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Reviving Retro

A Qualitative Study of Retro Apparel in Football

by

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Abstract

Purpose and aim: Our study investigates the phenomenon of nostalgic football apparel consumption, emphasizing the interactive cultural processes that shape nostalgic feelings and in turn influence consumer behavior. Despite the prevalence of nostalgia marketing in various industries, the sports apparel sector, particularly football, has been slow to capitalize on this trend and simultaneously research has predominantly concentrated on the corporate perspective rather than on consumer behavior.

Method: By employing an abductive research approach, combining both deductive and inductive methods. Through qualitative data collection, being three separate focus groups, the study has presented valuable and deep insights into how nostalgic football apparel consumers think about the subject. Through a thorough thematic data analysis, three major themes of evidence linked to the research question emerged.

Findings: The findings highlight significant theoretical implications for understanding consumer behavior in nostalgia marketing and offer practical insights for marketers aiming to leverage nostalgia in product design and branding. We find evidence that the interactive cultural process of valuing products shapes the nostalgic aspects of football apparel to a high extent, and therefore has a major impact when it comes to consumer behavior related to nostalgic football apparel.

Implications: The main implications of our study add to the body of nostalgia marketing, and in particular nostalgia in sports marketing. The study also identifies limitations and suggests avenues for future research to further explore the dynamic interplay between nostalgia and consumer behavior in different contexts.

Keywords: nostalgia, retro, nostalgia marketing, football apparel, interactive cultural process, consumer behavior, identity, community, co-creation.

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Secondly, we would like to thank everyone who volunteered to participate in our focus groups for their interesting discussions and for sacrificing their time and energy to help us reach our goal. Without their help, this thesis would not have been possible.

We would also like to thank a previous supervisor of ours, Lars Carlman, who once gave us a reassuring and inspirational quote that has resonated with us throughout many hours of thesis writing, both during this project and in the past:

“En inställd spelning är också en spelning” - Ulf Lundell

Lund, Sweden
27 May 2024



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1 Introduction

This section will provide essential background information, definitions, and general terms related to nostalgia marketing and football apparel, which are the contexts that are under investigation. These concepts are crucial for understanding the research presented in this study. It will provide the reader with a valuable understanding of the consumption phenomena that this study aims to explore in greater depth. And the phenomenon we have chosen to investigate is the sudden popularity increase of nostalgic football apparel. The chapter will end with the aim of this research and the research question.

1.1 Background

Throughout history, the market, brands and companies have been successful at adapting and using our world and its terms to their advantage. Capitalism always finds its way into places where we from the beginning might not have intended it to be. Firms utilizing nostalgia to their advantage are not an exception. The sentimental value that memories of bygone eras hold is consistently used by brands in marketing, design and relationship building. Hence, leveraging nostalgia to appeal to consumers is nothing new and many brands are built on being nostalgic. Coca-Cola has again and again used nostalgia in their marketing campaigns and has for example branded themselves as a vital part of Christmas since the 1930s (Weatherford, 2019). When their classic bottle celebrated its 100th anniversary, they did not miss the chance to try and get millennials to remember that the best way to enjoy a Coke is to drink it from a 100-year-old glass bottle (Olenski, 2015). Another example of a brand being permeated with nostalgia is Marlboro. The Marlboro cowboy known as Marlboro Man was used for decades by the brand and played on the dream of living as the rugged cowboy, the very essence of being American during a time when true wilderness still existed in the US (Scola & Gordon, 2018).

However, in the sports industry, the practice of using nostalgia had for a long time not been utilized properly. Quite understandably, the football apparel industry, like any other industry, focuses on technological advancements in its strive for improved product performance.

Consumers have witnessed the sports apparel giants produce increasingly advanced boots, shirts and training gear, enhancing product attributes like speed, breathability and water repellency. Naturally, this improves the sporting performance of products and consequently, the athletes' ability to play. However, it might also show a neglect of consumer interests such as aesthetics and affordability. Brown (1999) basically labeled the football industry as morons for not being marketing wizards historically since it is one of few industries that have been late to hop on the retro bandwagon. He further means that it is a matter of being customer-oriented and that the increased popularity of retro products is a direct consequence of consumer demand, which the football industry was not quick to realize. Heritage sports brands, such as Adidas and Puma, still sell classic items, which have now become nostalgic, and have continuously done so since the products' inception. However, since Brown's (1999) remarks about the football industry, sports apparel brands have begun to utilize nostalgia in their marketing to a greater extent, for example by releasing limited edition items with a hint of nostalgia. An instance of this is when Adidas released special editions of their timeless classic boot from 1979, the Copa Mundial, in 2007, 2013, 2014 and 2018 (Adidas, 2022). This meant using the brand heritage of Adidas and leveraging nostalgia and the history of the boot being so intertwined with the brand. Another example is when Nike relaunched the Nike Mercurial R9 boots in 2013 as a modern boot with a design emulating the boots worn by football superstar Ronaldo Luís Nazário de Lima during the FIFA World Cup 1998, a tribute to celebrate the cultural icon (Unisport, n.d.).

It is only recently, however, that the sports apparel industry has awakened for real and started pumping out tons of retro-inspired apparel permeated with nostalgia to remember the glory days. In early 2024, Adidas launched the newest edition of their immensely popular Predator boot as a re-imagined old-school version to celebrate the boot's 30-year-old history (Adidas, 2024). Similarly, in 2024, another German sports apparel giant, Puma, released special editions of their classic Puma King boot celebrating legendary players of the past, such as Pelé and Johan Cruyff (Soccerbible, 2024). Another way in which the recent retro boom in the sports industry has taken shape is that in 2022 the NFL took away a rule that forced teams to wear the same kit all season long which influenced teams to go back to wearing retro-inspired kits (Kerr, 2023). Besides football boots and American football, retro football (soccer) shirts have become immensely popular as leisure wear and fashion items. On social media, tons of smaller dropshipping websites, as well as larger actors, selling either vintage items or replicas

of football shirts from decades past, are marketing themselves aggressively. Some have even gone as far as sponsoring teams in Europe's top leagues (Classic Football Shirts, 2022; 2023). The shirts they sell can be colourways and designs from various teams' historically significant seasons or have the names and numbers of players of older generations on their backs. However, with many of the now popular retro shirts being replicas, and therefore made by unofficial producers, it becomes apparent that the main actors in the sports industry have been late to the table, and still are in many areas. But still, the urge for retro kits has also triggered larger actors such as Adidas and Puma to act. For example, from Adidas, you can now purchase remade replica shirts of historical national teams and players such as Argentina's shirt from 1996, Mexico's from 1985 or different versions of the Beckenbauer training jackets (Adidas, n.d.). Additionally, Adidas' jersey design template for national teams in 2024 hints at the past and heavily resembles the brand's jersey layout from the 2006 FIFA World Cup tournament (John, 2023). International football clubs have also joined in on the recent nostalgia boom. Unlike a couple of years ago, online shoppers can now find a retro section on many of the most renowned football clubs' web shops where nostalgic items, past shirt designs and retro training wear are brought back. Simultaneously, new designs celebrating teams' history and heritage can be found. The Swedish football club AIK alongside Nike, released a kit in 2023 which celebrates the club's 132-year-old history (Football Vintage Tees, n.d.). The motif on the shirt is the famous painting "Vädersolstavlan" from 1636, likely the first painting of the city of Stockholm (Stockholmskällan, 2022). Another notable example is Arsenal, which unveiled their third kit for 2023 in a nostalgia-filled advert as a tribute to their 1980s heritage (Arsenal, 2023). Similarly, the Belgian national team opted to honour the beloved national icon Tintin by designing their away kit in light blue, featuring a distinctive white collar and paired with brown shorts reminiscent of Tintin's iconic outfit (Sky News, 2024). These unique choices reflect a creative blend of football tradition and cultural homage within the realm of sports apparel design. It can therefore be said that the strategic use of nostalgia is becoming more prevalent in the sports apparel industry and specifically in football.

The concept of nostalgia is often characterized by a sentimental yearning for the past, frequently accompanied by a tendency to idealize bygone eras (Mukhopadhyay, 2024). In marketing, a very successful strategy has been to allude to things that are from the past since we humans tend to remember the positive things about the past and forget the negatives.

