



Why nostalgia is so 'fetch' right now

In the first two volumes of the Ipsos and Effie Dynamic Effectiveness series, we've explored the business case for better portrayals of women in marketing and how to bridge the empathy gap. In volume 3, we explore why nostalgia is a powerful tool and the ways in which brands can use it effectively.

Seen someone wearing skirt and trousers Y2K style recently?

Cottage-core, Barbie mania, vinyl, 90's yearbook challenges on TikTok & Instagram, Stranger Things, Mean Girls, messy mullets... We are recycling culture at a faster rate than our plastic bottles. Why is this?

To say we are overwhelmed is an understatement, 68% of people in the UK agreed that there are so many critical problems in the world today¹ we struggle to decide what to focus on. The current polycrisis makes us think about the past as a much more stable and attractive place, which we re-visit for comfort, hope, security, control, connection, and in some case, learnings to help us build a more desirable future.



Social scientist Zygmunt Bauman devised the term ‘Retrotopia’ to describe the societal desire to ‘return’ to an often imaginary, past.² While the far-right seeks a ‘return to the nation-state’, the left looks for a ‘return to equality’. Nostalgia affects everyone. Globally, there’s only an 8-percentage point difference between age groups yearning for their country to be the way it used to, and virtually no differences between those in their mid/late 20’s and those in their mid-70’s.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

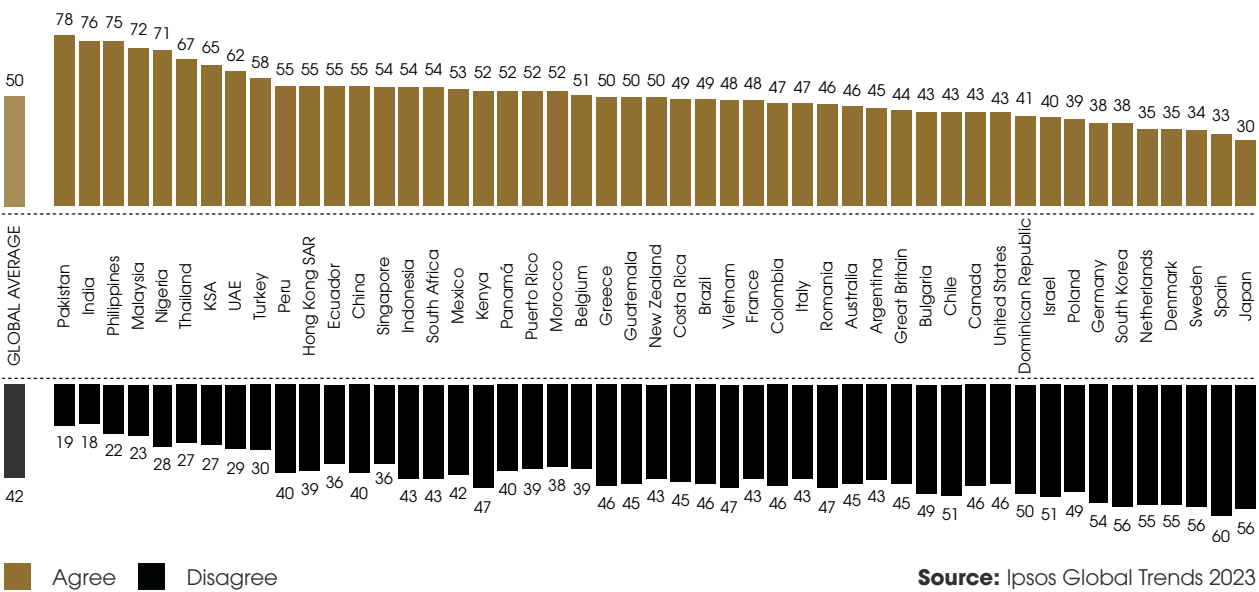
‘I would like my country to be the way it used to be’



In Great Britain, **44% of people agree that ‘given the choice, I would prefer to have grown up at the time when my parents were children’**. Further evidence of rosy retrospection and a strong desire for the past when faced with an uncertain future.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

‘Given the choice, I would prefer to have grown up at the time when my parents were children’



Nostalgia presents an opportunity for marketers to connect with consumers by tapping into the feel-good factor in their past. Here we explore four ways in which Effie award winners have used nostalgia in their campaigns to drive effectiveness and trigger specific emotional connections.



