Nostalgia in Marketing and Consumer Behavior: Scientific Evolution, Conceptual Structure, and Emerging Trends

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Abstract*– Nostalgia has gained relevance in marketing and consumer behavior, extending its applications to branding, tourism, consumer experiences, and digital environments. However, the rapid expansion of this research field has made it difficult to understand its conceptual evolution and the emerging trends shaping its development. In this context, this study aimed to analyze the scientific evolution, conceptual structure, and emerging trends of nostalgia research in marketing and consumer behavior through a science mapping approach. A total of 486 documents indexed in Scopus and published between 2015 and 2026 were analyzed using a PRISMA-based selection process and integrating RStudio (Bibliometrix package) and VOSviewer. The results revealed sustained growth in scientific production, identifying three developmental phases and six conceptual domains related to authenticity, heritage, emotions, tourism, branding, consumer behavior, and digital environments. Furthermore, the temporal analysis identified three conceptual stages, illustrating the transition from research focused on the cultural and psychological foundations of nostalgia to strategic applications associated with nostalgic consumption and digital platforms. The findings indicate that nostalgia has evolved into a strategic marketing resource with multidisciplinary applications, providing a framework for understanding the intellectual evolution of the field, the relationships among its research domains, and the emerging trends shaping its development.

Keywords*– Nostalgia, Marketing, Consumer behavior, Science mapping, Bibliometric analysis.

I. Introduction

Nostalgia is no longer regarded solely as an emotion associated with reminiscing about the past; instead, it has become a strategic resource in marketing and consumer behavior research [1]. Over the last decades, organizations have increasingly incorporated elements, symbols, experiences, and narratives linked to the past to strengthen consumers' emotional connections and differentiate their value propositions [2]. Likewise, the use of brand heritage and history contributes to reinforcing brand identity and generating competitive advantages [3], fostering differentiation and perceived authenticity in highly competitive markets [4]. From this perspective, nostalgia facilitates the retrieval of personal and collective memories [5], strengthens brand attachment and perceptions of authenticity [6], increases consumer trust [7], and positively influences purchase decisions and consumer behavior [8]. Consequently, research has evolved from predominantly psychological approaches toward interdisciplinary perspectives that integrate marketing, brand management, consumer behavior, tourism, hospitality, and digital technologies [2], [9].

This expansion has promoted the development of research across multiple consumption contexts. Initially, the literature focused on brand heritage and brand legacy [10], as well as heritage tourism and traditional gastronomy [11]. Subsequently, research expanded to include hospitality, experiential tourism, and cultural experiences, demonstrating that the evocation of the past enhances perceived authenticity, destination image, and revisit intention [12], [13], [14]. At the same time, branding research incorporated concepts such as brand heritage, retro branding, and brand communities, broadening the understanding of nostalgia as a mechanism for creating value and strengthening relationships between consumers and brands [7], [9], [15]. More recently, research has shifted toward nostalgic consumption, digital platforms, and social media, showing that nostalgic experiences reinforce perceived authenticity [16], increase consumers' emotional engagement [17], encourage interaction through user-generated content [18], and enhance value creation through brand storytelling [19]. These developments reflect an evolution from traditional applications toward scenarios in which nostalgia is integrated with digital technologies and new forms of interaction between consumers and brands [20].

However, this rapid expansion has also led to increasing fragmentation of knowledge. Research has developed simultaneously across multiple disciplines and application contexts, addressing dimensions such as authenticity, heritage, emotions, consumer behavior, tourism, branding strategies, digital platforms, and nostalgic consumption [2], [15]. Although this diversity has substantially enriched the field, it also makes it difficult to understand how these research streams are interconnected, which conceptual domains predominate, and how knowledge on nostalgia in marketing and consumer behavior has evolved intellectually.

