# Retromarketing: concepts, determining factors, strategies, and scopes of application

(Retromarketing: conceptos, factores determinantes, estrategias y ámbitos de aplicación)

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**Abstract**

Retromarketing, also known as nostalgia marketing, is a strategy/activity that "uses the past to sell in the present". Its growth has been exponential in recent years, both in academia and in business praxis. The objective of this paper is to carry out a theoretical review on this topic, and for this it extends in its essential terminology, in the determining factors of retro/vintage demand, in the most relevant strategies, and in the specific areas of application. of retromarketing.


**Resumen**

El *Retromarketing*, también conocido como marketing de nostalgia, es una estrategia/actividad que "emplea el pasado para vender en el presente". Su crecimientro ha sido exponencial en los últimos años, tanto en la academia como en la praxis empresarial. El objetivo del presente trabajo es llevar a cabo una revisión teórica sobre este motivo, y para ello se extiende en su terminología esencial, en los factores determinantes de la demanda retro/vintage, en las estrategias más relevantes, y en los ámbitos específicos de aplicación del retromarketing.

**Palabras clave:** retromarketing; nostalgia; retrobranding; retro product; vintage product; emociones, retromarketing; nostalgia; retrobranding; retro product; vintage product; emotions.


**Códigos JEL:** M21, M31, M37.

## Introduction

Since its inception, marketing has been developed as an activity aimed at optimizing the exchange between a buying party and a selling party, with the aim that the organization manages to create value and satisfaction for the customer, obtaining their long-term loyalty in return.

However, the concept of marketing has been changing as the market and the technological environment have evolved. Today it is possible to speak of a customer-focused marketing approach aimed at evaluating and satisfying their needs.

In parallel, the factors that influence consumer purchasing behavior have been affected by mutations in the socio-cultural sphere; families have diversified, individualism has grown, roles continue to change..., and all this acts on the individual unconsciously causing the selection of certain products, that is, affecting their preferences and choices. This is where *Retromarketing* finds its place and originates; as a way of "going back to the roots", making use of the nostalgia that people feel about the past, and evoking positive emotions and sensations linked to memories of past times in order to favor the tendency to buy. This evocation promoted by companies, and studied in the academic field (Fig. 1), uses different tools (eg retro-communication, retro-branding) to attract the target, who is offered products reminiscent of the past, in numerous areas such as textiles, the automotive industry, in the music industry, in appliances and other items for the home, in food and beverages, or in the entertainment sector.

Figure 1. Evolution in the number of publications that link marketing and nostalgia in the Scopus database (1993-2021).
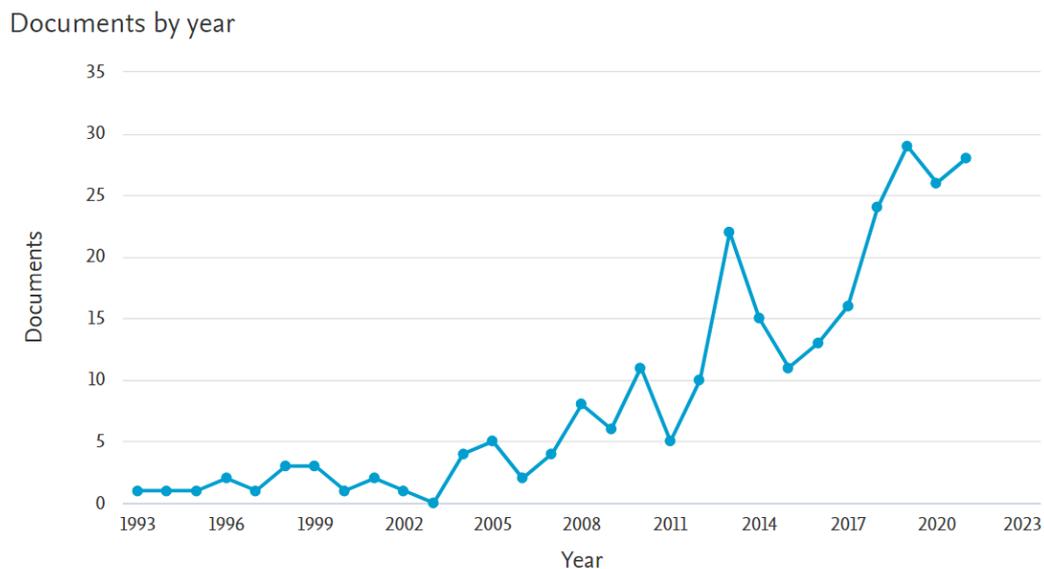


Source: Scopus (March 222)

The high presence that "retro/vintage" has reached, palpable and visible in any sphere of the market and of daily life, entails the need to specify and structure all the elements that this context implies, in order to provide clarity to what retromarketing does, and to know the roots that motivate the growth of retro/vintage demand.