Key takeaways

- Nostalgia is a tactic that helps meet people's emotional needs while tapping into aspects of your brand's history and heritage.
- Utilising aspects of a brand's history and heritage boosts brand attention of ads by 8%.
- Renault and Publicis•Poke used nostalgia to increase purchase consideration 52% in three months by revisiting their 90's 'Papa Nicole' ad campaign to reconnect audiences.
- KFC achieved a business turnaround over five years, accelerating revenue growth to over £1 billion by tapping into heritage icons and values to create 'The Right Way'.
- 'Long Live the Local' tapped into place-based nostalgia for the beloved local pub, galvanising the public and MPs to influence the UK Chancellor to stem a beer tax increase, which would force more pubs across the country out of business.
- Crayola's 'Colours of the World' products beat revenue projections by 8x by challenging nostalgic rosy retrospection, addressing the past head on, and giving us hope for the future.

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The effectiveness of nostalgia in numbers

Nostalgia is a means to drive a connection with your audience and leverage your brand fit while doing so, [as we know this two-way fit between brand and audience is the most discriminating factor in ad effectiveness.](#)

An analysis of the Ipsos ad testing database shows that utilising aspects of a brand's history or heritage in advertising **provides an 8% bump in brand attention**³. But currently **only 15% of ads in the UK and 10% of ads globally** are leveraging aspects related to the brand's history or heritage.

[Dunkin's 'Bennifer' and Disney's '100 Anniversary' ads in the 2023 Superbowl](#) did a great job reaching into their brand history to create some of the highest buzz and brand equity shifts Ipsos measured last year. We fully expect to see more nostalgia themes and brand history used in 2024.

While divergent 'Creative Experiences and Ideas' are important, we know from assessing thousands of ads that effectiveness isn't driven by creativity alone, 'Empathy and Fitting In' is equally important.

Using nostalgia to strike the right chord with your audience

In the UK, 76% of people "feel like things in my country are out of control right now"⁴. The uncertainty bred by the polycrisis causes us to long for the psychological safety of the past, which can manifest as feelings of control, comfort, connection, hope, or security.

We've identified four ways in which Effie award winners use nostalgia to evoke specific feelings for their audience.



01

Renault: 'Papa, Nicole'

Utilising the brand heritage to build connection:

Renault needed to build consideration with two different audiences - today's buyers (dads) and tomorrow's (daughters). But, when both were united by little other than COVID-triggered nostalgia, Renault saw an opportunity to dip into an archive of treasured assets, including the brand's iconic and beloved nineties campaign '[Papa, Nicole](#)'.

Publicis•Poke revived the iconic father-daughter drama, helping Renault bridge both audiences and unlock latent love for the brand. The campaign told a new chapter in the story starring three new Nicoles and their Papas. The campaign was launched on Father's Day and increased purchase consideration by 52% in three months.



Revisiting their 90's 'Papa Nicole' ad campaign helped Renault to reconnect audiences and increase purchase consideration 52% in three months.

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Our challenge was to find a unifying approach that could connect two very different audiences: younger women and older men. The answer lay in the iconic, fondly remembered Papa Nicole campaign. Creating a new chapter in this much-loved 1990's advertising property, by setting it in modern day Britain with a cast of real Dads and daughters, meant that we could deliver both emotional resonance and contemporary relevance.



Alison Head
Chief Strategy Officer, Publicis•Poke

Utilising brand heritage to provide comfort and reassurance:

Nostalgia can also give us confidence that we are making the right choices today. There are brands we love from our past, brands we trust to never let us down. KFC won a Gold Effie for sustained success in 2022 for their work on 'The Right Way'. Mother London and KFC recognised in 2017 that penetration was falling and to build it back up they needed to turn the business fundamentals around chicken quality into a mantra and the brand's heritage into a mark of quality and reassurance.

