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Nostalgia Rhapsody: The Use of Nostalgia in Musical Artists' Promotion and Marketing



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Nostalgia, with its ability to evoke comfort, connection, and transcendence, has become a pivotal element in music marketing and promotion. Once viewed as a form of psychological distress, nostalgia is now recognized as a positive emotional phenomenon that fosters psychological well-being and a sentimental connection to the past. This thesis explores how nostalgia is strategically utilized in the music industry to create meaningful connections with consumers and enhance commercial success.

By examining nostalgia's role in music production, branding, and promotion, the study highlights its use in areas such as retro packaging and branding, remasters, interpolations, legacy tours, and further uses of nostalgia. The research delves into both intentional and unintentional applications of nostalgic marketing and assessing its impact on consumer behavior. Through analysis of literature, it was revealed that the use of nostalgia in music presented to be a primary function in efficiently using existing product and being able to repackage and resell to both former and newer audiences, as well as a thematic device in musicians' promotion.

Primary data was also acquired through a series of interviews with music professionals in Finland to gain their perspective on how nostalgia has taken an affect on their career's operations, as well as their insights into how nostalgia has affected the music industry. Analysis illustrated how nostalgia, while a potent and useful tool in the sale of music, may be potentially overused as the industry risks stagnation with its dependence on past works.

Keywords:

Nostalgia Marketing, Music Marketing, Music Promotion, Nostalgia, Consumer Behavior, Music Industry

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background and Objective

I've chosen this topic as a method to examine how evoking nostalgia in consumers is used as a tool in the marketing and promotion of modern musical artists' product. The topic came to fruition through my experience as an avid music consumer myself and a listener of a variety of genres that have been popular throughout history. As a self-proclaimed fan of an assortment of artists, in recent years I began to follow many on their social medias and started to follow pop culture more closely. Through my avid music and pop culture consumption, I distinguished a distinct pattern of what could be considered history repeating itself.

The transportation music can provide through feelings of comfort, connection, and even transcendence can often be attributed to nostalgia. Historically, nostalgia's conjuring of overwhelming emotions has been defined as a form of mental illness or psychopathy (Routledge et al., 2013). As its been studied further, the phenomenon has been characterized more positively as "a sentimental longing or wistful affection for a period in the past" (Oxford Dictionary, 2024) that can even be utilized in upholding psychological well-being. Thus, music's strong association to consumer's memory has been utilized in its marketing and promotion.

Nostalgia as a marketing tool has long been used to appeal to consumers in various sectors and industries. The phenomenon has been recorded amongst marketers as both an unintentional and an intentional strategy. For example, in 2022 in a marketing conference proceeding it was noted that the with the use of "use of retro marketing, marketers can create a unique position in their branding to intrigue individuals through personal, historical, or collective nostalgia" (Bunch, 2022). It claims that that the success of branding associated with nostalgia can be substantiated because it can be used to influence "the order of

respondents' thoughts" rather than the simple claim that nostalgia is an emotional response as it has previously been studied (Muehling & Sprott, 2004).

Since music is considered a cultural product, its use of specific marketing strategies is often done beyond the confines of conventional promotion. For example, this has been examined amongst professionals in articles such as "The death of arts marketing: a paradigm shift from consumption to enrichment" (Walmsley, 2019), which explores the limitations of traditional marketing regarding marketing the arts because of the unique product and consumer at hand. He states that it is because "humanistic processes of audience engagement start to eclipse the transactional tactics of segmentation and promotion" (Walmsley, 2019). Therefore, the nuance and cultural identity of music must be regarded when theorizing the potential use of non-traditional promotion.

In the promotion and sale of music, musicians are seen as both the means of production and a product themselves. Furthermore, their conceptualized music's corresponding products, such as merchandise and concert tickets become an extension of their method of promotion. For example, large artist like Taylor Swift and Beyoncé, who have acquired large followings through their years long relationships with fans and engage with audiences through elaborate conceptual tours, raking in nearly 2 billion dollars each on their own respective tours (Rao, 2023).

While musicians have often been noted to take inspiration or interpolate music that came before them, it has gone beyond the actual music. The use of nostalgia has trickled down not only into the production of music through methods of remasters/reissues and interpolations, but musicians have also been able to thrive through the sale of their intellectual property. Greene (2023) discusses how music publishing, and the purchase of artists catalogues has become a flourishing business of its own because of the owner's ability to sell

the rights of the music for other musical artist's shot at using some part of it in their own production. These publishing companies recognized how artist were using the nostalgia of previous works and made business purely out of the sale of this musical nostalgia as Greene (2023) notes.

The physical products and visuals associated with released music is also used to evoke nostalgia in its consumers as an attempt to sell. In the consumer behavior review "Nostalgia Marketing: Examining Music Retromania" it claims that when music listeners are presented with "advertising messages made from classical music and images; CD packages designed with old pictures and posters designed based on an old style" it evokes nostalgic behavior and therefore "buying decisions can be positively enthused" (Kebede, 2021). The examination of nostalgia marketing is important because it can help advertisers to understand nostalgia triggers and implement them in the imagery and aesthetics of a musical artist's work.