While nostalgia has long been a popular theme in literature, contemporary psychology has recognized its role in also providing a sense of meaning in life (Routledge et al., 2011). Particularly in times of adversity and existential challenges, individuals tend to employ nostalgia as a psychological coping mechanism (Routledge et al., 2011; Mukhopadhyay, 2024). This feeling also seems to be more prevalent in younger generations (Scola, Gordon & Dwyer, 2022; Friedman, 2016). Furthermore, this anxiety can be better understood by looking at the pervading currents in our society today.

Postmodernity, the era we live in today, can be described as a society where intellectual assumptions of the modernist era are challenged and notions such as there being an objective truth have been replaced with the subjective nature of reality (Duignan, 2024). From a consumer perspective, Cova (1997) debates the concept of postmodernism and states that many describe it as an era often seen as a very individualistic period, where companies have allowed us to entirely create our own identities with all the different products we can imagine. By this, Cova also means that we are in an age where any ordinary individual has to showcase their uniqueness to show their existence. However, Cova (1997, p.300) suggests that the era of “severe social dissolution and extreme individualism” would rather be a description of late modernity in the past. Instead, he rather categorizes the era that we live in, postmodernity, as a time where we desperately seek community and social linkages like no other time. A time in which we are not limited to social constraints and we have such large amounts of freedom that it comes to a point where we are “too” free. Hence, we get anxious because of all the choices we have to make. Therefore, since we are anxious and continuously seek acceptance from others, the search for a community and to fit in becomes important which more often than not is made visible by our consumption behavior.

When it comes to physical presence, what we portray is often also what we want others to identify us as (Kaiser, 1997; Stone, 1962). A punk rocker’s mohawk or a reggae fan’s dreadlocks immediately send signals to other people about what they stand for and what they identify with. In our case, a football fan’s jersey sends the same kind of signals. The symbolism and power that the football jersey holds cannot be undervalued. Not seldom do fans burn rivaling teams’ jerseys or use their own as paintings on the walls of their home. We use these symbols (mohawks, dreadlocks and jerseys) as tools to be accepted into groups. We build our identity so that we can belong to a community.

1.2 Problematization and Aim

Around the new millennium, Brown (1999) wrote about retro marketing possibly being a fad, and that he could not see it sticking around for long. Conversely, however, he saw a very different development in the marketing field. Instead of dying out, as any other fad would, the nostalgia boom kept its relevance and developed into permeating every industry and product category imaginable (Brown, 2013). Now, more than ten years later, it is evident that retro products and nostalgia marketing are not a fad. Particularly in the sports apparel industry the use of nostalgia only seems to increase and the trend nowadays may seem like no surprise, it works as well as in any other industry.

Looking at studies and what experts have to say, the surge of retro products makes sense. The latest Adidas retro-inspired boots, and the national team kits from the 90's and AIK's jersey all go in line with the pronounced benefits of nostalgia marketing from a company's perspective. Studies show that leveraging nostalgia can be a powerful tool to increase sales (Sierra & McQuitty, 2007; Stern, 1990; Muehling & Sprott, 2004). This assumption is in agreement with other research showing that there seems to be a positive correlation between nostalgia marketing and purchase intention, meaning that nostalgia can drive purchases (Alkhafagi, 2023; Muehling & Sprott, 2004). Furthermore, the perceived value of a product increases when it is a sports retro product. Scola (2019) compared sports retro products with modern products and found that people are willing to pay a price premium for retro products compared to other items. Another study concluded that when a person had nostalgic feelings about a sports brand from their past, they were more prone to purchase new products from that brand if the product was marketed and designed in a retro fashion, rather than in a modern fashion. (Scola, Gordon & Dwyer, 2022).

There are several clear benefits of going down the nostalgia route. The mechanisms often presented point to the fact that nostalgia makes people feel good. From a marketer's perspective, nostalgia can affect consumer behavior positively since nostalgia shapes perceptions of the past (Cheung et al., 2013). We think back to the golden days when we get nostalgic. Hence, by integrating nostalgic aspects in marketing strategies, there are benefits that can increase customer engagement (Mukhopadhyay, 2024). As aforementioned, these nostalgic effects are more profound in younger generations. Supposedly, this is due to

technological developments having accelerated so fast that it has created a longing for the past by the younger generations, therefore leading them to want cultural artifacts from the past (Friedman, 2016; Scola, Gordon & Dwyer, 2022). Technological advances have also made items of the past more accessible since it has made it possible to find past things instantly, compared to when you had to dig through an attic to find old things (Carroll, 2023). These effects have all been boosted by current challenges in our society. According to Krystine Batcho, a psychology professor at Le Moyne College in New York, we have the “pandemic-era effect”, where we have been locked in our homes, and it has made us look back at past memories, where nostalgia has made us neglect the negative things about memories and remember the positives (Batcho cited in Carroll, 2023, n.p.). In a Forbes CMO newsletter, Nick Climer, executive creative producer of the global marketing agency RAPP gives a similar argument for the success of nostalgia marketing. He believes nostalgia works because of our current times, saying that “...we’re in more of a wartime feel where there’s a lot of injustices that are happening.” (Climer cited in Poiniski, 2024, n.p.). This is similar to the explanation given earlier about young people feeling more anxious today and that they are therefore looking back at history (Mukhopadhyay, 2024). Hence, we put our current time in perspective to past times, and view them in a more positive light.

These explanations have made way for numerous captivating business articles, enticing readers with headlines about the remarkable marketing strategy of tapping into nostalgia. They often oversimplify nostalgia marketing, suggesting that nostalgia holds the key to solving all challenges. Moreover, many of these articles dig into the nostalgic mechanisms that influence consumer behavior, proposing a narrative where our present anxieties prompt us to find comfort in familiar relics from the past, ultimately driving our purchasing decisions. While these mechanisms hold merit, it is worth questioning whether our current era truly engenders more anxiety than previous generations have experienced. Brands such as Coca-Cola and Marlboro successfully utilized nostalgia in the past. Therefore, seemingly shallow explanations as to why nostalgia marketing is flourishing now, like the fact that we are living in a strange time, may be overly simplistic. By framing the mechanisms and underlying motivations in this manner, there is a risk of overlooking valuable implications within the phenomenon. Consequently, studies on nostalgia marketing in sports have often neglected to explore consumer perspectives comprehensively. Scola (2019, p.3) writes “Although there appears to be a reliance on retro marketing in sport, we have minimal

knowledge regarding what emotions these practices elicit or how they impact consumer behavior.”. Mukhopadhyay (2024) agrees since, according to him, most studies on the subject focus on areas which look into the subject from a corporate perspective rather than looking at it from a consumer perspective and investigating underlying drivers and motivations of consumer behavior. Similarly, Pichierri (2023) writes that there have been few efforts in research to try and understand why, for example, nostalgic advertising works so well, particularly in sports marketing. Therefore, we suspect that there is much more to this phenomenon and that it is not as simple and easy to understand as these business articles want to describe it, especially since the retro football apparel trend has exploded now. Therefore, we want to investigate the consumption phenomenon from a different viewpoint, from a more sociological perspective. McCracken (1986) states that products’ meanings are created culturally and subsequently transferred onto the consumer. This could be described as an interactive cultural process where the value and meaning of products are culturally created in specific contexts, such as in a society or a friend group, to then reflect upon the person wearing or using said products. As Cova (1997) writes about how we desperately seek social linkages, it would be of interest to look at this phenomenon through the social lens and broaden the perspective by researching the social process of deciding value on football apparel, which in turn creates or enhances the value of nostalgia.

Since the current research and corporations seem to have put little effort into trying to investigate the factors behind the creation of the nostalgia and retro trend (Mukhopadhyay, 2024; Scola, 2019), there is a risk that big corporations and academia neglect a part that can help explain the consumption phenomenon. At the moment it seems as if brands use nostalgia as a tool to sell more products, but they might not have understood the whole picture. The studies that have begun investigating why people like the retro category emphasize that more research must be done, and also in different contexts (Mukhopadhyay, 2024; Scola, 2019). This is why our chosen phenomenon becomes interesting. People seem to like nostalgic items, not least when it comes to football merchandise, but why is that all of a sudden?

