingarten & Wei, 2023). At the same time, situational variables such as product framing and message design influence whether nostalgic affect converts into action-oriented intentions (Koh, 2022). Therefore, this study conceptualizes emotional memory as a strategic marketing tool and systematically analyzes the role of nostalgia in shaping consumer behavioral intentions. By linking psychological mechanisms with measurable market outcomes, the research contributes to both theoretical advancement and managerial application within the domain of strategic marketing communication.

2. Background of Study

The conceptualization of nostalgia in marketing has progressively shifted from a peripheral emotional appeal to a structured psychological construct grounded in memory and identity theory. Contemporary scholarship views nostalgia as a self-relevant emotion that enhances meaning-making and reinforces continuity between past and present selves. Within consumer research, nostalgia has been empirically associated with enhanced brand evaluations, relational closeness, and motivational outcomes. Recent empirical investigations demonstrate that nostalgia-driven advertising can significantly increase brand engagement and favorable consumer responses by activating autobiographical memories (Merchant & Ford, 2023). Similarly, research examining emotional processing mechanisms confirms that nostalgic cues strengthen affective intensity, thereby influencing evaluative and behavioral outcomes in marketplace

settings (Zhang et al., 2024). These developments provide a theoretical foundation for positioning nostalgia as an emotional memory-based marketing tool.

Advancements in memory research further support the strategic relevance of emotional recall in consumer behavior. Emotional memories are encoded with greater vividness and accessibility than neutral experiences, making them particularly influential during decision-making. When marketing stimuli trigger personally meaningful past experiences, they reduce cognitive resistance and increase perceived authenticity. Empirical evidence suggests that nostalgia fosters psychological comfort and social connectedness, which subsequently enhance purchase-related intentions (Sedikides & Wildschut, 2023). Additionally, experimental research indicates that nostalgic brand storytelling strengthens brand attachment by reinforcing consumers' self-identity and life narratives (Kim & Kim, 2024). These findings imply that nostalgia operates through identifiable relational mechanisms rather than merely generating temporary positive affect.

In contemporary digital ecosystems, nostalgia has gained renewed prominence due to the rise of retro branding, revival campaigns, and user-generated reminiscence content. Social media platforms amplify nostalgic sharing behaviors, enabling brands to integrate collective memory with commercial messaging. However, while engagement-based metrics often capture emotional reactions, the direct linkage between nostalgic activation and behavioral intentions requires deeper theoretical integration. Recent quantitative studies confirm that nostalgia appeals can significantly enhance purchase intention when aligned with consumers' generational identity and cultural context (Li et al., 2023). Furthermore, research exploring consumer-brand relationships highlights that nostalgia-induced attachment mediates the relationship between emotional response and behavioral loyalty (Bae & Koo, 2024). These insights underscore the need to empirically test structured pathways from emotional memory activation to intention-based outcomes.

Despite expanding literature, a coherent framework connecting emotional memory, nostalgia proneness, and consumer behavioral intentions remains underdeveloped. Prior research often isolates emotional response from action-oriented consequences, limiting managerial applicability. Emerging evidence emphasizes that nostalgia enhances perceived authenticity and trust two critical antecedents of purchase intention in competitive markets (Wang & Huang, 2023). Moreover, psychological investigations into nostalgic consumption reveal that temporal framing and life-stage cues significantly shape motivational outcomes (Cheung et al., 2024). Therefore, examining emotional memory as a marketing tool provides a theoretically grounded and practically relevant background for analyzing how nostalgia shapes consumer behavioral intentions. This approach integrates cognitive, affective, and relational mechanisms within a measurable behavioral framework.

3. Rationale of Study

Despite widespread use of nostalgia in brand communication, academic inquiry into how emotional memory directly influences consumer behavioural intentions remains limited and fragmented. Most existing research focuses on attitudinal outcomes such as brand affection, ad liking, or emotional engagement, rather than intention-oriented outcomes like purchase likelihood, repurchase intent, or recommendation behaviour (Kim & Kim, 2024). This gap restricts both theoretical development and practical application, as marketers lack clear evidence on whether nostalgia-driven emotional memory translates into actual behavioural intentions. As a result, many firms rely on anecdotal or engagement

metrics that do not necessarily reflect market performance. Clarifying this gap is critical for advancing strategic marketing frameworks that connect emotional constructs to behavioural outcomes.