Although narrative reviews and studies focused on specific applications of nostalgia are available, these works generally synthesize the literature from thematic or conceptual perspectives without simultaneously integrating analyses of scientific performance, conceptual structure, and thematic evolution [21]. Consequently, an important gap remains regarding how scientific knowledge on nostalgia in marketing and consumer behavior is organized, which conceptual domains structure this body of research, and which emerging trends currently shape its development. This gap is particularly

relevant given the incorporation of new perspectives related to branding, perceived authenticity, social media, experiential tourism, and nostalgic consumption, whose interactions have not yet been examined from an integrative perspective.

Within this context, the objective of the present study is to analyze the scientific evolution, conceptual structure, and emerging trends of research on nostalgia in marketing and consumer behavior through a science mapping approach based on data retrieved from Scopus. By integrating scientific performance analysis, conceptual structure analysis, and thematic evolution analysis, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of how nostalgia has evolved from a predominantly psychological construct into a strategic marketing resource with multidisciplinary applications. Furthermore, it offers an integrative perspective on the development of the field while identifying future research opportunities for innovation in digital marketing, experiential tourism, immersive technologies, artificial intelligence, and strategic brand management.

II. Methodology

A. Study Design

This research was conducted as a science mapping study using a quantitative, descriptive, and exploratory approach aimed at analyzing the scientific evolution, conceptual structure, and thematic trends of research on nostalgia in marketing and consumer behavior [22].

B. Search Strategy and Document Selection

Data were retrieved from the Scopus database, selected because of its extensive coverage of international scientific journals and the quality of its metadata for bibliometric research [22], [23]. The search was performed in the Title, Abstract, and Keywords (TITLE-ABS-KEY) fields using the following search query:

TITLE-ABS-KEY ((nostalgia OR "nostalgic consumption" OR "nostalgic marketing") AND (consumer OR purchas* OR branding OR marketing))

The search results were subsequently refined by considering publications from the 2015–2026 period within the subject areas of Business, Management and Accounting, Social Sciences, and Economics, Econometrics and Finance. In addition, only research articles and review articles were included, as they represent peer-reviewed scientific evidence. The document identification and selection process followed the PRISMA guidelines to ensure the transparency and reproducibility of the study [24]. As a result, the final dataset consisted of 486 documents, which served as the basis for the bibliometric and science mapping analyses.

C. Bibliometric Analysis and Science Mapping

The bibliometric analysis was performed by integrating RStudio with the Bibliometrix package (through the Biblioshiny interface) and VOSviewer, two complementary tools for scientific performance analysis and conceptual knowledge mapping [23], [25].

RStudio (Bibliometrix package) was used to analyze annual scientific production, the leading publication sources, and thematic evolution. VOSviewer was employed to construct the keyword co-occurrence network using All Keywords, the Full Counting method, and a minimum threshold of five occurrences. All Keywords was selected to integrate both author-provided and Scopus-indexed keywords, providing a broader representation of the conceptual structure of the field. Full Counting was applied to assign equal weight to each keyword occurrence, while the minimum threshold of five occurrences was established to exclude sporadic terms and retain concepts with sufficient recurrence to identify interpretable conceptual patterns. To facilitate network interpretation, the term “nostalgia” was excluded only from the visualization because of its high frequency, without modifying the composition of the document corpus.

Finally, conceptual evolution was examined using the Overlay Visualization feature in VOSviewer and the Thematic Evolution function in Biblioshiny. Together, these techniques integrated scientific performance analysis, conceptual structure analysis, and thematic evolution, providing a multidimensional understanding of the development of research on nostalgia in marketing and consumer behavior.

III. Results

A. Document Corpus Construction

The document corpus was established through a systematic process of identification, screening, and inclusion of publications to ensure the transparency and reproducibility of the study. The selection procedure followed the PRISMA guidelines. Fig. 1 summarizes the different stages of the document selection process.