Since the trend of nostalgic football apparel is relatively new, we aim to understand the interactive cultural processes’ potential to shape perceptions of nostalgia and in turn consumption. By having an empirical focus on nostalgically permeated football apparel, we can gain insights into how nostalgia is used and valued in the social creation of a consumption trend. We acknowledge that individuals strive to purchase and value products and artifacts

filled with nostalgia. Yet, why this is, and how the process works is at the moment rather ambiguous. Consequently, we aim to uncover profound insights into the interactive cultural processes, which give nostalgic apparel its value and in turn, drive consumer behavior in relation to retro and nostalgic football apparel. By investigating this phenomenon, we seek to illuminate the understanding of this trend and thereby enrich our understanding of contemporary consumer preferences and behaviors in the context of nostalgic football apparel consumption.

This aim results in the following research question:

How do interactive cultural processes shape nostalgic feelings, and in turn, influence the consumer behavior of nostalgia apparel in football?

1.3 Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the retro football apparel consumption phenomenon. The study can make significant contributions to both academia and industry. Academically, it will deepen our understanding of consumer behavior within the context of nostalgia consumption, and in this specific case nostalgic football product consumption. By looking into the motivations, drivers, and psychological underpinnings of this phenomenon, the study will enrich the existing body of knowledge in marketing and consumer behavior research. Through empirical investigation and theoretical analysis, we can gain valuable insights into the complex interplay of how people collectively shape each other's perceptions of value, ultimately influencing consumer choices in the realm of sports merchandise.

On a practical or managerial level, the insights gleaned from this research will be important for marketers, brands, and retailers operating in the sports apparel industry or those who utilize nostalgia. By understanding how and why consumers together give value to nostalgic elements and in turn to retro football products, stakeholders can develop more targeted and effective marketing strategies. This includes product design, branding, pricing, distribution, and promotional activities tailored to resonate with the desires and emotional connections of their target audience. Ultimately, leveraging these insights will enable businesses to better

engage with consumers and capitalize on the growing popularity of nostalgic football products, leading to enhanced competitiveness and market success.

1.4 Delimitations

This research is limited to studying consumer perspectives, opinions and rationales surrounding the consumption of sports apparel in the realm of football. We mainly focus on the consumption phenomenon of retro football apparel, meaning the fact that people consume clothes, and mainly shirts, that play on consumers' feelings of nostalgia and the past, which are associated with football. This limitation is made since much of the previous research regarding nostalgia marketing has been conducted without a consumer behavior perspective in mind (Mukhopadhyay, 2024; Scola, 2019; Pichierri, 2023) and we wish to further the knowledge in the field of nostalgia marketing.

1.5 Outline of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into five separate chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the topic at hand and presents useful background information as well as the research problem, research question, aim and purpose. Chapter 2 delves into the theoretical framework of this study and gives a comprehensive review of the literature later used to analyze the empirical data and answer the research question. Here, we present relevant literature and theories on nostalgia, nostalgia marketing, consumer behavior and how consumers are socially influenced to behave in certain ways. In Chapter 3, we present the methodology of the study. Here, we go over the research process, how we collected the empirical data and argue for our methodological choices and research design. Chapter 4 gives a thorough presentation of the gathered empirical data in combination with an analysis of the data using the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2. Lastly, in Chapter 5, we present the findings of the study together with theoretical and practical implications that our research has contributed to. Furthermore, we discuss the limitations of our study and suggest directions for future research on the topic of nostalgia marketing.

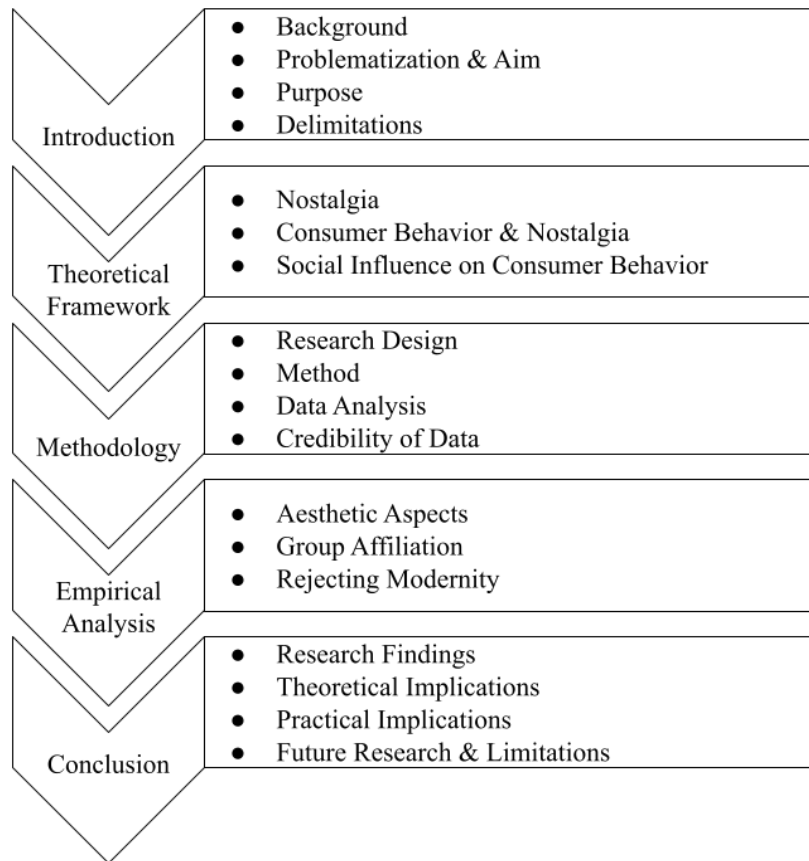


Figure 1: Outline of the Thesis

2 Theoretical Framework

This section brings up various theoretical concepts relevant to the study. The chapter highlights the underlying theoretical foundations that inform and guide the research, providing a comprehensive overview of the theoretical perspectives employed to analyze and interpret the phenomenon under investigation. Firstly, we discuss nostalgia marketing, its origin, how it has been used by researchers and marketers to this date, its effects and implications. We then connect nostalgia to consumer behavior. What becomes clear is that while it is a very well-researched area, there is room for broadening the understanding, especially in the realm of sports. In our specific context, there are questions that cannot be fully answered by nostalgia itself, which is why we also present how there are social influences that might be interesting to add to the investigation. The concepts demonstrated here are all used in many contexts to explain other types of consumer behavior and we intend to use these sociological concepts to broaden the understanding of the nostalgic football apparel consumption phenomenon.

2.1 Nostalgia

2.1.1 Introduction to Nostalgia

Nostalgia is the strive of people to seek comfort in reminiscing about the past (Mukhopadhyay, 2024). It was Johannes Hofer's observation and coining of the term "nostalgia" in 1688 that marked an early recognition of what we now understand as a psychological and emotional phenomenon. Hofer, a Swiss physician, initially described nostalgia as a medical condition characterized by profound homesickness or longing for one's homeland. He observed that soldiers who were separated from their familiar surroundings and loved ones for extended periods of time often exhibited symptoms of this intense longing, which could sometimes lead to a decline in health and sometimes even death (Winter, 2022).

Nowadays, the concept of nostalgia has been broken down into three types, personal, historical and collective or communal nostalgia. The first one, personal nostalgia, is the one most people think of when hearing the word. It is linked to your own sense of history and experiences, which are often remembered in a positive way (Baker & Kennedy, 1994; Stern, 1992). Different things that can evoke this kind of feeling are specific places from childhood, certain songs or smells, or even particular objects that remind you of significant moments in your life. Secondly, historical nostalgia refers to a longing or sentimental yearning for a past era or period in history, even if the individual did not personally experience that time. This form of nostalgia is tied to a broader cultural or historical context rather than personal memories (Baker & Kennedy, 1994). Examples could be how it has become popular to go to restaurants with 1950s inspiration, a type of retrofuturism, or when people wear vintage clothes. The third one, collective or communal nostalgia, is in many ways similar to historical nostalgia, where collective nostalgia refers to a shared sense of longing or sentimental attachment to a past time or experience among a group of people, typically within a particular community, society, or generation. Unlike personal nostalgia, which focuses on individual memories, collective or communal nostalgia is about a shared memory or perception of the past within a larger group context (Han & Newman, 2022; Wildschut et al., 2014). For example, in terms of the Swedish collective and sports, many often talk about Ingemar Stenmark and people remember how he dominated skiing in the late 1970s and 1980s. Or how the Swedish national team in football came third in the 1994 World Cup. These times are remembered fondly.