The psychological literature establishes that emotional memory influences cognitive processing and judgment; there is scant integration of these mechanisms into consumer behaviour models within marketing science. Cognitive and affective theories emphasize that emotional memories are encoded with greater vividness and accessibility, shaping preferences and decision pathways (Cheung et al., 2024). However, extant marketing studies rarely position emotional memory as a central construct, instead subsuming it under broader affective labels. This has limited the precision with which researchers and practitioners can design, measure, and optimize nostalgia-based interventions. Developing a model that foregrounds emotional memory as the operative mechanism will contribute to both theory refinement and empirical generalizability.

From a managerial standpoint, brands increasingly invest in nostalgia-centric initiatives retro product editions, heritage storytelling, and cultural callbacks yet lack standardized frameworks to assess their effectiveness relative to behavioural intentions. Understanding the conditions under which nostalgic cues elevate purchase intention, brand advocacy, and loyalty can inform resource allocation, creative strategy, and campaign timing decisions. Recent empirical evidence suggests that individual differences (e.g., nostalgia proneness) and contextual moderators (e.g., cultural salience) shape intentions in response to nostalgic messaging (Li et al., 2023). Without integrating these variables into an actionable model, marketers risk deploying nostalgia in ways that generate emotional resonance without measurable intention outcomes.

The technological shifts such as algorithmic personalization and interactive media formats raise new questions about how emotional memory is triggered and leveraged. While digital platforms offer unprecedented targeting precision, they can also dilute authenticity or evoke consumer skepticism if misapplied. Investigating nostalgia as a measurable tool tied to behavioural intentions allows researchers to bridge psychological mechanisms with evolving media landscapes. By articulating clear pathways from emotional memory activation to intention outcomes, this study advances academic understanding and provides practical guidance for designing effective nostalgia-driven marketing strategies.

4. Problem Statement

Despite the growing scholarly interest in nostalgia marketing, there remains limited clarity regarding how nostalgia-induced emotional memory translates into concrete consumer behavioural intentions. Existing studies predominantly examine nostalgia's influence on affective responses, brand attitude, and emotional engagement, but fewer investigations establish a direct and measurable link with purchase intention, recommendation behaviour, or loyalty outcomes. Meta-analytic evidence confirms that nostalgia positively affects consumer evaluations and psychological states; however, the translation of these emotional outcomes into behavioural intentions is not consistently examined (Santini et al., 2023). This disconnect creates a theoretical gap in understanding whether nostalgia functions merely as an emotional enhancer or as a strategic driver of actionable consumer decisions. While advertising research demonstrates that nostalgic appeals enhance persuasion effectiveness, the mechanism through which emotional memory activation shapes behavioural intention remains under-specified (Cheng & Yan, 2022). Many empirical models treat nostalgia as a one-dimensional emotional construct without distinguishing between autobiographical memory retrieval, identity reinforcement, and relational attachment pathways. As a result, the psychological processes linking nostalgic cues to intention formation lack conceptual

precision. Without identifying these mediating mechanisms, theoretical integration between emotional memory theory and consumer behaviour models remains incomplete.

The consumer psychology literature highlights that nostalgia strengthens self-continuity, social connectedness, and identity meaning, which may influence consumption behaviour indirectly (Sedikides & Wildschut, 2023). However, these psychological resources are rarely operationalized within structured behavioural models in marketing research. Studies often stop at attitudinal outcomes rather than examining how nostalgia-induced attachment or authenticity perceptions convert into measurable purchase intentions. This gap limits managerial applicability, as marketers require intention-based metrics to evaluate campaign effectiveness rather than relying solely on emotional engagement indicators. The contemporary consumer environments characterized by digital media saturation and algorithm-driven personalization further complicate the nostalgia-behaviour relationship. Although nostalgia has been shown to influence consumer motivation and brand relationships, contextual moderators such as product type, generational identity, and message framing significantly affect behavioural outcomes (Weingarten & Wei, 2023). The absence of integrative frameworks that combine emotional memory activation with these contextual factors restricts predictive accuracy. Therefore, there is a clear need to systematically examine how emotional memory, activated through nostalgic appeals, shapes consumer behavioural intentions within a theoretically grounded and empirically testable model.