One of the ads at the heart of this is '[Chicken Town](#)'. The ad deploys KFC's Colonel mascot to great effect (as Ipsos

ad testing data shows that use of a brand mascot drives up brand attention by a solid 17%⁵), showing him driving through London, the iconic Godfather theme playing in the background, past chicken shop imitators, saying: "A word to the wise, there is only one Colonel in Chicken Town."

This campaign tapped into the brand heritage and nostalgia to provide a sense of comfort and reassurance that KFC was home to the best quality chicken and, therefore, the right choice for them. From 2017-2021, 'The Right Way' was a north star for the entire business, delivering a brand turnaround, accelerating revenue growth to over £1bn, and overcoming two of the biggest crises in the business' history, all with an ROI of £3.81.

In five years KFC accelerated revenue growth to over £1 billion by tapping into heritage icons and values to create 'The Right Way'.



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‘Chicken Town’ drew upon the unique position of KFC in the category by repositioning competitors to imitators. Where other brands might seek to distract people from their competitors, this strategy took their existence as a strength and tapped into the power of a heritage which far outstretched theirs.

Heritage and an illustrious past aren’t always a guarantee of quality. Lehman Brothers was 118 years old before it collapsed, but when your brand is so entwined with the origin of the category tapping into people’s need for a little nostalgia is a powerful tool to usurp the competition.



Kieran Bradshaw
Head of Effectiveness, Mother

03

Havas: 'Long live the local'

Evoking nostalgia to drive action and provide control:

Havas with 'Long Live the Local' tapped into place-based nostalgia for local pubs and their place at the heart of UK communities. The campaign successfully galvanised the public to lobby their local MPs, who in turn would back the campaign in parliament and change the mind of an 'audience of one' (the UK Chancellor). They did this by reframing the issue of beer tax, which was causing pubs to close, as being 'bigger than beer' and a threat to the communities which those beloved local pubs serve.

Havas knew that to begin a modern movement, they needed to engage the

heart when economic arguments had failed in the past. They did extensive research around why the pub holds such a special place in people's hearts and found it was so much more than a drinking establishment. It was a place where many memories were formed, the original social network, a community hub, part of the national identity, and one of the last remaining public spaces.

For over four years, the campaign maintained public pressure on MPs and successive Chancellors to support Britain's pubs and breweries. This put power and control back into the hands of the people and saved the industry over £2.5 billion by cutting beer tax.

'Long Live the Local' tapped into place-based nostalgia for the beloved local pub, galvanising the public and MPs to influence the UK Chancellor to stem a beer tax increase.



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When the now feels a bit “meh”, and the future shouts climate emergency combined with AI futurism, no wonder we hark a few decades back.

Nostalgia is essentially optimism for the past. We look to tomorrow when the world feels good, and to the comfort of yesterday when it fills us with dread or anxiety. No big prize for guessing what we all feel when we lean into nostalgia in advertising now. From McDonald’s brilliant teletext ad ‘Change a little, change a lot’, to Hofmeister’s use of ‘George the Bear’; Arsenal celebrating the launch of their 23/24 kit in 80s style AND Chelsea theirs in 90s, with old Space Jam and Beverly Hills Cop reboots thrown in for good measure. It feels fun, feels human, we can laugh at it and those simpler times.

But rather than lamenting the present and recycling the past, brands and agencies are at our best when we drive optimism and excitement for the future. Look to the past for genuine human behaviour we want to protect or bring back for sure. But don’t hide behind it as style over substance. Our new generation of young adults are positive and optimistic about the future. So, whilst nostalgia plays a valid role and a shortcut to tap into good memory structures of the past, let’s not stop being innovative and creating new ones.