Nostalgia marketing is not only used by newer artist who are depicting nostalgic motifs from the past, but also by more seasoned artists. Musical artists who have been in the limelight for decades are able to leverage the nostalgia of their own career. This is commonly demonstrated when experienced artists decide to go on reunion or legacy tours. This occurrence has been recognized by business analyst in articles such as "Economics of Nostalgia: Aging Rock Stars" Access to Fan Dollars has 'never been easier'. McNeil (2020) discusses streaming as one of the most prevalent reasons as to how legacy artist are able to capitalize off of their older discography and with this increased exposure comes prolonged interest. Through this renewed garnered interest, legacy musical acts like class rock bands can "dine out" of their own "nostalgia and are able to tour because people want to see it" (McNeil, 2020).

The exploration on the subject of music marketing should be recognized for its unique product and therefore be engaged with uniquely. This study aims to

examine how the breadth of nostalgia marketing and its utility in music can be recognized as a ubiquitous and nuanced process for the promotion of art. The main objective of this thesis will be to examine further into the kinds of strategies that professionals in the music industry utilize to promote the success of their artist and how they continue to retain that success through the use of nostalgia marketing.

1.2 Research Question

When making observations through the thesis' objective lens, some of the line of questioning used will be aligned with some of the following

1. -What are the key promotion strategies in the music industry that utilize nostalgia to engage audiences and boost sales?
2. -What are examples of contemporary artist who have gained success through those strategies?
3. -In what ways has the marketing of nostalgia affected innovation in the promotion and production of music?

1.3 Scope, Limitations, and Structure

This thesis will mainly focus on studying specific strategies and examples from globally successful artist in their application. The thesis is divided into five chapters which include the introduction to give background on the topic and provide foundational insights. The second chapter is the literature review, which covers past research and triangulated findings based on said research. It then continues to methodology where the background of why and how primary data was collected is explained. The fourth chapter focuses on the actual primary data collected. Finally, the conclusion includes analysis on all data findings and the key takeaways from the research overall.

Due to limitations of the topic and restraints in research and resource, primary data will rely upon a small demographic. It will also likely span across a limitation of genres and artists from a select number of countries since many cultures have their own stars whom I might have little knowledge or research available about.

2 Literature Review

The following section will examine key promotional strategies used by artist that utilize nostalgia to engage their audiences and boost sales. In its structure, it will be categorized into 3 interpretations: Physical merchandise, live music touring, and actual production and sale of music. These categories presented to be the most prevalent methods through which nostalgia was used to target audiences. In reference to these categories, there will also be analysis of instances and artist who have found success in the use of nostalgia marketing methods in their careers.

2.1 Music Consumer Decision Making Framework

To contextualize how nostalgia is utilized in appealing to consumers, an analysis must be made to illustrate their consumer decision making when it comes to music as a product. For this thesis I used the framework pictured in Picture 1 (Kimmel, 2018) to provide a foundational understanding while researching secondary sources and its relevancy to consumer decision making.

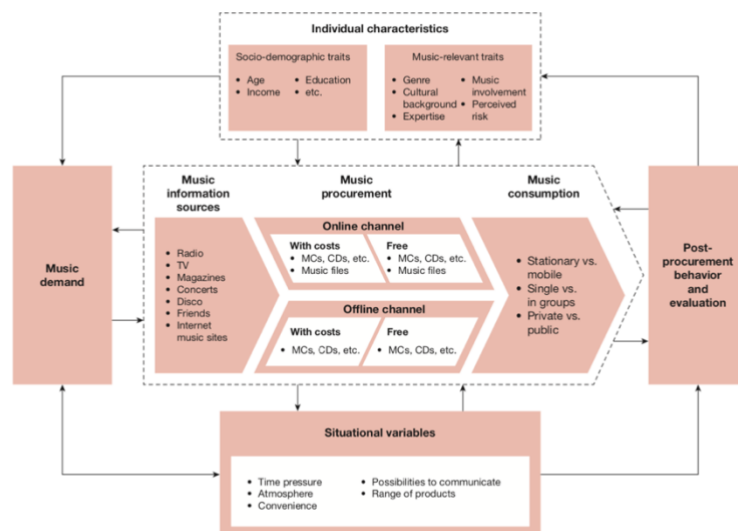


FIGURE 5.3 Consumer decision making and the procurement of music

Picture 1: Music Consumer Decision Making (Kimmel, 2018)

According to Kimmel (2018), it begins with music demand, which is shaped by individual traits like age, income, and cultural background, as well as situational factors such as time pressure and convenience. Consumers seek music-related information from sources like radio, TV, concerts, friends, and internet platforms, which help them discover and evaluate options. Based on this, they proceed to the music procurement phase, where they choose between online and offline channels. Both channels offer paid (e.g., CDs, digital files) and free options, with decisions influenced by accessibility, cost, and personal preferences.

Kimmel (2018) continues to explain that after procurement, the focus shifts to music consumption, which varies depending on the context—stationary or mobile, private, or public, and solo or group listening. These consumption experiences contribute to the post-procurement evaluation, where consumers reflect on their satisfaction and overall experience. This evaluation informs future music demand, creating a cyclical process where personal preferences, market conditions, and situational variables continuously interact to shape music-related buying behaviors.

2.2 Key Promotional Strategies in Music

To understand how the use of nostalgia is relevant in the promotion of music, it is then necessary to discuss the key promotional strategies used in the sale of music to analyze consumer behavior buying decisions (see Picture 1.). Since music is a medium of art being sold, there is more variation and exceptions to traditional marketing and promotion. While consumers have emotional attachment to physical products, consumers usually will have more preference and ethos connected to “creative products” such as paintings, drawings, designs, and music.