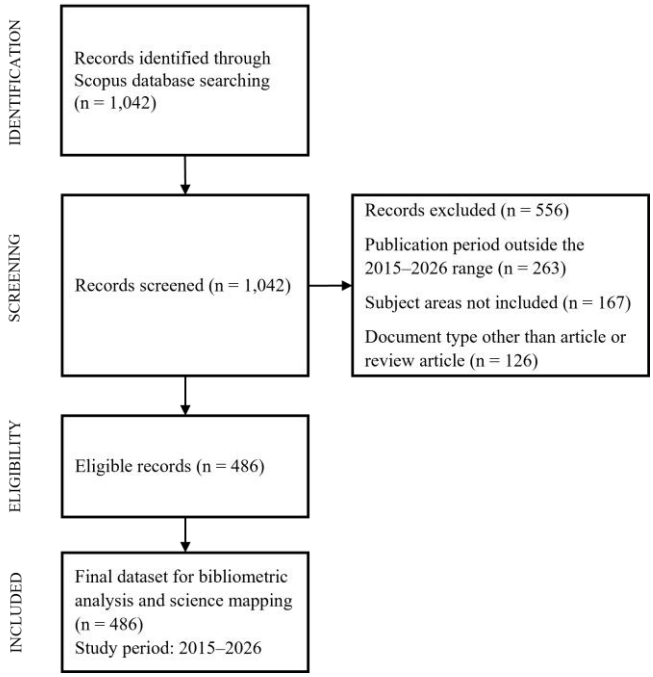


Fig. 1 PRISMA flow diagram of the document selection process.

The search strategy initially retrieved 1,042 records. After applying the predefined inclusion criteria (publication period, subject areas, and document type), the final dataset comprised 486 documents, which served as the basis for the scientific performance analysis, conceptual structure analysis, and thematic evolution analysis of research on nostalgia in marketing and consumer behavior.

B. Scientific Performance of the Research Field

1) Annual Scientific Production: The evolution of scientific production provides insights into the main stages in the development of research on nostalgia in marketing and consumer behavior. Fig. 2 illustrates the annual number of publications recorded during the 2015–2026 period.

Scientific production exhibited a steady upward trend throughout the study period, with an average annual growth rate of 10.5%. The dataset consisted of 486 documents published across 302 scientific sources, with an average document age of 4.41 years and 15.87 citations per document, indicating a relatively recent but steadily expanding research field.

The annual publication pattern revealed three distinct stages. Phase I. Emergence of the field (2015–2018): This initial stage was characterized by an increase from 18 to 37 publications, primarily focused on understanding the role of nostalgia in consumer behavior.

Phase II. Sustained growth (2019–2022): During this period, annual scientific production remained relatively stable, ranging from 38 to 45 publications per year, reflecting the consolidation of new applications of nostalgia in marketing and consumer behavior.

Phase III. Scientific expansion (2023–2026): This stage showed accelerated growth in scientific production, reaching 66 publications in 2025. Although 54 publications were recorded for 2026, this value corresponds to a year that was still in progress at the time of data collection.

Overall, these findings demonstrate the continuous development of the field, whose conceptual transformation is examined in the following sections.