Thus, this article is structured as follows. Section 1 expands on what retromarketing is and how it arises. Section 2 sets out the essential concepts of the field of retromarketing. Section 3 reviews the determinants of retro demand. Section 4 expresses itself on different specific retromarketing actions. Section 5 presents the different specific areas of application of retromarketing. Finally, section 6 is about conclusions.


## What is Retromarketing and how does it arise?


Retromarketing is defined according to Brown (2001) as "the revival or relaunch of a product or service from a previous historical period, generally an earlier decade or identifiable time, which may or may not be up to date with contemporary standards in terms of its performance, function or taste". Beyond this complete definition and going into what has been expressed by other authors, Gajanova and Zdenka (2020: 42) state that retromarketing refers to the use of nostalgia to make the modern product more attractive; retromarketing, they continue, can involve creating a brand identity, based on legacy or nostalgia for products the company has offered in the past. Similarly, Oguz (2017) indicates that retromarketing is a process of creating a brand image based on nostalgia or its heritage from the past.

Based on the above, retromarketing uses nostalgia for the past as its defining axis (Crespo-Pereira, Membiela-Pollán, Sánchez-Amboage, 2022), in order to arouse a brand identity or emotion in a product so that it is attractive to the consumer. Although, and as we will see in section 3, there are other motivations that explain the retro/vintage demand.

The positive emotions aroused by these products, linked in many cases to the memory and memories of the person, favor the inclination to purchase. And this has been the reason for the remarkable growth of the "retro" or "vintage" market in recent times. The psychological explanation is also linked –partially– to the fact that "the memory filter tends to positively bias the personal past", and "the individual finds refuge, security, and comfort in past times on numerous occasions; for example, childhood" in the face of a current scenario, with loss of roots, identity, and social capital (Membiela-Pollán, 2020).

Thus, brands seek to attract individuals with the use of strategies that provide consistency in relation to that past, and offer reminiscent products on the market, whether in packaging, communication, or content, so that it is possible to remember these goods and their benefits (Horwitz and Weinberger, 2005). The youngest are also appealed to so that they can be attracted to these retro products, in the aim of "obtaining uniqueness and individuality" (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry, 2003).

On the other hand, the launch of retro products entails less risk and implies a lower cost for companies than that represented by the continuous release of new items. And their commercialization is easier, since they are known by consumers (Clemente et al., 2013).

## Essential concepts in retromarketing

Within retromarketing, understood as an umbrella and generic concept that tells us about the series of strategies used by the past to sell in the present, there is a bundle of terms that appear frequently in the literature and in business praxis. Are detailed below:

- *Retro product:* retro products are those that, having been created today, are inspired by or reproduce items from the past. Unlike these, "vintage" refers to products made in the past (old objects, garments or accessories) that are still in good condition or have been recovered, having in themselves a value derived from their design, quality and nostalgic load (Cotado, 2014; Membiela-Pollán, Picatoste & De Jesús Faustino, 2021).
- *Retro branding:* It refers to the relaunch of brands that were popular in an earlier time; and they evoke that past as a repositioning strategy in the present (Emote, 2009). This is the case of brands such as Moritz, Matutano, Converse, Juanola, and Chupa Chups.
- *Brand revitalization:* As consumer tastes and preferences evolve over time and new competitors appear, in brand revitalization the past is used as a reputation, badge and brand story, but innovates in products or services in order to achieve a good position in the market (Guevara, 2015), so it does not always imply the launch of products typified as "retro".
- *Retro communication* or *nostalgic communication*: it is the use of the "retro" trend in the marketing communication strategy (advertising, packaging, promotional strategies...). This strategy is common in many global brands, given the impact and interest it usually has on consumers (Grębosz-Krawczyk and Pointet, 2015).
- *Retro shop*: stores or chains of stores inspired by the retro style (eg vintage barbershops, USA 50's style cafes and burger joints,...); or dedicated to the sale of retro or vintage items from different eras.
- *Retro packaging*: they are reminiscences and old designs that are used in the packaging and the visible face of the products. Numerous food brands such as Coca-Cola or Cola Cao have used retro packaging (Membiela-Pollán, Picatoste & De Jesús Faustino, 2021).
- *Retro style / retro design*: Linked to the previous term, retro style is considered to be the design given to products with modern technology but that simulate past trends. Therefore, the term can be applied to numerous objects and articles, to graphic and interior design, to fashion, music, cinema and other artistic expressions, and to games and toys, among others (Guffey, 2006).