Because of this differentiable sentiment involved in the consumption of music, promotional strategies present as more unique and case-by-case according to

artist, genre, or even based on specific pieces of music being released by the same artist. However, as a general outline, common blueprints are used to appeal to specific target audiences. Most include elements such as strong personal digital branding, wide distribution, partnerships, and collaborations. Digital marketing has become overwhelmingly important in the promotion of product and its prevalence is no less in the marketing of a musical artist and their work. Many music publications emphasize that in order to have a fighting chance in the already hyper-competitive industry, a digital identity is necessary to build a relationship with potential fans or consumers (Rolling Stone Cultural Council, 2024). There are of course exceptions, such as more seasoned artist who already had an established fanbase prior to social media's existence and artist with more niche fan bases.

However, as previously stated, due to the industry being so competitive, artist usually require a social media presence. This is done by creating a "visual narrative" through elements such as consistent and curated Instagram post and stories or involvement in trends amongst all social media platforms (Grome, 2024). Fans and consumers can then follow along in real time and feel emotionally involved with their favorite artists personal lives, therefore feeling more inclined to consume their creations.

Another key strategy is selection of music distribution. This can include streaming and digital downloads/purchases, but also more traditional distribution such as CDs, vinyls, and cassettes. However, digital music distribution is primarily used to generate revenue and is therefore focused on more in promotion. This is because it is the most popular method for listeners to not only consume, but also discover music (Towse and Handke, 2013). Listeners will commonly utilize streaming platforms such as Spotify and Apple music to discover new music as their accounts become familiar with their taste and the platforms then provide "customized" suggestions for the user. Therefore, "the production and circulation of music takes on the characteristics and features of software through digitization, musicians, and labels become

more like software developers, building songs to match particular content needs and trigger particular algorithmic variables” (Morris, 2020).

For physical distribution, music marketers have slowly shied away due to factors such as piracy and ease of accessibility to a larger catalogue of music through digital distribution. Regardless, there is money to be made and fans gained through physical cultural goods. Therefore, the minority of those who still discover music through tangible distribution should not be ignored and can uniquely be advantageous in becoming more likely to form an attachment to the music. This is because consumers are able to collect and display the physical good rather than it be lost amongst a vast digital catalogue. Especially since there are still older generations who find this to be their primary method of participating in the music industry (Park, 2023). It also aids in the sale of physical merchandise/events such as memorabilia and live music tickets which are much more difficult to replace with any digital alternative, thus creating cultural value for the consumer (Behr and Cloonan, 2018).

2.3 Nostalgic Merchandise, Concepts, and Visuals

Often, artist will package their music alongside some sort of aesthetic or multimedia imagery to engage with its audiences. It can present an opportunity for those promoting music to use nostalgic concepts and visuals. This can entail items of physical merchandise such as clothing, wall art, jewelry, knick-knacks, and copies of music (tapes, vinyl records, C.Ds). Merchandise for musical acts has always been an integral part of their sales structure and measure of success as music merchandise is a multimillion-dollar industry on its own (Bassett, 2023).

Research has highlighted that unique merchandise can have a profound influence on an artists' success, affecting not only sales but also their perceived public image and presence in the music industry. As Umam and Manurung

(2022) state, "as an art commodity, musicians and all their stakeholders are required to be creative and continue to produce products."

Merchandise being such a large commodity in not only the simple sale of an individual items, but also in the sale of a certain perceived image. Because of this methodology, those conceptualizing merchandise for the promotion of an artist have a heavy hand in how well an artist can do commercially because of the affect it can have on the overall branding (McIntyre, 2017).

2.3.1 Association and Familiarity

Association and familiarity has been reported "as an important factor modulating emotional and hedonic responses in the brain" (Freitas et al., 2018). Similarly, merchandise associated with music can benefit from the same emotional response. Those working in music promotion have long recognized the importance of merchandise and therefore capitalizing on consumer's sense of nostalgia. The potential to capitalize on a consumer's sense of nostalgia encompasses an understanding of what will make a consumer will feel a sense of familiarity or evoke an association in their brain. In the consumer behavior review "Nostalgia Marketing: Examining Music Retromania" it highlights how the use of nostalgia, as it pertains to music marketing, can especially be seen in how artist and their teams decide to design their tangible goods. They claim that this is because when consumers are faced with "familiar" imagery in advertising and promotional materials, "buying decisions can be positively enthused" (Kebede, 2021).

Researching and following the patterns of nostalgic "buying decision triggers" leads to merchandise that imitates packaging, advertising material, and experiences paralleled from the past. The effectiveness of these "nostalgia triggers" are impactful because the perception of music as it pertains to nostalgia, is marginally affected by individual factors that differentiate audiences such as expertise in music, gender, or age in its association to a specific

emotion (Juslin and Laukka, 2004). Overall, it is seen as an attempt to bring positive association to the new and unfamiliar music and lessen some mistrust that consumers naturally take on.

It's important to consider the nature of music as a uniquely sentimental product in itself. Its relevancy is imperative when considering how the utilization of nostalgia in its sale because of its tie then to psychological distance between product and consumer. The article, "The nostalgia of copyright: how performers make movies, and other sounds of authorship" discusses this concept in depth. The author states that "Nostalgia fuels the yearning and desire of 'pre-owned' audiences for familiar objects and satisfying narrative restatements" (Gibson, 2022). While the article is referencing the use of nostalgia in film, the same principle applies to music.