Britt Iversen
Executive Head of Strategy, Havas London

04

Crayola: 'Colours of the World'

Providing hope and a reason to look ahead by addressing the past head on: Crayola in the US won a Gold Effie for recognising how skin tone is continually and wrongly a deciding factor for who gets to 'belong'. It is a significant and unsettling experience for generations of children to not see themselves reflected in the world. Crayola tapped into a past that most people of colour can relate to and subverted nostalgia by challenging rosy retrospection.

Crayola believe that every child deserves the power to create their place in the world by colouring themselves into it. To bring that idea to life, they identified the

experience where children of varying skin tones felt most invisible and where Crayola could make a tangible difference: the iconic childhood self-portrait. They invited children everywhere to finally draw their #TrueSelfie with Crayola's ground-breaking 'Colors of the World' (CoW) products.

Not only did Crayola become a champion for children's representation and inclusion, the CoW campaign garnered 2 billion impressions within the first six weeks, drove revenue +8x vs. projections, and earned awards ranging from Creative Toy of the Year to Best Consumer Launch, Global PR Week & Grand Prize at the ANA Multicultural Excellence Awards.

Crayola's 'Colours of the World' products beat revenue projections by 8x by challenging nostalgic rosy retrospection.



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When I was eight years old, I went shopping for a Ken doll on my first holiday abroad. It was a huge deal as they weren't available in India. At a toyshop in Bahrain, there were two options – a white skinned Ken that cost eight dirhams and a brown skinned Ken that cost three dirhams. Standing in that shop I accepted this as normal because, by this age, the world had taught me that my real self was worth less in its eyes and I'd been drawing myself with pink skin, yellow hair, and blue eyes for some time. The Crayola campaign brought up so many memories for me, and I am truly delighted to see a brand create such a simple and practical tool to help children question things early on and feel like they belong.



Samira Brophy
Senior Creative Excellence Director, Ipsos



In summary

To sum up, there are several ways for marketers to boost the effectiveness of their marketing by tapping into nostalgia.

This tactic is effective because we are addressing a stressed-out audience who are looking to the past to find control, connection, security and hope. It provides the opportunity [for empathy and fit](#) which we know to be the most discriminating ad experience for effectiveness. Here are some pointers, brought to life using Effie cases to help you make the most of nostalgia:

1

Utilise your brand heritage to build connection using highlights people will enjoy reminiscing about.

2

Utilise brand heritage to provide comfort and reassurance to people for choosing you.

3

Evoke memories around special places or events in people's lives to inspire them to act.

4

Finally, you can also upend nostalgia by showing the past for what it is and provide hope for the future.



Sources

1. Ipsos Essentials, n=10038 people surveyed between Sept 5 to 11, 2023. Respondents were aged 18-74 in Canada and the United States and 16-74 in Australia, Brazil, China, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, India, Japan, Mexico, South Africa, South Korea, and the United Kingdom.
2. Zygmunt Bauman (2017) Retrotopia. Polity Press
3. Ipsos Global Ad testing database, 2020 to present. Brand attention refers to the ability of people to recall your ad and brand after they have experienced it in a true to life clutter or distracted setting.
4. Ipsos Essentials, n=1002 people aged 16-74 in the UK
5. Ipsos Global Ad testing database, 2020 to present



Get in touch

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Samira is an Ipsos expert on brand and communication work, with 20 years of experience spanning creative and research roles. She leads Ipsos' early-stage campaign development offer, is a thought leader on ad effectiveness, and works with clients to adopt a misfit mindset and make bolder, highly creative campaigns that audiences value.

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Rachel has over 25 years' experience working across marketing, communications and market research – in both agency and client-side roles. During that time she's worked with brands and business in most industries in a career that's spanned the Charity and Public Sector as well as the Commercial sector. Her role at Effie allows her to bring her diverse experiences together to champion the progressive practice and practitioners of marketing effectiveness across the industry.

Dynamic Effectiveness: Ipsos & Effie UK

While the bedrock of brand building and human motivations stand firm, we turn our spyglasses onto the shifting sands to uncover current opportunities for marketers. The series combines evidence on society, trends, and advertising effectiveness from Ipsos research with Effie's marketing effectiveness database.