On the other hand, and returning to retromarketing, Brown (2001) points out that its four main elements - the "4 A's of Retromarketing" - are: Allegory, Arcadia, Aura and Antinomy. Due to their explanatory load and interest, we specify them below:

- The *Allegory* refers to the history of the brand and the metaphors, symbols, images and ideas associated with it; so it is linked to morality and customs, and can have different meanings.
- *Arcadia* refers to an imaginary country created by the poet Virgilio, for which it refers to "utopia", going back to the past as that which was always better, idealized and perfect, using the tools of modern technology.
- The *Aura* is in psychology a representation of the soul, so it is associated with the essence of people, appealing to authenticity and those moments that are perceived as "unrepeatable".
- The *Antinomy* represents a paradox or contradiction, offering to satisfy opposing desires, as is the case of returning to the simplicity of the past, but being able to make use of current technology. Brown (2001) considers that this characteristic is the most important, since in it the past and the present converge; the living and the dead coexist at the same time.
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Zonneveld and Biggemann (2014), for their part, consider that an extra A should be added, "*Ardour*", given the passion generated by certain "cultural and national elements associated with a brand". This arises based on the character, pride and identity of a society or country.


## Determinants of retro demand


Since the second half of the 1990s, various authors have analyzed the reasons that lead to the purchase of retro products. They first mention *nostalgia* (Havlena and Holak, 1991; Patterson and Brown, 2003) as an explanatory axis —which is why retromarketing is also called *nostalgia marketing*—. But they also consider other factors such as: *recognition or familiarity* with the product or brand (Menzel, Baker and Kennedy, 1994; Novack and Mustafa, 2004), *authenticity and genuineness* (Goulding, 2003; Henning, 2004); the *feeling of finding an escape route to the past* (Chronis, 2005; Noxon, 2003); a *search for security* (Ford, 2005; Goulding, 2001); *quality* (Henning, 2004; Holbrook and Schindler, 2003); and the *desire to feel different and unique* (Crewe et al., 2003; Jenb, 2004; Novack & Mustafa, 2004).

In what follows, these factors are briefly detailed (see, among others, Clemente-Ricolfe et al., 2013 and Membiela-Pollán et al., 2021), bearing in mind that there are often correlations between one and the other, and many of them with "nostalgia".

- *Nostalgia*: the consumption of retro products, according to this variable, is motivated by the memory and evocation of past times, generally considered positive as opposed to a more hostile present. The retro product excites the consumer by recalling places, people, moments, experiences, sensations, individually and collectively.
- *Authenticity*: the consumer "seeks authenticity in an inauthentic world". That which distances you from artifice, superficiality and artificiality, being more "pure".

- *Security*: The retro product awakens in the consumer a sense of security, linked to that more accurate and secure past, in the face of the uncertainty that the future represents and the inevitable fear that death produces (Zhou et al., 2013).
- *Escape route to the past*: it is related to the idea that the past was more "ideal". This idealization pushes the consumer to surround himself with products that allow him to "travel" emotionally to a more friendly context.
- *Belonging to a group or culture*: for young people, retro products are a binding element with their family group. While for the elderly, these articles have a symbolic load of group and cultural identification.
- *Stability*: consumers associate the permanence of brands and their stability in the market with trust and familiarity, especially in times of economic and social conflict.
- *Strengthen personal identity*: this factor is associated with nostalgia, authenticity and the search for differentiation. The individual often identifies with past times, either because of his own individual and collective experience, or because of the perception that the existing sociocultural scenario was more positive and authentic than the one he lives in the present.