This satisfaction that is gained through the possession of familiar and sentimental merchandise can make consumers feel more participatory and emotionally conscience in their purchase. According to Hidayatia et al. (2021) "A shift from rational cognitions reliance toward emotional reliance, which results in intimacy, and develops the connection of interpersonal trust" (Hidayatia, Et.al, 2021). Through this idea, the music promotes the sentimentality of the merchandise and vice versa. Additionally, collecting and listening to the physical formats creates a sense of nostalgia and a deeply personal and emotional experience for music consumers (Park, 2020).

2.3.2 NewJeans

One of the greatest exports out of South Korea is their highly conceptual K-pop music. HYBE corporation, the music agency responsible for global super group BTS, debuted a 5-piece girl group by the name of "NewJeans". NewJeans debuted on July 7th, 2022, with members Minji, Hanni, Danielle, Hyein, and Haerin with a sudden drop of an E.P shortly after. (Herman, 2023).

Since their debut several of their songs have hit unprecedented hundreds of millions of streams for a new musical act. Because of this remarkable success, others in the music industry have been trying to pinpoint just what makes the fresh-faced girl group such a hit. Many have come to the simple conclusion that NewJeans' instant success "can be largely attributed to one thing: nostalgia marketing" (Quilt.AI, 2023).

The creative direction of the group has been under the leadership of world-renowned K-pop director, Min Hee-Jin. Her creative direction has since been studied and praised by industry "scholars" such as Lee Jiyoung, who remarks that their "design and the way they present themselves is 'a brand-new flavor' while evoking feelings of nostalgia" (Valdez, 2023). They have evoked this nostalgia primarily in the visuals backing their music. In the music video for their hit debut song, "Attention", it follows the common 90's movie love story tropes set with the backdrop of retro styling and youthful energy.



Picture 2: NewJeans in their "Attention" Music Video (Youtube.com, 2022)

The music video was meant to portray the collective desire for "attention" and traditional socialization in a post-pandemic world. Min Hee-Jin setting this evergreen sentiment with the backdrop of familiar 90's aesthetic and storylines

draws in consumers to feel fondness and comfort in the group's music (Valdez, 2023). The music and visuals allow for younger consumers to connect retroactively while older ones can reminisce with something familiar. This is why as of October 2023, the song has surpassed 300 million streams and has reached a record 1 billion streams on their very first album (AllKpop.com, 2023).

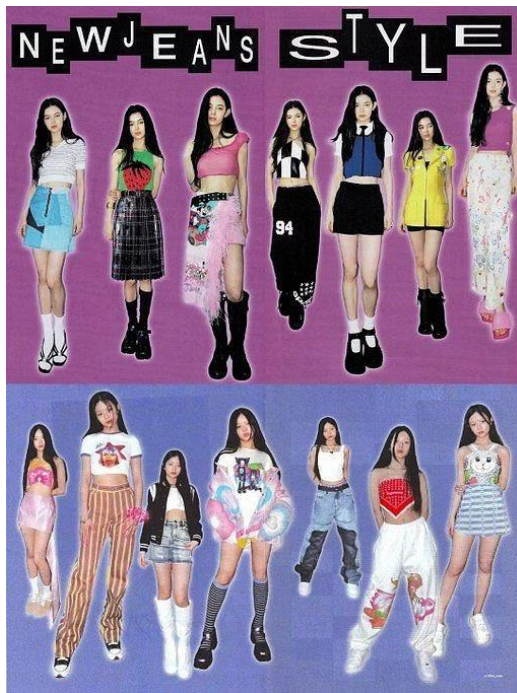
The group also evoked feelings of nostalgia in their album's packaging. Packing for albums is especially important in the K-pop genre because of the culture of fans often collecting them or buying them for the exclusive visuals inside. Similar to the ethos of the "Attention" music video, younger generations are attracted to 90's and Y2K style and imagery because it represents a simpler and more optimistic time before the pandemic that they hope to emulate (Chen, 2023).



Picture 3: NewJeans inside album design (Chen, 2023)

The style, though not singularly brought back by NewJeans' concept, has promoted its popularity, and therefore has promoted their popularity. For example, on Chinese social medias Y2K fashion spread rapidly and "posts

about New Jeans' Y2K style introductions, styling and outfitting guides appear in them, with hits ranging from tens to hundreds of thousands” (Chen, 2023).



Picture 4: Fan-made Y2k NewJeans style visual (Chen, 2023)

Overall, NewJeans concept development and creative direction taking on both overt and underlying nostalgic undertones has set them apart in their industry and has set a precedent for other international acts creative direction

2.4 Touring

2.4.1 ABBA: “Thank You for the Music”

Because of innovative technology and dedicated fans, artist can now capitalize on their own music’s nostalgia from the comfort of their own home. Iconic 70’s Swedish group, ABBA, have been one of the first to introduce this business model. ABBA announced that in 2021 they would begin the development of a new “digital” concert residency in their very own “ABBA Arena”, “a state-of-the-art 3,000 capacity arena located at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in London” (Aswad, 2021).

The initial reaction to the announcement was met with both resistance, and support as many feel protective of the music and memories associated with it. Some “celebrate the opportunity to see ABBA either again or for the first time in concert, while others speculated that the decision to use ABBAatars and to reform after so many years was financially, rather than creatively, motivated” (Mathews, 2023).

However, the concerts development was one of the most expensive in history, “with a price tag of about 175 million USD”, which includes the construction of the arena filled with LED screens and “291 speakers to deliver surround sound” (Shaw, 2023). The investment has been deemed successful because within 15 months it has “generated more than \$150 million in sales and sold more than 1.5 million tickets, surpassing all but a handful of the biggest live shows last year”, meaning that it makes about 2 million USD per week.