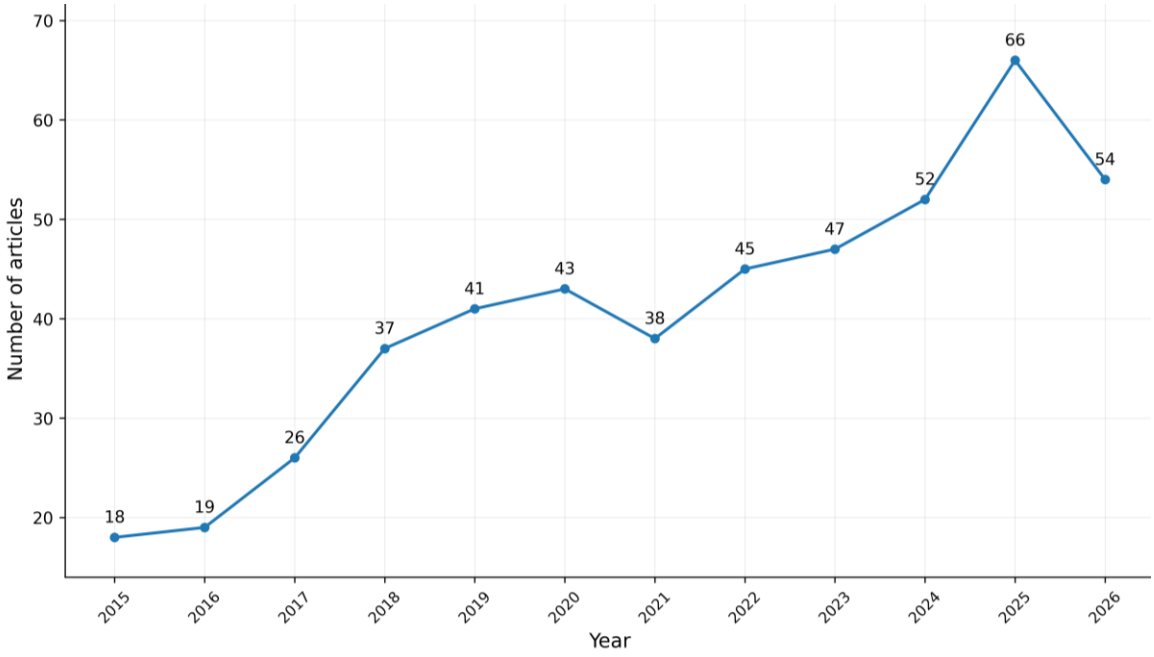


Fig. 2 Annual scientific production on nostalgia in marketing and consumer behavior during the 2015–2026 period.

2) Leading Publication Sources: The analysis of publication sources makes it possible to identify the journals that have played the most significant role in disseminating research on nostalgia in marketing and consumer behavior. Fig. 3 presents the leading publication sources identified in the analyzed dataset.

The 486 documents were published in 302 scientific journals, highlighting the multidisciplinary nature of the research field. The journals with the highest publication output were Journal of Business Research (15 articles), Psychology & Marketing (13), and Journal of Marketing Management (10). Other prominent journals include Current Issues in Tourism, Journal of Product and Brand Management, and International Journal of Hospitality Management, reflecting the growing application of nostalgia research in marketing, tourism, hospitality, and brand management.

From the perspective of journal quality, most publications appeared in Scopus Q1 journals with high impact indicators, including Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services (CiteScore 24.8), Journal of Business Research (22.9), and Psychology & Marketing (17.7). These findings indicate that research on nostalgia is primarily disseminated through high-impact international journals, further supporting the interdisciplinary nature and increasing maturity of the field.