## Specific retromarketing actions

Within the aforementioned *retro design*, *retro packaging*, *retro branding*, *retro communication*, and *retro product* launch strategies, there are specific retromarketing actions that include relaunches, limited, special or collection editions, and retreads. These are not carried out on a regular basis, but rather at certain times in which the aim is to capture the attention of customers, either because the brand is "asleep" or because greater activity is pursued in the market.

- *Relaunches*: these are product launches that are no longer on the market, or the use of old advertisements for existing products, considering them as "modern classics".
- *Special editions*: products that are launched on the market for short periods of time or in a certain quantity, generally on the occasion of a special date such as Christmas. Retro strategies are often used.
- *Retreading*: these are new versions of products currently on the market, reconditioning (or retreading) the aesthetics of the past to turn it into a modern product with all the mentioned characteristics of retromarketing.

### Scopes of application of retromarketing

***Food and Home***
The visit to the supermarket or hypermarket confirms the retro trend in food and other household products. It is observed in the packaging, in the content of the product and even in the type of communication carried out by the brands. The examples are almost "endless": vintage design in fruit packaging, in chocolate wrappers, in bottles of water

and soft drinks, in milk and juice cartons, in pastries (vintage cakes), in tinned food, in cereals and products for breakfast, in candies, coffees, ice creams, spices, flavorings, condiments and sauces…, and also in storage cans, shoe creams, cosmetics, combs and brushes, eau de cologne, shaving and oral cleaning supplies, soaps, detergents and fabric softeners …

Numerous brands are mentioned here that were reactivated in this field and using a retrobranding and/or brand revitalization strategy in recent years, such as: Tab soft drinks, Hydrox biscuits, Brim coffee, "the Catalan Moritz beer that had been out of the market since 1978", and "the Matutano brand of PepsiCo Spain, which had been replaced ten years ago by the global brand Lays" (Cerviño and Baena, 2014: 21).

### Textile, footwear, and accesories.

In the textile and footwear sector, retro/vintage fashion has entered strongly, and the examples are innumerable. Global brands such as clothing such as Levis, Zara and Pull and Bear and sportswear such as Nike, Adidas, Reebok or Kappa, launch collections where reminiscences of the past have a high presence, as also happens in sports shoes, with the relaunch of sneaker models from the sixties, seventies, eighties and nineties. Other firms such as Lancaster or Dior have recovered designs from earlier times. Recently there has been a co-branding between Pull&Bear and Casio in a product launch strategy with this attribute. Likewise, the Vans shoe brand launched a line that includes Snoopy and Charlie Brown designs and would have reached agreements with Nintendo to include the image of Mario Bross (foromarketing.com, 2017), as the Spanish brand El Ganso in this year 2021.

### Music

Groups from the seventies, eighties and nineties (for example Abba, Guns N 'Roses, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Back Street Boys, Hombres G…) have successfully returned to the stage, with a loyal audience that nostalgically recalls musical themes from the past.

There are specific music festivals from previous decades. It also highlights the strong return to the vinyl disc. In countries like the United States, this format (with a turnover of 232 million euros in 2020) exceeds CDs in sales.

### Cinema, series and television programmes

The retro trend in this sector can be seen in the large number of sequels and remakes of films of the past, like Superman, Tron, and the Star Wars trilogy; in recent movies such as *Ready Player One*, by Steven Spielberg, with a large symbolic charge from the eighties; and in series like *Stranger Things*, *Narcos* or *Cobra Kai*, which again travel to the eighties. Also, television and streaming platforms (Netflix, HBO, Amazon Prime Video) broadcast series that one day were successful. In addition, there are popular television and radio programs that focus on past times.

### Home appliances

Home appliances with retro/vintage aesthetics have become popular. They meet current quality standards, but their vintage look offers personality, color and originality. The decades of the fifties and sixties are the most evoked. They usually use pastel shades. The most frequent, within the big electrical appliances, are kitchens, refrigerators and mini-fridges, dishwashers, washing machines and extraction hoods.