5. Objectives of Study

- To examine the effect of nostalgia-based marketing appeals on consumers' emotional memory activation
- To analyze the influence of emotional memory on consumer behavioural intentions, particularly purchase intention, recommendation intention, and brand loyalty
- To investigate the mediating role of emotional attachment in the relationship between nostalgia appeal and consumer behavioural intentions
- To assess the moderating influence of individual nostalgia proneness on the strength of the relationship between emotional memory and behavioural intentions
- To develop and validate a conceptual model linking nostalgia marketing, emotional memory, and consumer behavioural intentions using empirical testing

6. Review of Literature

Recent scholarship conceptualizes nostalgia as a multidimensional emotional construct that enhances relational and motivational outcomes in consumer contexts. Empirical research demonstrates that nostalgic advertising strengthens brand love and emotional attachment by activating autobiographical memory structures associated with meaningful life experiences (Ju, Kim, & Johnson, 2022). This activation fosters psychological comfort and identity affirmation, which positively influence brand-related evaluations. Moreover, contemporary marketing studies indicate that nostalgia-driven messaging enhances perceived brand warmth and authenticity, thereby shaping consumer responses beyond mere affective liking (Cho & Jang, 2023). These findings reinforce the view that nostalgia operates through structured emotional memory mechanisms rather than functioning solely as a decorative creative appeal.

Theoretical advancements in consumer psychology suggest that nostalgia contributes to self-continuity and social connectedness, which are critical drivers of behavioural motivation. Experimental evidence

shows that nostalgic reflection enhances feelings of belongingness and existential meaning, which subsequently influence consumption preferences (Newman & Sachs, 2022). In marketing settings, this psychological reinforcement increases consumers' willingness to engage with brands that symbolically represent their past experiences. Additionally, studies examining emotional branding confirm that nostalgic cues strengthen relational bonds, which in turn elevate purchase intention and advocacy behaviour (Kim, 2023). These outcomes suggest that emotional memory functions as a mediating mechanism linking nostalgia appeal to behavioural intention.

Advertising research further highlights that nostalgia's effectiveness varies across contexts and consumer segments. For instance, generational identity and life-stage relevance significantly moderate the impact of nostalgic appeals on consumer intention (Zhou, Yang, & Hui, 2023). When nostalgic cues resonate with shared cultural experiences, they enhance message persuasiveness and strengthen behavioural responses. Conversely, incongruent or forced nostalgic framing may weaken credibility and reduce effectiveness. Moreover, empirical investigations reveal that perceived authenticity plays a pivotal role in determining whether nostalgic affect converts into actionable intention (Bataat & Peter, 2022). These insights emphasize the importance of contextual alignment and psychological congruence in nostalgia marketing.