Picture 5: ABBA Voyage Tour (Lontoonmusikaalit.fi, 2024)

This success can be attested to the fact that every night, the venue is nearly 99% full. The show has been able to sell so well, despite the fact that the artists aren't actually present, because the technology that has been invested in and the music's ability to stand on its own.

The concert is much more of an experience than a typical concert, so through the nostalgic admiration of the music “The perception of being in the same place and time with the performer creates a bond or para-social relationship for the attendees, who can experience satisfaction “interacting” with the dynamic figures of their fandom” (Brown & Knox, 2017.) This connection between fans and the artist is what brings back concertgoers, so they can feel collective satisfaction and enjoyment. In their collective nostalgia “individuals feel validated in their musical choices” (Matthews, 2023).

The entirety of the show is validating their audience’s musical choices by sticking to their hits and pieces of iconic choreography. “By playing these hits during the show, ABBA Voyage was able to tap into the nostalgia of their audience and create a sense of shared experience that resonated with fans of all ages.” (Aswad, 2023). Now, fans that weren’t even alive during their peak are able to be capitalized off of because of the nostalgia that is shared between generations. The show has now been so successful that there are currently plans in place to expand the live show to become globally accessible to fans and bring ABBA to a wider ranging audience that might not be able to make it to London.

2.5 Remasters, Interpolations, and Sampling

Both contemporary and established artists have taken advantage of familiarity of past music melodies and motifs to capitalize on audience’s existing associations with certain genres or eras of music. This phenomenon can be explained by nostalgia’s tendency to generate “positive emotions and a sense of continuity” (Havlena and Holvak, 1991). This sense of continuity taps into a listener’s sense of identity and history and therefore has emotional resonance that will make them more likely to consume said music.

The reinterpretation of music through interpolation, which is defined as “taking part of an existing musical work (as opposed to a sound recording) and incorporating it into a new work” according to (U.S Copyright Office, 2021), can allow for consumers to rely on their existing association with the music and form new attachments. While some may consider it “recycling” music, the phenomenon of past hits being recreated by new artist has never been more prevalent (Harding, 2022). According to Harding, from 2017 to 2022, the number of songs on the Billboard 100 that contain interpolated material doubled). Between these time periods, major record labels were able to identify how well their interpolated and nostalgia associated was doing on charts, leading to the uptick in its production and release (Rosenberg, 2023). For example, Rolling Stone reports that songwriting camps hosted by major music publishers have been asking for writers to draw inspiration from the publisher’s existing catalogue (Leight, 2018). Sony Music has even reported that requested submitted for interpolations of music possessed in their catalogue had even doubled (Millman, 2021).

The growing popularity of sampling and interpolating music is leading to increased success for those who own the music, as younger audiences are rediscovering it through the refreshed versions. This is because “It’s bringing an entirely new, specific angle to it — a way of creating a dialogue between the past and present. Interpolating and sampling may continue to be a prominent constant in pop music, considering TikTok’s acceleration of this particular trend and our culture’s yearning for pacification and predictability after years of chaos” (Rosenburg, 2023). Older music can seemingly have a new life through younger generations use of it in social media and reintroduction through top pop hits.

More experienced artist have also been benefiting as “Publishers have spent the past few years paying hundreds of millions of dollars for legacy-artist catalogues, and one way to wring more value out of those catalogues is to pitch interpolations” (Harding, 2022). They also then have the potential to remaster their music to reproduce their music to appeal to current consumer taste. The

rerelease of their music through these remasters not only prepares the music for new ears but also gives the opportunity to repackage the music for modern promotion (Bruel, 2019).

However, it can be argued that there is a line between drawing inspiration and ripping off the essence of a song. As the popularity of interpolation and song sampling continues, the concern for the originality and the innovation of music increases amongst artist and audiences. Increasingly, it may hinder musician's and other artist incentive to create a complete original work since "The bulk of the music industry's profits are now a result of "catalog" records rather than new releases" (Edmondson, 2024). Although it can also be used as a way to make tribute to music that influenced and moved them as well and carry on the nostalgia that they feel towards the interpolated works.

3 Methodology

The chapter will discuss the research design, sampling strategy, data collection methods, ethical considerations, and data analysis techniques used in this study.

3.1 Qualitative Data

The primary research focuses on qualitative data obtained through interviews with industry professionals. Qualitative research gathers participants' experiences, perceptions, and behavior. It answers the "hows and whys" instead of "how many or how much" (Tenny, Brannan and Brannan, 2022). Qualitative data is beneficial for this study as its intent is to substantiate experiences and behavior towards nostalgia (Rahman, 2016).

However, a con of using qualitative data lies in its complexity of being analyzed as it is heavily dependent on context and on subjects' experience (Tenny, Brannan and Brannan 2022). Despite this, qualitative data collection was chosen for this research as the lived experience was beneficial in contextualizing the lived experiences and perspective of subjects in addition to the secondary data provided in the literature review (Rahman, 2016).

3.2 Sampling Method

The research adopts a selective approach of interviewing specific industry professionals to provide a comprehensive understanding of how nostalgia is utilized in music marketing. A very purposive sampling method was used to select industry professionals to ensure a dynamic perspective of the production and marketing promotion of music. Purposive sampling strategies are often used when the subject being studied requires interviewees who have prior knowledge or expertise on a topic to provide an important perspective on the

subject (Robinson, 2014). The reason for adopting a purposive strategy is that “given the aims and objectives of the study, specific kinds of people may hold different and important views about the ideas and issues at question and therefore need to be included in the sample” (Campbell et al., 2020).