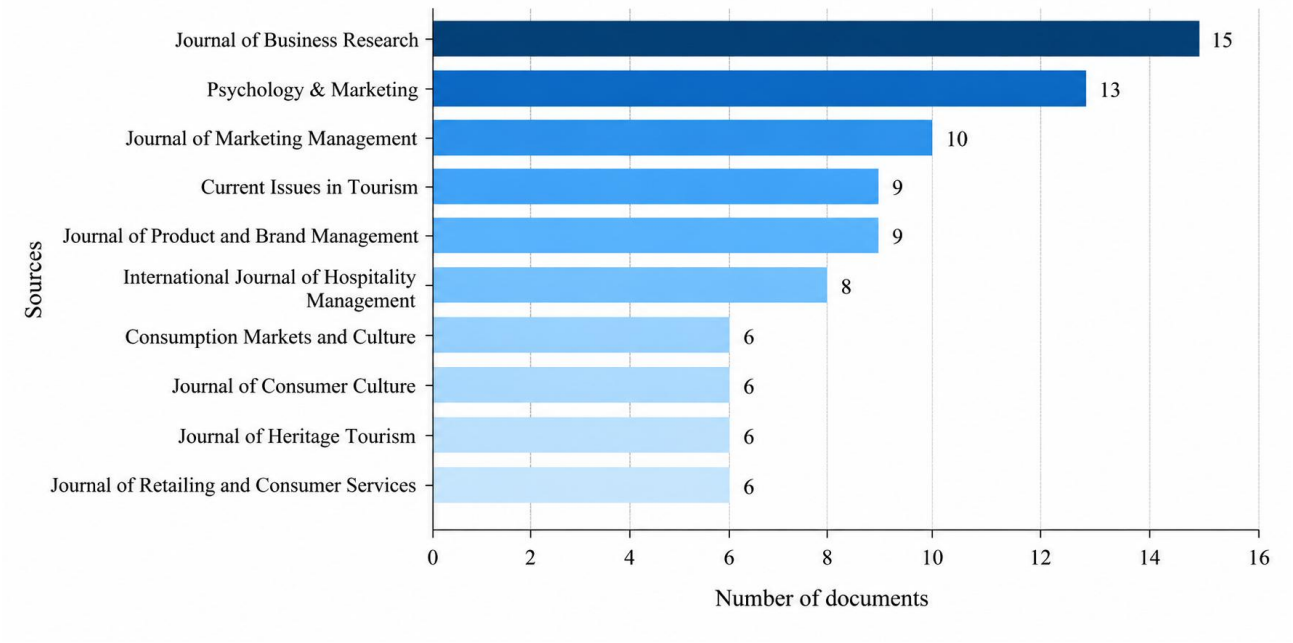


Fig. 3 Leading publication sources on nostalgia in marketing and consumer behavior.

C. *Conceptual Structure of the Research Field*

1) Keyword Co-occurrence Network: To identify the conceptual structure of research on nostalgia in marketing and consumer behavior, a keyword co-occurrence analysis was conducted using VOSviewer. Fig. 4 presents the conceptual network generated using the Full Counting method with a minimum threshold of five occurrences per keyword. The term "nostalgia" was excluded only from the visualization because it represented the central concept of the search strategy, and its high frequency hindered the identification of relationships among the remaining concepts.

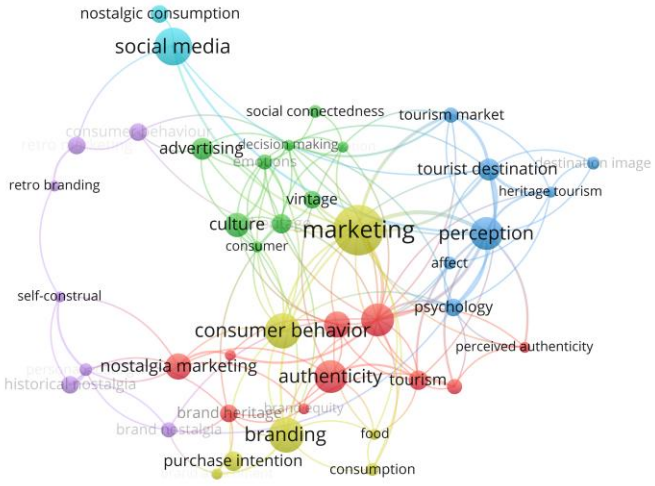


Fig. 4 Keyword co-occurrence network of research on nostalgia in marketing and consumer behavior.

The network analysis identified six conceptual domains, derived from clusters of highly interconnected keywords. To facilitate interpretation, Table I summarizes the main concepts comprising each domain, their significance within the research field, and the representative literature supporting their interpretation.

The thematic organization presented in Table I shows that research on nostalgia in marketing and consumer behavior has evolved through the progressive incorporation of new theoretical perspectives and application contexts. The earliest domains are associated with concepts related to authenticity, memory, heritage, and cultural identity, which constitute the foundations upon which the field initially developed. Subsequently, research expanded toward heritage tourism, consumer experience, and strategic brand management, incorporating concepts such as brand heritage, branding, brand attachment, and purchase intention.

More recent domains reveal a transition toward digital environments, where nostalgia is integrated with nostalgic consumption, social media, user-generated content, and emerging brand communication strategies. This evolution reflects a shift from approaches primarily focused on explaining the psychological foundations of nostalgia toward perspectives that emphasize its strategic application as a mechanism for creating value, strengthening perceived authenticity, and fostering long-term relationships between consumers and brands.