What implications does this have for people then? Researchers seem to agree that nostalgia is powerful and works as a marketing tool because people derive significant gratification from products that resonate with their personal history, invoking a profound sense of nostalgia (Han & Newman, 2022; Holbrook, 1993). Belk (1990, 1991) continues this thought by exploring how possessions contribute to shaping an individual's sense of past, emphasizing the emotional bond between individuals and their belongings as an archive of memories and life experiences. This perspective underscores how possessions not only serve utilitarian functions but also play a crucial role in maintaining and enriching personal narratives, fostering a tangible link to one's history. Linked to keeping one's sense of past, Davis (1979) explains that nostalgia could be seen as a mechanism that prevents a person from losing their identity in times of transition, for example, when going from adolescence to adulthood. Thus,

nostalgia plays a significant role for many people in preserving their sense of identity and is a potent emotion.

2.1.2 Nostalgia in Marketing and Consumption

What research shows is that nostalgia seems to have a deep and impactful influence on us humans, hence brands from several different industries have for a long time utilized this profound appreciation. It has been used all over, from the beverage industry with Coca-Cola (Weatherford, 2019) to the car industry with Porsche (Cole Smith, 2023). The use of nostalgia in marketing has been both effective and powerful, being viable for increasing sales in various cases (Muehling & Sprott, 2004; Sierra & McQuitty, 2007; Stern, 1990). To much extent, the research that has been conducted has been quantitative (Holbrook & Schindler, 2003), focused on purchase intention (Alkhafagi, 2023; Muehling & Sprott, 2004), consumer preferences (Rindfleisch et al., 2000), brand attachment (Thomson et al., 2005), or brand attitude (Youn & Jin, 2017). These have looked at the phenomenon from a corporate perspective. For example, Ju et al. (2016) argued that leveraging nostalgia in marketing could significantly enhance brand management. Their research explored the influence of nostalgia marketing on consumer decisions across various product categories where they found that nostalgic advertising had a greater influence on consumers' perceived self-continuity compared to advertising focused on the present. This led to a better brand attitude towards the brand, and in turn a higher purchase intention. Youn and Dodoo (2021) showed in their study that brands that leverage nostalgia receive better ratings on dimensions such as sincerity and competence, getting better brand engagement from their consumers.

The research on nostalgia in the sports industry seems to follow the lead of earlier research. As previously mentioned, Scola (2019) found that consumers are willing to spend more on products that are in some way retro-inspired compared to other products. Likewise, Scola, Gordon and Dwyer (2022) concluded that when a person had nostalgic feelings about a sports club, they had a higher chance of buying products from that team if the products were retro-inspired. Moreover, Funk and James (2006) showed in their study that fans' loyalty is connected to nostalgia. Pichierri (2023) could show that when a team is performing badly, advertising season tickets by referencing back to when the team performed well in the past had a positive effect on sales. In contrast, when a team is performing well, it is not as effective

to reference back to the good old days in advertising. What becomes evident here is that most focus of previous research is on the perspective of the brand, and what implications brands can utilize. However, few seem to look at how this works, and why consumers do these actions and have these thoughts.

A conclusion to the research and perspectives that have been brought up is that it has an extreme emphasis on looking at how and why brands should leverage nostalgia in their marketing. Besides that, it explains the retro surge in a rather simple way, cooking down the whole phenomenon to one stimulus, which is a nostalgic product or branding practice, triggering a positive reaction from a consumer. For instance, nostalgia is powerful in marketing because it is connected to deep memories, and therefore it has been found to increase sales when marketers exploit this stimulus. However, the research that has been done does not put much effort into considering the deeper underlying motivations that people have (Mukhopadhyay, 2024; Scola 2019).

2.2 Consumer Behavior Connected to Nostalgia

As we now know, nostalgia can have a great effect on consumer behavior because it can evoke sentimental connections to, for example, products or brands (Cheung et al., 2013). This emotional pull can lead to people consuming items that represent and symbolize memories or something that they have romanticized. Whether it is the classic soda bottle or a football jersey, these products tap into people's yearning for the past. As mentioned before, marketers leverage this feeling because they know that these products have inherited values and symbols. The products become intertwined with personal memories and cultural narratives. At the heart of this viewpoint lies a profound acknowledgement of the cultural significance inherent in products. This significance is not automatically given to the products independently but rather emerges through a collective process of social construction involving shared symbols, narratives, and rituals (McCracken, 1986).

To truly grasp consumer behaviors and preferences within their sociocultural framework, it becomes important to understand these cultural meanings. These meanings are woven into the fabric of society, evolving through the interactions and interpretations of individuals and groups (McCracken, 1986). They encapsulate the stories and symbols that imbue products

with layers of significance beyond their material attributes (McCracken, 1986; Belk, 1988). Therefore, we describe how people socially create and value things as an interactive cultural process. By understanding the cultural meanings that football apparel has, we can illuminate the motivations behind consumer choices and actions. Products become conduits through which cultural identities, values, and norms are expressed and negotiated (Rokka & Ulver, 2023). Consequently, studying consumer behaviors within this broader context unveils the intricate interplay between individuals and their sociocultural environments, shedding light on the complex dynamics that shape consumption patterns and preferences.

The symbolic meanings that can be found in all products are well-used by consumers. Consumption has become one of the major sources for expressing and constructing our identities (du Gay et al., 1997; Rokka & Ulver, 2023). Therefore, it is of great interest to investigate how people's identity projects shape their consumption related to football apparel. Cultural and symbolic meanings are connected to every single person because we use the meanings to construct our identity (Belk, 1988; McCracken, 1986). The concept explains how individuals shape and define themselves within society. Several researchers have discussed how we use the role that products play as symbolic tools in the identity-building process (Belk, 1988; Bocoock, 1993; Holt, 2002). When people engage in constructing their identity through the symbolic meanings in the consumption products, they can be seen engaging in identity projects. In these projects, individuals can inhabit several different consumer positions which have different meanings (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Rokka & Ulver, 2023). As noted by McCracken (1986), these products serve as tangible representations that people can use to both discern and project aspects of their identity onto themselves. By engaging with certain products, individuals today can mirror the associations and affiliations of the products onto themselves. Using consumption as the main tool for creating identity has historically not been the case. For the majority of time, people's lives and identities were predetermined by factors such as occupation, religion and family. But with new ideas emerging, such as postmodernism and the consumption society, there are new ways to create your own identity. People's identities become more fluid and dynamic, where the individual decides how it is formed (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). This is particularly interesting in our case, since as mentioned before, nostalgia according to Routledge et al. (2011) is very efficient in times of adversity and existential challenges. We have gotten the agency to express our individuality, and in line with consumption society, consumption has become the

major source of expressing our identity. This process is shown through consumption choices, where individuals signal their allegiance, values, and aspirations, thereby shaping their social identity and status within their peer group or community (Rokka & Ulver, 2023). This is connected to Cova's (1997) view on consumption and identity in which he agrees that by buying, an individual can construct their own identity. He elaborates by giving a sports example of football fans to the famous French club, Olympique de Marseille, where the act of completely dressing in team colors makes an individual seem and feel affiliated with the club.

We scatter the market to find symbolic meanings that go in line with our values to create our identity, we want to mirror symbolism found in products (Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1998). When a football fan wears the national jersey of Sweden, it is to portray the symbolic meanings that that particular jersey symbolizes. To show up with a Denmark jersey in the middle of hundreds of Swedish fans would naturally give out the wrong signals. This could be further understood by the extended self that Belk (1988) introduced, where he means that a person uses things from his or her environment and borrows the symbolic value to extend their own identity. Furthermore, Belk (1988, p.160) notes that self-extension, in our case using the symbolism in football merchandise, "...operates not only on an individual level, but also on a collective level...". Since we humans are social animals, belonging to a community becomes important. A motivation to construct an identity is that we want to fit in. Sending the wrong symbolic meanings would mean that we are not fitting in, but conforming to the majority does. This leads us to the next step in this theoretical review.