The interviewees were chosen to ensure that the study captures the industry lens with which professionals consider their decisions according to the potential perceptiveness of consumers. Although the three subjects originate from the same company, their responsibilities and perspectives spanned a wide variety of music genres and experiences. The first two subjects interviewed were both music producers who have both worked independently on their own music and within their own company with an expanse of artist of different genres, as well as for artist outside their company. The final interview was with the CEO of said company, who answers more to the business side of the company to give a comprehensive outlook as to how promotional decisions and strategies are influenced.

3.3 Interviewing Process

Semi-structured interviews, which are a set of pre-determined questions which allow for interviewers to further inquire based on subject’s response were selected (Burgess, 1984). This was to allow flexibility in exploring the professionals’ understanding of nostalgia in music marketing while maintaining a focus on specific research questions as they are they are “interactive between the participant and the researcher and reflect conversational exchange similar to that in a real-world setting” (Jennings, 2005).

An interview guide was used to steer the conversation, focusing on topics such as:

- How they consider nostalgia in their line of work

- The effectiveness of nostalgia in creating engagement and increasing sales.
- Challenges they may have faced confronting the balance of innovation and nostalgia in their work
- If they have noticed a shift in the music industry regarding the use of nostalgia
- Their perspective on the future of musical promotion and how nostalgia contributes or hinders it.

The following questions were used to guide the conversation according to background, strategy and elements of nostalgia, audience response, and effects on the industry:

1. Background

- What is your official job title, and can you describe your main responsibilities and tasks?
- How long have you worked in this industry?

2. Strategy and Elements of Nostalgia

- How do musicians or you bring a sense of nostalgia into their/ your music? Are there particular techniques or themes they tend to use?
- Do you think musicians think about audience might respond to music in a nostalgic way when creating it? If so, how does that affect the way they work?
- How deliberate are you about using nostalgic references in your work?
- Are there any marketing strategies that really make the most of nostalgia?

- How do you think they affect your approach?
- Is it something you decide on the spur of the moment, or do you plan it out?

3. Audience Response

- Do you think musicians think about audience might respond to music in a nostalgic way when creating it? If so, how does that affect the way they work?
- What are your thoughts on how listeners connect with nostalgia in music? Do you think it makes their overall experience better?
- Have you had any feedback from your audience about how your work evokes nostalgia for them? Could you give me an example?

4. Effects on the industry

- What's your take on nostalgia's role in driving music sales or streams?
- Can you think of any examples in the industry that have been really successful?
- What's your take on nostalgia's role in driving music sales or streams?
- Is there any change you have noticed in the frequency of nostalgia's use in the music industry?
- What are your thoughts on the innovation of the music industry and its promotion? Do you find that it might be helped or hindered by the use of nostalgia?

3.4 Analysis Methods

After conducting interviews, they were transcribed and translated for analysis. After sorting through the interview transcriptions, responses were divided into themes that were separated by the questions to accurately respond to the research objectives. Following the analysis of interview responses, the secondary data analyzed in the literature review was used to substantiate and draw conclusions upon the primary data. This method is called triangulation, which means “gathering and analyzing data from more than one source to gain a fuller perspective on the situation you are investigating” and was used because it provides either important validation or contradiction to the primary data (Rahman, 2016b).

3.5 Limitations and Intention

Although the semi-structured interview approach provided valuable insights, there were limitations to this study. The small sample size for the interviews (three professionals) limited the generalizability of the findings from the qualitative component. The purposive sampling method used for the interviews may have introduced some bias, as the sample may not fully represent the general population of music professionals (Andrade, 2021) since all three were founders of the same company as well as all of them primarily working in Finland so it may not be able to represent a complete global outlook on the music industry. Finally, the focus on self-reported data means that some responses may have been influenced by response bias since the subjects were chosen by myself and those who I had the most access to. Despite these limitations, the interviews did fulfill the intent of getting actual industry professionals’ insights and commentary as to how nostalgia is a constant consideration in their work and how it contributes to success within the industry.

4 Analysis and Findings

4.1 Professional Background

The three interviewees are the cofounders of Finnish independent record label and production company, Booa Music. The company was founded in Turku, Finland in 2019 and since, they have continued operations primarily in Helsinki, Finland.

The first two interviews were conducted with producers/creative directors Petro Pyysalo and Kauri Ruohonen. They were valuable subjects to interview to cast insights into how music producers might consider nostalgia in the production of the actual product of music itself and how it may be perceived by potential listeners. Both have been professional in the music industry for nearly 6 years, working to produce a variety of genres for not only their labels but independently as well for other artist.

The Final interview was conducted with Booa music's chief executive officer (CEO) Nicholas Klimscheffskij. Klimscheffskij handles the day-to-day operations for the label as well as ensuring that the company's operations are aligning with their qualitative and fiscal goals. His outlook was used to give interpretation to how nostalgia can be used outside of the artistic process and the approach to music's promotion.

Throughout the interview process they gave perspective as individual professionals as to how nostalgia has affected their operations and view of its use in the industry as a whole.

4.2 Strategy and Elements of Nostalgia

Within the production of an artistic product especially, there is question of how much market appeal is and should be considered in order to not hinder the

artistic process. It was important to examine on how conscientious they felt about elements of nostalgia during the production and sale process to gain perspective into how much awareness there is in its utility to appeal towards consumers.