Overall, the identified conceptual structure demonstrates that research on nostalgia in marketing and consumer behavior is organized around six interconnected conceptual domains representing different stages in the development of the field. Rather than constituting independent research streams, these

domains illustrate a continuous evolution from the cultural and emotional foundations of nostalgia to contemporary applications involving branding, consumer behavior, and digital ecosystems. This conceptual organization provides an integrated view of the intellectual architecture of the field and serves as the foundation for interpreting its temporal evolution, which is examined in the following section.

2) Temporal Evolution of the Conceptual Structure: The temporal evolution of the conceptual structure was analyzed using the Overlay Visualization feature in VOSviewer, which assigns a color to each keyword according to its average year of publication. Fig. 5 illustrates the progressive incorporation of new concepts and highlights the main trends that have shaped the development of research on nostalgia in marketing and consumer behavior.

TABLE I
CONCEPTUAL DOMAINS OF RESEARCH ON NOSTALGIA IN MARKETING AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IDENTIFIED THROUGH KEYWORD CO-OCCURRENCE ANALYSIS

Conceptual Domain	Main Concepts	Domain Interpretation	Representative Literature
1. Authenticity, brand heritage, and consumer experiences	Authenticity, brand heritage, consumer nostalgia, tourism, memory, brand equity, perceived authenticity, revisit intention	Nostalgia enhances perceived authenticity and brand heritage, creating memorable experiences that increase brand value and positively influence consumer behavior in tourism and consumption contexts.	[3], [4], [7], [12], [14], [16]
2. Cultural heritage, emotions, and consumer decision-making	Heritage, culture, emotions, motivation, decision making, consumer, advertising, social connectedness, vintage	Nostalgia functions as a mechanism that transforms cultural heritage into emotional connections capable of influencing motivation, consumer decision-making, and consumers' sense of belonging toward brands and destinations.	[7], [10], [11], [15], [26]
3. Destination image and tourism experiences	Tourist destination, destination image, heritage tourism, perception, psychology, affect, tourism market	The evocation of the past enhances destination image through cognitive and affective processes, promoting memorable tourism experiences while increasing visit and revisit intentions.	[4], [13], [15], [17], [18]
4. Branding strategies and consumer behavior	Marketing, branding, consumer behavior, purchase intention, brand attachment, consumption, food	Nostalgia has become a strategic marketing approach that strengthens brand positioning, enhances emotional attachment, and promotes purchase intention and consumer behavior.	[3], [8], [9], [14], [19]
5. Types of nostalgia and retro branding strategies	Brand nostalgia, personal nostalgia, historical nostalgia, retro branding, retro marketing, self-construal	Research distinguishes different forms of nostalgia and demonstrates that each generates specific consumer responses that can be leveraged through retro branding and retro marketing strategies.	[3], [8], [9], [27], [28]
6. Nostalgic consumption and digital social media	Social media, nostalgic consumption	Digital platforms expand the reach of nostalgic consumption by facilitating the creation and dissemination of content that strengthens consumer interaction, engagement, and brand loyalty.	[9], [15], [18], [20], [27]

The analysis identified three stages of conceptual evolution. These stages do not represent chronological subdivisions of the 2015–2026 document corpus; rather, they are interpretative groupings derived from the Average Publication Year (APY) of the keywords included in the co-occurrence network. Therefore, their temporal ranges reflect the average concentration of the concepts that met the established minimum occurrence threshold rather than the temporal boundaries of the analyzed corpus. The first stage (2019–2020) is characterized by studies focused on the foundations of the field, with concepts related to heritage, culture, advertising, decision-making, and brand heritage. The second stage (2021–2022) reflects the consolidation of nostalgia as a strategic resource, incorporating topics such as marketing, branding, authenticity, perception, tourism, and purchase intention.

Finally, the third stage (2023–2024) reveals an expansion toward emerging research topics related to brand nostalgia, nostalgic consumption, social media, perceived authenticity, and affective responses, reflecting the growing interest in digital experiences and contemporary marketing strategies.