2.3 Social Aspects of Consumer Behavior

We have now mapped the importance of how we use cultural meanings to create our identity construction and how that affects our consumer behavior. Now we come to the next step where we elaborate and describe more of the sociological aspect that is widely used in explaining consumption. One such concept is community. Cova (1997) defines communities as characterized by people having shared interests, values, and lifestyles related to each other. Similarly, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001, n.p.) define a brand community as "...a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand.". According to these authors, a brand community is rather fixed around a

certain common brand and is a stable environment which is based on differentiation from other groups. Furthermore, they mean that a brand community has a we-and-them kind of thinking. Such a brand could be a football club or a national team, where people point their interests and get their relationships from the brand. One similar concept is consumer tribes or subcultures which are similar in the way that they consist of people that have a common ground in their similar interests. However, according to Cova (1997), consumer tribes or subcultures are not stable like a brand community but they do get a sense of belonging and use the “linking value” that can be found in the common interest in a consumption practice. Linking value is described by Cova as derived from the way products and services help consumers connect with others. This emphasizes the role of consumption in facilitating social bonds and communal relationships. Football clubs, nations and players all have nests of followers around the world that share this linking value. This goes in line with Rooka and Ulver’s (2023) discussion regarding neo-tribal communities, where you could say that a postmodern view on identity has given rise to neo-tribal communities where people meet and build their shared identity based on shared interests. They mean that these are often linked to lifestyle and consumption in contrast to what people have historically based their identities on, like family or religion. Football supporters and their sense of belonging in groups could be seen as these neo-tribal communities. Whether it is supporters of a specific team, collectors of vintage memorabilia, or enthusiasts of a particular era, these people form tight-knit communities bound by their passion for the sport and its associated paraphernalia (Cova, 1997). In essence, football subcultures exemplify the evolution of modern identity formation, where individuals forge meaningful connections and identities based on shared passions and lifestyles, thus illustrating the complex interplay between consumption, culture, and community in the realm of football.

We have seen that a way of creating your identity is through consumption. One motivator is that we create our identities to fit into a bigger collective, often by dressing in certain ways (Johnson, Lennon & Rudd, 2014; Kaiser, 1997). What becomes interesting, is that wearing a team jersey or displaying merchandise can communicate a sense of belonging and shared identity within a larger community. A community which can not only be a football club or a nation but also a friend group or a family. Products therefore become more than mere items, they become conduits for self-expression and social connection, allowing individuals to articulate and showcase elements of their identity to the world around them (Rokka & Ulver,

2023). In this study, this process is of the highest importance and it is the factor which we will further investigate to get a broader understanding of how and why nostalgic football apparel has become so increasingly popular. The process of creating and understanding the identities is dynamic and interactive, as individuals navigate their social landscapes and use material objects to construct and communicate facets of who they are (McCracken, 1986). We humans are social animals, and we learn quickly that it is integral to fit in and find a sense of belonging. For example, Kaiser (1997) discusses how we humans integrate norms and what is socially acceptable into our behavior as we grow up. She means that at a certain stage, it becomes really important to conform with our peers and a way in which we conform has become our clothing preferences. Therefore, how we dress becomes a major symbol for affiliating with certain groups. Additionally, Stone (1962) describes how individuals shape their self-image through interactions with other people. This involves choosing clothing to express a desired identity and to communicate that identity to others. Further on, Sirgy (1982) presented the self-image product-image congruity theory, where the basic assumption is that the products we consume gain associations from marketing and branding, and that people buy products that they see represent themselves or want to in some way. Naturally, people will avoid buying products that go against their desired self-image and one such product is of course clothes. The symbolic importance of clothing as an identity buildingstone to get acceptance from a group is also discussed by Kaiser (1997). She describes how we categorize people depending on what they wear and that clothes are tangible objects that represent more abstract ideas of a culture. The different symbolic meanings arise when we acknowledge differences and contrasts in people's clothing choices. One could dress masculine or feminine, old or young, or as a supporter of either Sweden or Denmark. Regardless of which, all different choices have a greater meaning than just being a piece of cloth.

If we are to go back to symbolic meanings, we can see that the values and meanings given to products are the result of us collectively labeling them (McCracken, 1986). We humans together give symbolic meaning and value to different things, we co-create these values. Cassinger and Bertilsson (2011) discuss the paradigm of co-creation having become standard practice in contemporary marketing. They mean that co-creation is the process of value creation done in cooperation between brand and consumer and that consumers' actions, when utilized appropriately together with a brand's products and services, can be an effective tool to strengthen and enhance brand value. Furthermore, they argue that the idea of brand

co-creation stems from the concept of the service dominant logic presented by Vargo and Lusch (2004) which, as opposed to previous beliefs in marketing, blurred the lines between producer and consumer in creating value. According to Vargo and Lusch (2004), the consumer always plays a role in creating the value of products and by simply consuming, consumers contribute to the marketing and value creation of a brand's offerings. By this, they mean that value is created in the consumption of products rather than in the actual moment of purchase. In our phenomena of study, it becomes interesting to investigate how these ideas shape the value of nostalgia.

With a surge of nostalgia-driven products in football, it is notable that a considerable portion of nostalgic products are purchased by individuals who fall outside the typical age range associated with personal nostalgia. For example, retro shirts from the 1990s are popular among individuals who were not even born then. This phenomenon underscores the notion of historical and collective or communal nostalgia, wherein people exhibit a collective preference for items imbued with historical significance on a broader cultural or societal scale (Han & Newman, 2022; Wildschut et al., 2014). If that is the case it implies that a person, who feels nostalgic about a time which he or she has not even lived through, must have been influenced by another person or at least some kind of outside influence since it cannot be because of the person's own memory.

When it comes to football apparel, this notion is especially relevant since a shirt or a training kit belonging to a certain team is filled with value by its fans. Similar to regular fashion items, a piece of clothing is given its value by the people consuming it. This is linked to what Arvidsson (2005) writes about in his article, where consumers not only buy goods for their use, but they create communities which are based on the social value that a brand gives. It is the community that creates the social value and an example is how football fans use football products such as jerseys and thereby enhance the value of the clothing. The interactive part (implicitly or explicitly) between individuals in their cultural context becomes important in defining what values different objects symbolize. A shirt without a club emblem or the right color is worth less in a football community than a shirt with the right symbols because the people in the community, the consumers, have together enhanced and defined its value. Naturally, when it comes to monetary value and the prices of products, the producer sets the price but the actual value is determined first when consumers decide to purchase it.

The research that has been presented here is useful in the context of football apparel consumption. Individuals can purchase football merchandise to actively construct and express their extended selves and identities (Belk, 1988; Rokka & Ulver, 2023; McCracken, 1986; Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1998). For example, a motivation for a consumption behavior could be to be part of a team or community. By using team jerseys, scarves, or other branded apparel, fans symbolically align themselves with their favorite teams and players. Another motivation could be that people might create their identity to portray or be seen in a certain way. One could for example want to be seen as a connoisseur and only wear clothes that fit that role. This act goes beyond mere fashion, where it serves as a visible declaration of affiliation and belonging within a specific fan community (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Through these material expressions, individuals communicate shared values, emotions, and connections associated with their chosen team or sport. It allows individuals to assert their identity within a broader cultural context, forging bonds with like-minded individuals and fostering a sense of camaraderie and belonging (Cova, 1997). The way we dress and consume clothes becomes a major motivator for people to create their identity so that they can feel part of a community (Kaiser, 1997).

2.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the theoretical base on which the study stands. It has brought up three different sections where we structurally have gone through how the theoretical understandings are connected. It started with the concept of nostalgia and how much of the research in marketing related to nostalgia has focused on the corporate perspective. This has meant that a consumer perspective on retro and nostalgic football products has been neglected, creating a gap where the consumer aspect is not as researched. This means that a missing part is the understanding of how the interactive process of a collective shapes the nostalgic aspects of retro football apparel consumption. At the same time, we connect the notions of nostalgia marketing to how consumer behavior is shaped by nostalgia, where individuals use consumption as a tool for active identity construction. Through the use of consumption, people use values and symbols that are embedded in products to reflect them upon themselves. Ultimately, the last section presents how individuals use the values of products to construct their identities to fit into the collective. Furthermore, we describe that

the values used are not automatically inherent in products but socially created. As a society, we collectively assign meaning to various items. These values can be created and utilized, such as within communities and through co-creation. How people create these meanings and how they are expressed is therefore of great interest in the context of this research.