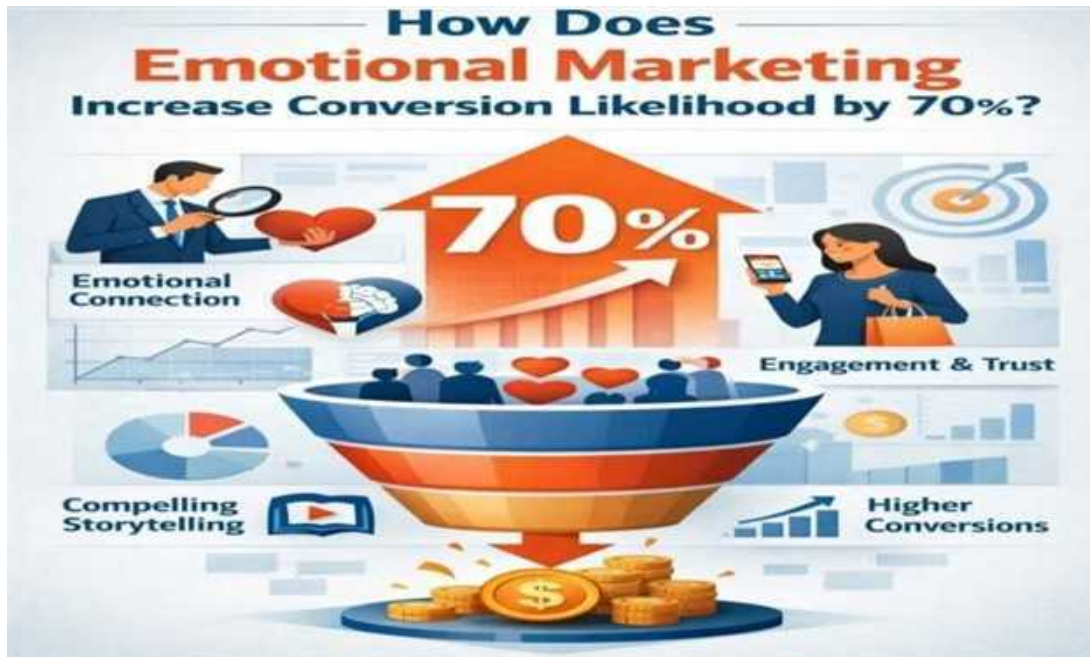
Despite the growing body of literature, an integrative framework connecting emotional memory activation with behavioural intention outcomes remains underdeveloped. While several studies confirm that nostalgia enhances brand attachment and emotional engagement, fewer empirically test structured mediating pathways linking memory activation to intention formation. Recent research calls for more robust modelling approaches that incorporate emotional intensity, identity reinforcement, and relational attachment within predictive consumer behaviour frameworks (Orth & Gal, 2024). Therefore, there is a clear need for empirical examination of how nostalgia-induced emotional memory systematically shapes consumer behavioural intentions in contemporary marketing environments.

7. Research Methodology

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8. Discussion and Analysis

Figure 1: Emotional Marketing



(Source: www.winsavvy.com)

The figure illustrates a structured pathway through which emotional marketing significantly enhances consumer conversion likelihood, highlighting a reported increase of up to 70%. At the initial stage, emotional marketing strategies—such as emotional connection and compelling storytelling—serve as key stimuli that engage consumers at a psychological level. The use of emotionally charged visuals, narratives, and symbolic elements (such as hearts and human interaction) reflects the ability of brands to tap into consumers’ affective domain, triggering emotional memory and personal relevance. Storytelling, in particular, functions as a strategic mechanism that transforms marketing messages into meaningful experiences, thereby strengthening brand recall and emotional resonance. This emotional engagement is not merely superficial; it builds a deeper cognitive–affective linkage that positions the brand within the consumer’s personal and social identity framework, making the communication more persuasive and memorable. As the process progresses, emotional engagement translates into higher levels of trust and sustained interaction, which act as critical mediating factors influencing consumer behaviour. The figure’s depiction of engagement through digital interfaces and trust-building elements suggests that emotionally connected consumers are more likely to interact with brands, perceive them as authentic, and develop long-term relational bonds. These factors collectively drive consumers through the conversion funnel, where emotional alignment reduces decision-making resistance and accelerates purchase intentions. The final stage, represented by financial gains and growth indicators, demonstrates that emotional marketing ultimately leads to higher conversions and improved business outcomes. Thus, the figure encapsulates a comprehensive behavioural model in which emotional stimuli are transformed into economic value through a sequential process of connection, engagement, trust, and action, reinforcing the strategic importance of emotions in contemporary marketing practices.

An analysis shows that emotional memory significantly predicts consumer behavioural intentions, including purchase intention and brand advocacy. Consumers who reported stronger emotional recall exhibited higher levels of intention to purchase and recommend the brand. This supports contemporary evidence suggesting that emotionally retrieved memories influence decision heuristics and reduce