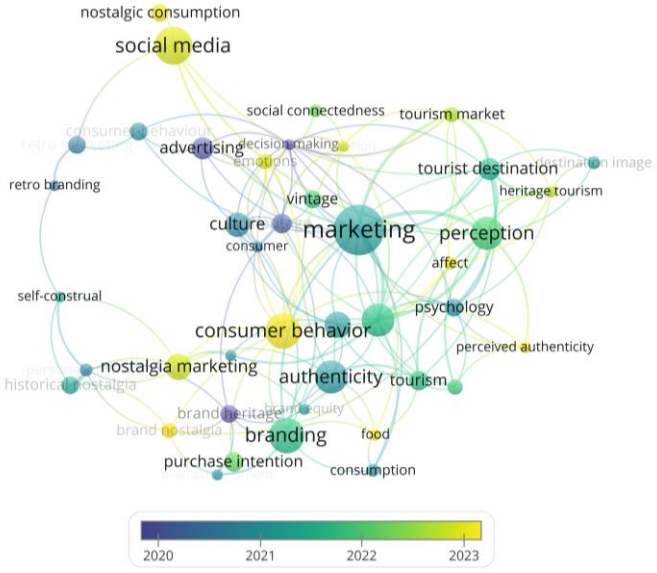


Fig. 5 Temporal evolution of the conceptual structure of research on nostalgia in marketing and consumer behavior based on the VOSviewer Overlay Visualization.

Overall, the temporal evolution demonstrates a transition from studies centered on the cultural and psychological foundations of nostalgia toward approaches focused on strategic brand management and, more recently, nostalgic consumption in digital environments. This progression is consistent with the increase in scientific production identified in the previous section and confirms a conceptual transformation of the field, in which nostalgia has evolved from a construct primarily used to explain consumer behavior into a strategic marketing resource with multidisciplinary applications.

IV. Discussion

The thematic evolution identified in this study demonstrates that nostalgia marketing has evolved from being primarily understood as an emotional resource to becoming a multidimensional construct closely associated with authenticity, brand heritage, destination image, consumer behavior, branding strategies, and digital interactions. This evolution suggests that nostalgia is no longer viewed as an isolated affective response but rather as a strategic mechanism capable of strengthening consumer–brand relationships through cognitive, emotional, and social processes [3], [4], [19].

The first thematic cluster reveals that authenticity and brand heritage constitute the theoretical foundations of contemporary nostalgia marketing. Early studies emphasized authenticity as a key determinant of heritage tourism experiences and consumer trust [4], whereas more recent research demonstrates that brand storytelling, sustainability cues, and heritage narratives enhance perceived authenticity and increase the effectiveness of nostalgic marketing campaigns [19]. Similarly, heritage-based brand management has evolved toward participatory approaches in which consumers embrace innovation provided that it preserves the symbolic identity of the brand [3], [7]. Collectively, these findings indicate that authenticity has evolved from a static brand attribute into a dynamic perception co-created by organizations and consumers.

A second major finding concerns the increasing integration of emotions, cultural heritage, and consumer decision-making. The bibliometric structure shows that emotions are no longer viewed solely as outcomes of nostalgic experiences but also as mediating mechanisms capable of influencing purchase intention, destination choice, and consumer evaluations [10], [11], [26]. Likewise, positive emotions expressed in digital environments promote value co-creation and strengthen consumer loyalty [15], whereas incidental emotions can substantially influence judgment and decision-making processes [18]. Consequently, nostalgia marketing has progressively incorporated principles of emotional psychology into broader consumer behavior frameworks.

The third cluster highlights the consolidation of heritage tourism as one of the principal empirical contexts for nostalgia marketing research. Destination image, heritage tourism, affective experiences, and revisit intention form an integrated conceptual framework explaining how nostalgic memories enhance the attractiveness of tourist destinations [10], [12]. Recent studies further demonstrate that immersive technologies, particularly virtual reality, intensify nostalgic experiences by increasing emotional engagement and destination evangelism [17], while user-generated content on social media simultaneously amplifies destination image through nostalgia-driven narratives [15], [18]. These findings suggest that technological innovation has substantially expanded the practical applications of nostalgia marketing beyond traditional tourism experiences.