3 Methodology

This section will present our methodological choices. We will start with describing our initial approach to the research, and how it was designed. Then we explain our method and why we chose to go down certain routes. A major part is also the data analysis section, where we explain how the process of connecting empirical material with our theoretical understanding. The chapter ends with a thorough go through of the study's credibility and limitations.

3.1 Research Approach

This study intended to highlight underlying motivations that consumers of nostalgic football apparel have, using theoretical concepts that are focused on how interactive cultural processes shape nostalgic value, which impacts consumer behavior. We have argued that while existing literature puts a lot of effort into explaining how nostalgia is useful from a corporate perspective, little effort has been put into explaining how collective understanding may shape the underlying motivations of consumers, especially in the consumption of nostalgic football apparel. Therefore, there is not one particular theoretical model that applies to our phenomena, which would have been needed if we were to conduct deductive research (Bryman & Bell, 2017). Meanwhile, we have not only based this study on our own empirical observations but on previous theories from similar contexts, and it is therefore not to be categorized as an inductive study either (Bryman & Bell, 2017). Naturally, this led us to adopt an abductive approach where the two methods, deductive (theory-driven) and inductive (data-driven), are combined. Hence, we have sought to generate plausible explanations that best fit an observed phenomenon or data without strictly adhering to a theoretical framework or predetermined theories, but not on purely descriptive observations either (Haig, 2005 cited in Conaty, 2021). This approach encouraged us to embrace uncertainty and think critically, ultimately enhancing our understanding of the world and stimulating further investigation and inquiry.

When combining our empirical data with the analytical framework, we intended to highlight mechanisms that influence consumer behavior connected to nostalgic consumption, that has not been researched before. These mechanisms are of course the social influence that people have on each other. Through conducting a focus group study, we intended to make consumers of nostalgic football apparel discuss their motivations and thoughts regarding different choices and preferences when it came to their consumption of nostalgic football products. This specific method gave nuanced perspectives on how people in groups, an environment where the social aspects really are put to work, shape each others' preferences.

3.2 Research Design

To answer the research question and fulfill the aim of this research, we have gathered empirical data from consumers of retro and nostalgic football apparel and their underlying motivations. With the approach of the study being of a qualitative nature, it provided a nuanced perspective for studying a complex phenomenon by exploring the subjective experiences, viewpoints, and behaviors of individuals within their natural settings. Unlike quantitative methods that emphasize numerical data and statistical analysis, qualitative research strives to capture the richness, depth, and subtleties of human experiences through comprehensive exploration and interpretation (Bryman & Bell, 2017). Hence, this fitted well with the aim of the study and our focus on exploring subjective ideas and experiences regarding nostalgic football apparel consumption.

Naturally, qualitative research methods are well-suited for this purpose, providing the flexibility necessary for exploratory research to discover new insights and investigate emerging themes in a fluid and adaptable way. It has allowed us to dive deep into the subject, uncovering new insights and exploring emerging themes. Unlike quantitative approaches that rely on predefined measures, qualitative research methods enable researchers to be responsive to unexpected findings and to adjust their focus based on evolving understanding. This adaptability is essential for capturing the richness and complexity of human experiences and behaviors, making qualitative methods a valuable tool for research that aims to explore and understand phenomena in depth (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

3.3 Data Collection Method

Our data collection method has been through focus groups. However, before we started our main data collection, we conducted an initial interview with a person who is an avid football fan, and a consumer of retro football products. Furthermore, from this initial interview, we gained a lot of useful insights when it came to the subject of research. This, in turn, helped us refine and develop our approach before the planned focus group sessions which were our main method of data collection. In the following, we will describe our two methods thoroughly and motivate our choices.

3.3.1 Initial Interview

We started by conducting a single-person interview to understand what types of data and themes would surge when we dove down into the topic of nostalgic football apparel. When it comes to the interviewee as a person, he is an avid football fan and a consumer of retro football products. He therefore suited our wanted type of person to hear motivations, preferences and gain data from. This first interview was very useful for this study in giving us insights into how people could argue and discuss the topic of retro football apparel, even though it did not perhaps contribute extensively to the final empirical data presented in this paper. However, from the interview, we gained insights that we would not have been able to get had we simply conducted focus groups directly without understanding how a person could reason on this matter.

This interview mainly helped us in coming up with discussion points and how to structure the focus group sessions. We could also discern some analytical themes and data that we could potentially connect to our theoretical understanding and also get insights on what would be unnecessary to ask the focus group participants moving forward. The result of this was that we could tweak our framework to what kinds of data or empirics we were going to be able to collect through focus groups. For example, at the beginning of the single-person interview, we asked simple questions about his relationship to football and clothing. These types of questions were not asked during the focus groups, since they came out as not interesting to the research. On the other hand, we got insights that were very useful for our collection of focus group data. In the interview, the respondent was asked to imagine himself in a couple of

different scenarios. For example, in one of these scenarios, he was shown two pictures of two different shirts and was then asked to pick only one of them and motivate his choice. Another scenario was that we showed him a picture of the Brazil 2002 national team that won the World Cup that year when he was asked to choose a shirt with a player name from that squad and describe the reasons for a particular choice or why another choice would be wrong. It is important to state that we have not used the empirical data from this interview in our empirical analysis, except for one comment. This was used since it gave a great description and showcased a point very well. Furthermore, from the initial interview, we got a good amount of deep insights that an initial interview is capable of producing (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

3.3.2 Focus Groups

The main source of data collection for this thesis has been through focus groups, which Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) define as a type of group discussion where we as researchers try to gather insights and reactions to our chosen phenomenon. Bryman and Bell (2017) also mention that focus groups are suitable if the research is going to deeply focus on a particular subject or topic, which applies in our research context of looking into the case of nostalgic football products. Furthermore, it gave us the pros of an interview, where we got to take part of the individual's experiences and thoughts, while regarding the influence of other group members (Carson et al., 2001; Nilsson, 2024). Moreover, we decided to conduct all the group sessions in Swedish. Except for it being a more feasible option, since this research has been conducted in Sweden, it also enhanced the group discussions since all participants could engage in the discussions in their native language, making them more comfortable and more able to share their thoughts to a full extent. Naturally, due to this decision being made, it also added a very pronounced criteria for the participants to be eligible for the group sessions.

A focus group usually consists of somewhere between five to twelve individuals with the mission to discuss certain topics or phenomena (Bryman & Bell, 2017; Carson et al., 2001). According to Morgan (1998 cited in Bryman & Bell, 2017) and Carson et al. (2001), groups with a lower number of people are suitable when you have participants with a high involvement in the subject. This aligned with our participants and therefore we had five (Group 1) and six (Group 2) participants in our two initial focus groups. These people had an

appropriate knowledge about the subject since they were chosen on the criteria of being consumers of nostalgic football apparel. Hence, we felt that it would give us more qualitative insights if we were to leave each individual more time to let them explain more deeply about their thoughts, which would not be as likely to happen if we had focus groups consisting of, for example, twelve people. There would be much less chance of a deeper discussion if that was the case. Additionally, Bryman and Bell (2017) highlight that the higher the number of people in a group, the harder it gets to manage it. While one drawback of a focus group is that there is a risk that a dominant individual shapes the discourse (Smithson, 2000), by limiting the number of persons and choosing individuals who we knew are highly engaged in the topic, we minimize the risk of letting one person take over the focus group discussions.

During the sessions, we as researchers worked as mediators and tried to have as little impact on the discussions as possible (Bryman & Bell, 2017). Our job was to start the discussion, which we did by presenting images with some describing words for context and asking open-ended questions. To give an example, we shared an image of eight different football shirts with the participants. The instructions were to jointly decide which football shirt was the best looking and that they could wear. After that, we tried to be as dismantled as possible from the discussion, only adding questions such as asking participants to elaborate or explain their comments. For many of the other discussion points the process was similar, we showed one or several images to set the stage and then let the participants discuss it between themselves.

There are several reasons as to why we chose focus groups as our method. Firstly, it is a great way of collecting different insights and perspectives that are on a deeper level (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Often in focus groups, you can get reasons for why people are thinking like they do. Other participants often point out contradictions, and people have to reflect on their reasonings (Bryman & Bell, 2017). Bringing in several people to discuss a question or look at a problem made it possible to get insights from different angles, which helped us get a deeper and broader understanding of the research topic.