The producers were very transparent in their utility of nostalgia within their artistic process. When discussing nostalgia Petro emphasized its importance when he's going through production of a work:

“Nostalgia has always been a big value in my work. The harmonies and the feeling I try to create – it’s important to me that the listener can get a familiar feeling through the music, almost like there’s a touch of nostalgia. It’s almost always essential for me” – Petro Pyysalo

Similarly, Ruohonen mentioned how imperative it is to include a feeling of nostalgia in his production through familiar sonic elements:

” Maybe through memory associations, I try to create a feeling in a song that evokes nostalgia or longing for something in the past. These come through memory associations—specifically, it could be through melodies, certain chord progressions, or sounds. For example, if I use something from a song released in the '90s, maybe a melody or a specific sound, I try to repeat it in some way to bring out that nostalgic feeling. But there’s no one specific way to do it. It depends on the song itself. Sometimes, it comes out naturally, and other times, it’s more intentional.” - Kauri Ruohonen

While both producers spoke of how listeners might have different experiences and therefore different emotional triggers, there is a universality of both nostalgia and music. Thus, why it's such an important part of their artistic process to dig into familiar emotion and memory, whether it be entirely intentional or not. Admittedly, they were aware of its effect on listeners and take advantage through various sonic features to assist in nostalgia's evocation. When comparing to findings in the literature review, it further emphasizes the

leveraging of the emotional factor in nostalgia such as when the K-pop group NewJeans famously did upon their debut by combining 90's aesthetics weaved throughout their visuals and music videos. This was what resulted in the freshly debuted group acquiring hundreds of millions of views and streams (Chen, 2023). Their success aligns with the producer's observations of how evoking familiarity and memory association can really resonate with listeners.

he producers of course focusing on the actual music and nostalgic sonic elements while Nicholas has more responsibility with the marketing of the artist and therefore invested in the power of an artist's personal branding. Nicholas's philosophy on strategically utilizing nostalgia by contrast was to lean more into the authentic image of an artist, rather than focusing on rehashing past art for the purpose of its sale:

"I've found that the personal branding of an artist is its own form of art that should be approached delicately... with that said, when artist are able to approach common emotional themes that evoke nostalgia naturally, I've noticed the best end product.

The irony is that no one really knows what people want. People think they do, but they're often surprised. I think art at its best is always unexpected and can't be predicted. The best we can do is create a space that nurtures that uncertainty without trying to shape it.

So, I'll never be the kind of CEO who insists on knowing better than the artist. I may have my opinion, of course, but if we've hired someone because we believe in their talent, we have to trust them completely. We have to trust that they know best how to create what only they can create. And then our job is simply to support them and let that process unfold naturally, without interference." – Nicholas Klimscheffskij

Nicholas's commentary emphasizing personal branding of artist and how it contributes to musical promotion further corroborates how when nostalgia is

weaved into personal branding naturally, it can prove successful in their recognition just as previously mentioned with the girl group NewJeans (Chen, 2023). In cross analyzing their responses, its apparent that nostalgia can be an extremely helpful factor in the sale of music through familiarity of emotion, brought forth through branding and sonic elements.

4.3 Audience response

Audience/listener response is essential when considering the distribution and sale of music, hence why it was important to gain insights from music professionals as to how and why they find that consumers respond to nostalgia in music

When interviewing Pyysalo, he often referenced how his background and the music that was played when he was younger was important to how he viewed nostalgia. When inquired about why/how he evokes it with artist he works with he spoke about the customer service element and promotional tool of being a producer:

” That feeling often comes through harmonies and chord progressions. I have a certain melancholy, but it also depends a lot on who I’m working with. In a way, this job is also like customer service. I’m serving the artist’s vision and trying to bring it out as much as possible... that you’d need to dig into nostalgic themes. But music is all about recycling ideas and finding those elements that resonate with people who didn’t experience that time themselves” – Petro Pyysalo

Petro and Kauri both commented that they were very aware of the effect on audience response when using elements of nostalgia:

“And I think that’s an important part of being a producer—to succeed at that every time. Sure, I want to create something new, but at the same time, I want to bring out something old, something that resonates with people, because

familiarity is always comforting to people and gives them something they can easily connect to.” – Petro Pyysalo

“When listeners are able to identify a familiar melody, it’s as if they already know the new song. This might make them come back over and over again... it’s like reminding them of a childhood memory.” – Kauri Ruohonen

Petro and Kauri’s perspective further explains why research cites that a bulk of musical promotion revenue for older artist can come from capitalizing on their famous discographies and selling them for the rights to be sold on for sampling and interpolating (Edmondson, 2024). Similarly, The ABBA Voyage concert, which created holograms of the famed group from their prime, illustrates the commercial potential for playing upon a nostalgic fan experience through production when they earned over 150 million dollars in sales as stated in the literature review (Shaw, 2023). Nicholas had also mentioned that from his perspective, the audience response was heavily reliant on production and having an emotional evocation, stating:

*“The details in the production can help bring the emotion to the forefront.” –
Nicholas Klimscheffskij*

All had acknowledged the strong emotional responses they have noticed from listeners with the use of nostalgia, often mentioning connection to common ethos and memory. This kind of emotional response can therefore draw in attention and be used as promotional tool for the music.

4.4 Effects on Industry

The discussion continued into the idea of “recycling” music and the implications it may have on the music industry. Within the production of music, as discussed in the literature review, there are components from older music that can be recomposed for new release of music. This kind of production often uses elements of sampling and interpolation for reinterpretation of the original, often popular, works.