The fourth thematic cluster indicates that branding has become one of the fastest-growing application areas within nostalgia marketing. Rather than relying exclusively on historical references, contemporary branding strategies incorporate brand attachment, brand storytelling, and participatory brand management to strengthen long-term relationships with consumers [3], [7]. Empirical evidence also demonstrates that nostalgic experiences significantly increase purchase intention and consumption behavior across diverse contexts, including traditional restaurants and culturally rooted food products [8], [13], [14]. Furthermore, recent studies indicate that brand narratives and authenticity cues are essential mechanisms through which nostalgia marketing enhances the perceived credibility of brands [19].

Another important contribution identified in this review is the conceptual distinction between brand nostalgia and personal nostalgia. Earlier studies primarily focused on nostalgia associated with traditional brands and historical products [3], [10], whereas more recent research clearly differentiates personal nostalgia from collective or historical nostalgia, demonstrating that both dimensions independently predict consumer behavior [8], [27]. This conceptual refinement expands the explanatory power of nostalgia marketing by simultaneously incorporating individual autobiographical memories and shared cultural narratives [28], [29].

Finally, the sixth cluster highlights the growing importance of social media as a new frontier for nostalgia marketing research. Unlike earlier studies, which primarily focused on traditional advertising, recent research demonstrates that nostalgic consumption increasingly takes place on digital platforms where consumers actively create, share, and reinforce meanings associated with nostalgia [27]. User-generated content, visual brand storytelling, and social interaction strengthen emotional connections with brands and destinations, transforming consumers from passive recipients into active co-creators of nostalgic experiences [15], [18]. This transition reflects the evolution of nostalgia marketing toward digital ecosystems characterized by greater consumer participation and interaction.

Overall, the thematic structure identified through the bibliometric analysis demonstrates that nostalgia marketing has evolved from a relatively narrow emotional construct into

a multidisciplinary research field integrating psychology, branding, tourism, consumer behavior, digital marketing, and cultural heritage. Rather than representing independent research streams, the six identified clusters constitute complementary perspectives that collectively explain how nostalgic experiences generate perceptions of authenticity, strengthen emotional attachment, influence purchase decisions, and foster long-term relationships between consumers and brands across both physical and digital environments [4], [7], [15], [19].

V. Conclusions

This study examined the scientific evolution and conceptual structure of research on nostalgia in marketing and consumer behavior during the 2015–2026 period using a science mapping approach. The findings indicate that this research field has undergone sustained growth and increasing maturity, as evidenced by the continuous rise in scientific production, the diversification of research topics, and the expansion of specialized journals publishing studies on this subject.

The keyword co-occurrence analysis identified six interconnected conceptual domains that describe the intellectual organization of the field. These domains demonstrate that research has evolved from approaches centered on authenticity, heritage, and emotions toward strategic applications involving branding, consumer behavior, experiential tourism, and nostalgic consumption. Collectively, these findings indicate that nostalgia has evolved into a multidimensional phenomenon whose applications extend beyond psychological explanations, establishing it as a strategic resource in contemporary marketing.

The temporal evolution of keywords revealed three conceptual stages that reflect the progressive transformation of the field. While early studies focused on understanding the cultural and psychological foundations of nostalgia, subsequent research incorporated concepts related to authenticity, brand management, and, more recently, social media, nostalgic consumption, and digital platforms. These findings suggest that future research will increasingly focus on digital environments and emerging technologies that enable the development of highly personalized consumer experiences.

From a methodological perspective, this study demonstrates that integrating RStudio through the Bibliometrix package with VOSviewer enables the combination of scientific performance indicators with conceptual mapping and thematic evolution analyses, providing a comprehensive understanding of knowledge development within the field. Furthermore, interpreting the identified clusters through representative articles from the document corpus strengthened the analysis by moving beyond the descriptive interpretation of bibliometric networks and developing a conceptually grounded synthesis supported by scientific evidence. In this regard, the findings provide a valuable framework for future research exploring new applications of nostalgia in artificial intelligence, digital marketing, immersive experiences, electronic commerce, and strategic brand management.

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