Secondly, since this study is aimed to broaden and investigate the understanding of our phenomena, conducting focus groups was therefore a fitting method to capture the interaction between how individuals perceive phenomena and their mutual influence within consumer culture (Nilsson, 2024; Askegaard & Linnet, 2011; Bryman & Bell, 2017). Focus groups

make it possible for us as researchers to try and capture how individuals in a group create meaning in a phenomenon together (Bryman & Bell, 2017). This method makes people discuss their ideas with other people, making them reflect on their thoughts. As ideas are exchanged and debated, there is a possibility that new perspectives emerge. For example, participants can build on or go against another person's argument, compared to an interview with a single person, where you only get a deeper understanding of that person's insights into a phenomenon (Easterby-Smith, 2021). Additionally, group participants might also be influenced by other people in the focus group. Why this is interesting and perhaps positive in our case, is because this influence catches the research gap that we are investigating since we want to understand how this interactive cultural process is connected to nostalgic football apparel consumption, and look at the social influence that can influence this consumption. If a respondent during the focus group in one way or another showed signs of these outside influences, it gave us valuable data that would not be able to be collected in for example an individual interview, where there is less external pressure.

However, a drawback of using focus groups is the logistical part. There can arise problems when organizing sessions and collecting respondents (Gibbs, 1997). In our case, this was not a problem for the first two focus groups. However, as we decided to conduct a third group session with a combination of participants from the two initial groups, many of the participants were unable to attend a second time. This, unfortunately, led us to do the third group session with only four people, two from each of the initial focus groups. Even though this might be too few in an optimal group, it did not affect the group discussions to a great extent. This was due to the participants' knowledge of what had been discussed in their original groups, which enabled them to, without any problems, discuss the same topics they had discussed before, but with the hindsight of new information and perspectives that the previous groups had discussed.

The focus groups were designed to gather data and insights in different ways and to collect as much insightful data as possible. What we learnt from the initial interview was that the most fruitful way of getting a respondent to talk freely was to show pictures or examples that put the question in context, rather than just asking questions. This is something that is used in many areas (Harvard University, n.d). Therefore, for each discussion point used in the focus groups, we had pictures that added context. For example, we could show two different

football shirts, one retro and one modern and then want the participants to comment on them (see Appendix A).

Since the goal was to get as much insightful data as possible, we conducted face-to-face focus groups where the respondents got to see each other and discuss in real life. This also helped us get a feel of the room, being able to see the participants' body language and facial expressions. This gave us a chance to see social interactions and group dynamics in real time (Nilsson, 2024), something which contributed to the intentional aim of our study.

3.4 Sampling

To gather participants for our focus groups we used a purposive sampling method. This meant that we had a clear idea of what type of data and in turn which type of interviewees were needed to be able to reach our aim and research question (Easterby-Smith, 2021). Hand-picking people to give insights limits us in the sense of making the results generalizable. However, since this research is qualitative, generalizing is not the aim, and therefore this is not regarded as an issue. Hand-picking did however mean that we had to put a lot of effort into choosing the right individuals to gain optimized insights into how different consumers think about their retro football apparel consumption (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

To be able to participate, the individual had to comply with two important criteria: they had to be consumers of nostalgic football apparel and had to speak Swedish. For nostalgic football apparel, we include retro-inspired as well as vintage clothes since the point is to understand the consumption of products that leverage nostalgia in some way. For example, a consumer can own the new 2024 Adidas Predator football boots, but they would still qualify because the boots clearly pay homage to the original Predator boots from 25 years ago (Adidas, 2024). Likewise, a consumer with a counterfeit retro 1992 Real Madrid shirt produced in the year 2024 would also qualify, since the product is unquestionably nostalgia-inspired. Furthermore, we chose to seek younger consumers for the focus groups, meaning consumers belonging to Generation Z. This is because the trend is most widespread in this segment.

In the process of organizing the focus groups, we had two choices. The first choice could have been two groups of people with mixed experiences and knowledge. This meant that both

groups would consist of people of different genders, levels of interest in football, ages etc. The other choice was to let the groups be more homogenous, meaning that the people of one group would come from similar experiences and have similar interests while the other group's participants would be picked on the basis of having another type of knowledge and experiences, while of course being similar to their group members. Debating this, we chose the second option.

As mentioned, we initially conducted two different focus groups, where the people in the groups were homogenous, while the two groups themselves differed. The main point of having homogenous groups was to hear two different perspectives being discussed so that we then could arrange a third focus group where we mixed participants from the two earlier groups. In this third focus group, we got the chance to hear how the two different types of groups discussed with each other and what they thought about the other groups' motivations, preferences and insights. This third group gave us the chance to see how, compared to their first environment, they influenced each other in social settings and gave us insights into how social interactions impact the retro football trend.

Group one consisted of only men between the ages of 23 to 26 years old. They were all invited to participate based on their deep interest in football and that they had bought several different football-related shirts and products in the past. This meant that the first group of people had the same prerequisites and that they could talk about the topics from similar grounds. Since this group liked football to a great extent, there were no problems for them to talk about specific football-related topics. By gathering these people together we could explore their deep insights, unique perspectives and experiences related to football consumerism, diving into their motivations for purchasing football-related merchandise and their thoughts on current trends in the industry.

In group two, we completely changed the type of people to a group consisting of people with considerably less football interest, but who were still consumers of nostalgic football apparel. This, of course, meant that they could not discuss the exact topics from focus group one in a similar manner. Therefore, we had to tweak the topics to a more general discussion surrounding fashion and clothing preferences. This gave us insights into other perspectives. Mainly from the viewpoint of people who are invested in the same trend as the seemingly "geeky" football aficionados from group one, but from a distance it would seem like they had

different motivations and thoughts about the retro football apparel trend and their consumption of it compared to group one. Moreover, group two consisted of three women and three men. They were from the ages of 22 to 24. In contrast to the first group, group two gave us insights into any potential differences in how people of different genders think about the trend.

Focus group three was, as mentioned, a mix of people from the two initial focus groups with the intention to hear what they thought about the other groups' responses. When choosing the participants from this group we wanted as many as possible and therefore asked if the participants could participate again. Even if they would have liked to, many were unfortunately preoccupied. Therefore, we managed to gather a total of four individuals for focus group three, two from each of the earlier focus groups. The groups consisted of the following people:

Table 1: Focus Group 1

Participant:	Age:	Type of nostalgic football apparel that the person owns:
Hannes	23	Several football jerseys and scarves.
Alexander	24	Several football jerseys.
Markus	23	Several football jerseys.
William	26	Several football jerseys, scarves and shorts.
Gustaf	24	Several football jerseys and scarves.

Table 2: Focus Group 2

Participant:	Age:	Type of nostalgic football apparel that the person owns:
Tekla	23	Several football jerseys.
Rebecka	23	One football jersey.
Tim	24	Several football jerseys.
Ida	23	Several football jerseys and scarves.
Victor	23	One football jersey.
Alexander	22	Several football jerseys.

Table 3: Focus Group 3

Participant:	Age:	Originally from Group 1 or 2
William	26	Group 1
Alexander	24	Group 1
Victor	23	Group 2
Ida	23	Group 2

3.5 Data Analysis

To extract as many valuable insights as possible from our data, we have adopted a thematic analysis of the material, a common way to approach data analysis in qualitative research. Through this method, we have been able to identify frequently occurring and important themes in our empirical material (Bryman & Bell, 2017). To structure our data analysis we followed the steps proposed by Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) who present three main stages of the data analysis: sorting, reducing and arguing.

First of all, sorting is a step where the aim is to identify recurring themes and topics often brought up or that we found interesting by the participants in our focus groups. Practically, this means that we used primary coding (Charmaz, 2002 cited in Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018) where we simply marked these insights with different colors in the transcribing process which gave us seven different categories of themes in total. During the transcribing process, the themes were: nostalgia, community, co-creation, identity, wrong associations, aesthetics and modernity. These themes and their different colors were assigned to different quotes that treated these topics. For example, if a participant mentioned something that indicated that their preferences are somewhat influenced by or created in unison with others, we marked that in green. Moreover, we also made notes during the group sessions where we highlighted a time point if we noticed an interesting quote. Then in our analysis, we focused on identifying repetitions, similarities, differences, implicit meanings, metaphors, and analogies within our dataset. Throughout the process, we remained mindful of our research question, actively seeking connections within the material that aligned with it. To ensure accuracy and depth in

our interpretations, we engaged in continuous discussions, sharing and validating our insights with each other.