And within small appliances: microwaves, toasters, coffee makers, kettles, mixers, foamers, juicers, popcorn machines, ice cream machines ...
Reputed brands such as Russell Hobs, Smeg, Delonghi, Philips, Fagor, Fram, Ikohs or Ariete participate in this trend.

### Decoration
Retro decoration and vintage design has a presence both in houses and in shops, boutiques, cafes, hotels, restaurants, barbershops (Mazzoli, 2017). It is the central element of the so-called retro-shops. Specifically, retro/vintage decoration is formulated through furniture, tables and chairs, lamps, wall lights and taps, floors inspired by the past, paintings, posters and old photographs with their corresponding frames, use of pastel colors, decorative pieces from the past, industrial, wall clocks, chipped or exposed walls, and various accessories.

### Retro tourism
Retro tourism or "nostalgic tourism" (Cui, 2015) is also a trend.
The individual wishes to perceive the identifying, the authentic and the historical-cultural side of the place (Russel, 2008). Places that remain in people's memory are also revisited (Park. et al., 2020). Sometimes people want to revive the sociocultural heritage of iconic sports teams associated with the tourist site; or observe communities that maintain a leisurely, simple and relational lifestyle, such as the Amish communities in the United States.

### Electronic devices, watches, cameras
We find a retro trend in electronics products such as mobile phones (eg New Nokia 8210 and 3310), record players and radios (for example, several models of Phillips, Daewoo, Sharp, Madison, AEG, Roadstar, Aiwa…). Well-known camera brands such as Leica, Sony, Olympus or Polaroid often launch retro models as a way of attracting the consumer that nowadays tends to take photos with their mobile phone. In watches, retro/vintage fashion is common. It is remarkable the boom of retro Casio´s.

### Video Games
In this sector nostalgia and interest in retro are appreciated from different angles. First, the tendency to collect video games and consoles from the past. In this sense, it should be noted that in July 2021, a copy of Super Mario 64 (1996) was sold for $ 1.5 million at an auction organized by Heritage Auctions (businessinsider.com, 2021).
Second, in the relaunch of consoles and/or video games of the past. Third, in the neo retro style of some current consoles and/or video games. Fourth, in the rise of the Arcade and classic video games of the seventies, eighties and nineties. Fifth, in the explosion of retro merchandising.

### Cars and motorcycles
What Brown (2013: 522) called "retromania" has been installed in the motor sector: in cars and motorcycles. Well-known examples in automobiles are the Volkswagen New Beetle, the Chrisler PT Cruiser, the Mini Cooper, and recently the highly successful Fiat 500. As with other retro products, technology and functionality are combined with elements of the past. Car brands like Dodge, Ford, Opel, Ora, Hyundai, Lamborghini,

Porche or Volkswagen are currently announcing upcoming retro designs in several models. And in motorcycles, examples of brands with retro models are Kawasaki, Fantic Caballero, Ducati Scrambler, Indian, BMW, Benelli, Piaggio, Mash and Royal Enfield among others. The café racer style is also a clearly vintage trend. As well as the production of retro items (helmets, gloves, jackets ...).

## Conclusions

The use of emotions, sensations and experiences has become a reality in the theory and praxis of marketing. Today's individual seeks transcendence, meaning and symbolism in the product he acquires. This is how the intangible values are configured in a decisive element for the attraction of the prospect and the differentiation of the competition.

In this context, this paper has focused on *Retromarketing* as an activity/strategy that goes back to the past to sell in the present, either through design, content, style or the way of marketing. communicate the good or service. The importance of this topic is such that in recent years there has been talk of the "retromarketing revolution". This can be seen in the number of "retro" products present in commercial establishments, department stores and in the online market. As has been shown in this work, practically no sector escapes this trend and strategy, as its presence is noted in the field of motoring, in textiles, in decoration, in toys and bikes, in watches and cameras, in soaps and shampoos, in food products, and even in video games.

In this line, together with the mother concept that is retromarketing, there is a bundle of terms that have gained considerable strength, such as retro communication (or nostalgic communication), retro branding, brand revitalization, or retro style. In this way and when retromarketing strategies are implemented, the different elements that make up strategic marketing (branding, consumer behavior analysis, segmentation...) and operational marketing (marketing mix - 4 P's) are addressed and/or or affected.

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