Petro’s perception as a producer on music’s composition using these strategies was multifaceted in both its hinderance and benefit for the industry in general:

“That’s what makes it feel a bit cheap—that people haven’t put in much effort. But then in sampling, where you’re actually using sounds from the 80s, for example, it automatically gives me that feeling of an era being captured again in a new form... It’s pretty contradictory, thinking about how it will impact the future. And then there are all the AI things, which will probably change a lot, or already have. But yeah, I don’t have any... I’m a bit ambivalent towards all music trends, and when it comes to them, I have this mindset that everything is welcome, and everything can go.”

“It’s all up to you, how you approach them and whether you become a cynical industry hater, or if you want to try to utilize all the tools the world currently has. I also consider the whole sampling and recycling thing to be really good.

I think a lot of good and cool stuff has come from it—people redoing things. Because there’s a lot of beautiful music from the past that wouldn’t otherwise reach the ears of people born, say, last year. So, I think it’s actually good for the culture—it’s a plus that people get to know where all these things come from in the past.” – Petro Pyysalo

Overall, from the perspective of a producer and creative director, Pyysalo was very aware of how his use of nostalgia in music was key in hooking listeners using sonic elements of harmonies and familiar chord progression. Although he is conscious of its use, he mentions that it also comes about naturally in the artistic process and is simply a powerful element in music to evoke an emotional response out of listeners.

Petro admitted that nostalgia has become increasingly overused in music and its promotion but with any other “trend”, there are positive takeaways to further the innovation of music rather than staying cemented in the cynicism that its purely for profit.

On the other hand, Kauri and Nicholas had a more cynical perspective on how nostalgia’s popularity is over taking the industry:

“If artists rely too much on nostalgia, it can start to feel a bit stale. People recognize these songs and memories, but it doesn’t always evoke the same strong feelings as when it was fresh.” – Kauri Ruohonen

“I’m not saying there’s anything wrong with these old ideas, but it’s just been so overwhelming, like everything in pop music starts to sound the same, using the same sound, same patterns. It becomes so repetitive, and I think that’s where music’s stuck right now... Ultimately, the goal is to build long-term success, not just short-term wins. And that comes from understanding both the creative and business sides of the music industry. It’s about finding a balance, creating great art, and building something that lasts.” - Nicholas Klimscheffskij

Their alternative outlooks are also reflected in other research and musical editorial literature stating that there is a lack of innovation when older musical elements are used to pacify audiences and still drawing in the most revenue but can also be seen as tribute to the past and employing nostalgia’s emotional

effect genuinely (Harding, 2023). The conflict in its overuse as emphasized by Nicholas presents a difficult dilemma in an industry heavily dependent on such an emotional product. While taking advantage of this emotionality employs success temporarily, it hinders investing time and funds into new ideas to propel the industry forward.

Despite being critical of nostalgia's frequent use as a short cut into selling music, the three remain faithful to their point of view as well as the artists that they support in their operations. Overarchingly, nostalgia's emotional effect draws from memory but there is always new art to be made as long as audiences remain open minded.

5 Conclusion

This research has set out to examine how nostalgia serves as a powerful tool in the promotion and marketing strategies of the contemporary music industry. By addressing how nostalgia is used as a strategy in the sale of music, research has illuminated the intricate interplay between nostalgia, audience engagement, and industry innovation.

The analysis of promotional strategies revealed that nostalgia is employed through various methods, including the revival of retro aesthetics, reimagined past sounds, vintage derived personal branding, and artist from the past taking advantage of their classic discographies. These approaches tap into the emotional resonance of audiences, creating a sense of familiarity and comfort that drives both engagement and sales.

Furthermore, as discussed through interviews with industry professionals, the decision to include these promotional strategies is a very conscience one. Their observations aided in corroborating existing research through their shared experiences, emphasizing the importance of nostalgia as a tool in their day-to-day work through both familiar sonic and personal branding methods. By leveraging cultural memory and shared experiences, these strategies have proven effective in fostering deeper connections with listeners across diverse demographics by limiting the psychological distance when consuming as the research and interviews further emboldened.

Finally, this research examined the broader implications of nostalgia-driven marketing on innovation within the music industry. While nostalgia has proven to be a powerful promotional tool, it can also pose challenges to originality. The focus on retro influences may limit risk-taking and lead to the cyclical recycling of familiar themes and sounds as expressed during the interviewing process. Despite this, many artists and producers have used nostalgia not as a creative crutch but as a foundation for exploring new avenues in music production,

blending old and new to create hybridized styles that resonate with contemporary audiences.

In drawing conclusions from both primary and secondary data in this thesis, nostalgia remains a double-edged sword in the music industry. It is a potent force for audience engagement and revenue generation but requires careful balance to avoid stifling innovation. As the industry continues to evolve, the challenge lies in maintaining the delicate balance between reverence for the past and the pursuit of artistic originality which very well can easily lean towards the industry's desperation to toll out music in mass. By understanding and leveraging the power of nostalgia thoughtfully, artists and industry professionals can ensure it remains a source of inspiration rather than a constraint.

However, it became apparent that the dependence on nostalgia poses a risk to newer artists who want to experiment beyond the constraints of what's been proven popular in the past. Overall, observations underscore the importance of ongoing exploration into how cultural memory shapes creative expression and consumer behavior in the ever-changing landscape of musical promotion to properly support the future of the industry.

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