uncertainty in consumption choices (Wang & Huang, 2023). Emotional memory enhances perceived authenticity and trust, both of which play decisive roles in intention formation. The statistically significant path coefficients indicate that nostalgia-induced recall is not limited to affective appreciation but extends into actionable behavioural commitment. The mediating role of emotional attachment was also substantiated through bootstrapping procedures, revealing partial mediation between emotional memory and behavioural intention. This suggests that nostalgia strengthens relational bonds before influencing behavioural outcomes. Prior research has demonstrated that nostalgic storytelling enhances brand attachment by embedding the brand within consumers' identity narratives (Kim & Kim, 2024). In the present model, emotional attachment amplifies the impact of memory activation, indicating that behavioural intentions are more likely when nostalgia fosters a sense of relational closeness. Thus, attachment emerges as a critical psychological bridge linking past-oriented emotion with future-oriented action. Consumers with high nostalgia orientation exhibited stronger purchase and advocacy intentions compared to those with lower proneness. This finding corroborates generational and identity-based research suggesting that nostalgic responsiveness varies across consumer segments (Li et al., 2023). The overall model fit indices (CFI, TLI, RMSEA) confirm robust explanatory power, validating the integrated framework. Collectively, the findings demonstrate that emotional memory serves as a central explanatory mechanism through which nostalgia shapes measurable consumer behavioural intentions.

9. Findings of Study

- The study reveals that nostalgia-based marketing appeals significantly activate emotional memory among consumers. Exposure to nostalgic cues such as retro visuals, heritage narratives, and past-oriented symbolism resulted in heightened autobiographical recall and emotional vividness. Respondents demonstrated stronger self-continuity and personal relevance when interacting with nostalgia-driven stimuli. This finding confirms that nostalgia operates as a cognitive affective trigger, effectively reactivating emotionally embedded past experiences within the consumer memory system.
- The results further indicate that emotional memory activation has a strong positive influence on consumer behavioural intentions. Consumers who experienced intensified emotional recall reported higher purchase intention, stronger willingness to recommend the brand, and greater loyalty orientation. Emotional memory enhances familiarity and perceived authenticity, which reduces cognitive resistance and increases approach behaviour. The statistical analysis confirms that emotional memory functions as a significant predictor of behavioural outcomes rather than merely influencing attitudinal responses.
- Emotional attachment was found to partially mediate the relationship between emotional memory and behavioural intentions. Nostalgia-induced memories strengthened affective bonds between consumers and brands, which subsequently translated into behavioural commitment. This suggests that nostalgia influences behavioural intentions through relational mechanisms. Brands that successfully embed themselves within consumers' personal narratives are more likely to generate repeat purchase and advocacy behaviours.
- The moderation analysis demonstrates that nostalgia proneness significantly strengthens the relationship between emotional memory and behavioural intention. Consumers with high nostalgia orientation showed stronger intention responses compared to those with lower nostalgia proneness. This finding emphasizes the importance of market segmentation in nostalgia marketing strategies. Overall, the validated structural model confirms that emotional memory serves as a central mechanism through which nostalgia shapes measurable consumer behavioural intentions in contemporary marketing contexts.

10. Conclusion

This study establishes emotional memory as a strategically significant mechanism in understanding how nostalgia shapes consumer behavioural intentions. By integrating emotional memory theory with consumer behaviour frameworks, the research moves beyond treating nostalgia as a decorative or sentimental appeal and positions it as a measurable psychological construct. The findings confirm that nostalgia-based marketing stimuli effectively activate autobiographical memory systems, which in turn influence purchase intention, recommendation behaviour, and loyalty orientation. Thus, nostalgia operates not merely at an affective level but through structured cognitive relational pathways that shape future-oriented consumer actions. The study further demonstrates that emotional attachment serves as a critical mediating mechanism linking nostalgia-induced memory activation to behavioural outcomes. When nostalgic cues strengthen relational bonds between consumers and brands, the probability of actionable intentions significantly increases. Additionally, the moderating effect of nostalgia proneness highlights the importance of segmentation and audience alignment in designing nostalgia-driven campaigns. These results reinforce the view that nostalgia marketing requires strategic targeting rather than broad application. From a managerial perspective, the research provides evidence-based guidance for designing effective nostalgia-oriented marketing strategies. Brands should focus on authentic autobiographical cues, identity-relevant storytelling, and heritage symbolism that resonate with consumers' lived experiences. Moreover, evaluation metrics should extend beyond engagement indicators to include measurable behavioural intentions and relational constructs. This study contributes to both theoretical advancement and practical implementation by developing a structured model that connects nostalgia appeal, emotional memory activation, and consumer behavioural intentions. By framing emotional memory as a core marketing tool, the research offers a robust foundation for future empirical studies and strategic brand management initiatives in increasingly emotion-driven marketplaces.

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