The next step was reducing. Here, we had to choose what to represent in our study, thus we had to focus on our research question and the aim of the study. For example, to present what earlier research already has presented may be of less interest, since we aim to contribute to new insights and broaden the view (Rennstam, 2024). On the other hand, we must picture reality and present our real findings to maintain research integrity. To accomplish this and to know what empirical data to neglect, we used categorical reduction. This meant that we found themes that could be excluded. The process of knowing what theme to exclude, involved asking two questions: is this relevant to answer the research question and aim? And: Does the theme contribute to something new and unique?

Last but not least, was the third step of arguing. It involved us presenting our argument by utilizing the empirical data gathered. At this point we compared the empirical material with our theoretical understanding, to be able to create substantiated arguments that contributed to our aim (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). Our empirical data revealed three rather distinct themes related to the research question, with the overarching link being nostalgia. In these themes, we found plenty of useful data that could be used to answer the research question. In this section, our abductive approach was particularly evident, showcasing the interplay between our observations and theoretical understanding. Initially, we found ourselves looking more into the consumption part of the phenomena, looking at how the participants acted in relation to nostalgic football apparel. But when we aligned our empirical understanding with our theoretical understanding, things got more clear and we were able to draw conclusions that fitted more towards the research aim. We could at this stage look into how the interactive process had shaped perceptions of nostalgia and in turn how the participants acted in relation to nostalgic apparel.

First of all, the groups discussed the aesthetics of various jerseys. Drawing from our theoretical understanding, we identified several connections between these comments and the concepts of community, nostalgia, symbolic value and identity. Remarks about the appearance of football apparel were frequently linked to individuals' desires for social acceptance or identity enhancement. There seemed to be clear structures of what one was supposed to prefer, connecting to the co-created values and symbols that their cultural contexts had

created, where nostalgia often enhanced the value of a shirt or symbol. For example, as soon as one member of group one mentioned that a modern Real Madrid jersey with a dragon on it (see Appendix B) should be regarded as ugly, the other participants agreed and it became apparent from the group that it was a silly design and should therefore be considered undesirable.

Another theme that was discovered was that participants often discussed their preferences and consumption behavior in terms of wanting to affiliate with a certain group. This theme emerged because of our theoretical understanding of how people seek a sense of belonging with the help of nostalgia. People construct their identities to gain acceptance within a group. Our observations revealed that nostalgic products were valued more highly than non-nostalgic ones, a theme that emerged from our understanding of how the interactive cultural process can give value to things. Furthermore, it became clear that many participants preferred owning and wearing items with a strong nostalgic appeal. For instance, in group two, participants agreed that boxy and loose shirts with collars were preferred over sleek and tight ones, which they labeled as retro- versus modern-inspired styles. These types of comments instantly made us connect them to the theories of nostalgia and community.

Finally, the third theme was that a common point that made people prefer retro or old shirts to modern ones was that they showed a distaste or aversion towards modernity in football and in society in general. This theme made us once again connect it to an interplay between our observations and our theoretical framework. We started to wonder if the aversion to modernity had something to do with the appeal of the past in our groups. For instance, both groups had several moments where they either criticized modern football or modern consumption society and showed that products infused with nostalgia were more accepted by the group. For example, when the topic of modern football was introduced in focus group one, the participants immediately showed their awareness and expressed concerns about the controversies surrounding modern football among supporters. Similarly, group two emphasized that wearing modern shirts represented fast fashion in a sense. Where buying old-styled shirts was seen as more “genuine”. Although the groups discussed different aspects, our theoretical framework allowed us to connect these points to the same overarching theme. These comments demonstrated their understanding of the underlying issues connected to their view of modernity.

In a way, all of these themes were expressed by the participants to be motivations for preferring nostalgic apparel instead of modern apparel. This thematic categorization enabled us to identify patterns that might have otherwise gone unnoticed. In our analysis, we connected these driving motivators to our theoretical base in chapter two and found that the data and structure gave us a firm ground to draw conclusions on.

3.6 Credibility of Data

Even though research of qualitative nature is not interested in measuring, unlike quantitative research, there are still concepts which are used to ensure the quality of the research. Bryman and Bell (2017) argue that it is possible to assimilate the concepts of validity and reliability into qualitative research. We have used this notion, and will therefore describe our careful process of ensuring the quality of our study.

3.6.1 Validity

To enhance the validity of our study, we made efforts to acknowledge our personal biases. This meant that we incorporated a membership validation approach, allowing participants to review and confirm the findings based on their own experiences and interpretations (Bryman & Bell, 2017). The most obvious example was that we conducted a third focus group, where we gathered old participants from the two initial focus groups. We then presented them with what they previously had discussed and asked them to give their thoughts about the discussion points. This method not only enhances the study's credibility but also empowers participants by involving them in the validation process while mitigating the impact of potential researcher biases. Furthermore, some level of researcher bias is inevitable. To address this, we engaged in continuous reflection and evaluation throughout our study, echoing Bryman and Bell's (2017) emphasis on self-reflection as integral to the research process. Engaging in continuous self-reflection allowed us to critically examine our own preconceptions and biases, thereby enhancing the validity of our findings. This process involved regularly questioning our assumptions, considering alternative viewpoints, and being transparent about our subjective influences on the research outcomes. Ultimately, acknowledging and addressing

our own bias underscores our commitment to conducting credible and ethical research, promoting transparency and accountability in the research process.

3.6.2 Reliability

In the theme of trying to conduct research of high quality, it is important to be consistent. Reliability pertains to the consistency of the research process, implying that if the study were replicated, the results should remain consistent (Bryman & Bell, 2017). Consistent with this principle, we aimed to provide comprehensive explanations of every aspect of our research process to ensure transparency. Therefore, all methodological, theoretical, and empirical components are accessible for review. This has meant that it is easily accessible for anyone to use our research design and replicate our study. It does not however mean that the results of the study will be identical to ours. The nature of qualitative studies and the possibility of changing the theoretical framework gives room for discrepancies between other researchers and their findings.

Moreover, the focus groups conducted were meticulously recorded and transcribed to preserve the integrity of respondents' answers without influencing them. Additionally, we employed a systematic approach to data analysis, utilizing coding frameworks or thematic analysis techniques to organize and interpret data consistently (Bryman & Bell, 2017). This approach facilitated the identification of patterns and themes rooted in the data itself, minimizing the impact of subjective biases.

3.6.3 Transferability

It is crucial to recognize that this is a study performed in a specific context, implying an investigation of a phenomenon within an environment, accompanied by certain conditions. In qualitative research, generalizability poses challenges because the context varies with each case. Therefore, grasping the context is essential for drawing conclusions about the case and assessing its transferability to other cases (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). However, since we are conducting a qualitative study, the aim is not to generalize. In postmodern social sciences, the focus shifts from seeking universal generalizations to emphasizing contextual knowledge (Kvale 1994). From our social constructionist perspective, the pursuit of a singular truth lacks

appeal. Instead, we focus on localized knowledge by exploring the how and why within this specific case, rather than focusing on general inquiries about mechanisms in nostalgia football apparel consumption. Our goal here is to enhance our understanding through the insights gained from this particular instance.

In our specific case, investigating how interactive cultural processes shape the nostalgia football apparel trend, is just one way of looking into nostalgia marketing phenomena. The point of using this specific context is to find insights that can help broaden the understanding of nostalgia that is leveraged in marketing practices. By looking into the retro football surge, we have an excellent opportunity to gather insights and data on the subject, with a context that has become popular lately.

3.6.4 Reflexivity

Qualitative research is acknowledged to pose challenges in achieving complete objectivity (Bryman & Bell, 2017). It is therefore important to remain reflexive as proposed by Alvesson (2003). He highlights the importance of reflexivity as an intentional and ongoing effort by researchers to illuminate diverse perspectives and angles of a subject, instead of favoring a singular, potentially conventional viewpoint. If approaching a phenomenon in this way, the researcher can be more focused on questioning assumptions and meanings of data. Throughout our theoretical chapter and our analysis, we have therefore tried to always have a critical mindset and think about the context we try to apply the theories on since we know they are not necessarily tailored to this specific phenomenon. Additionally, we have tried to gather insights from different perspectives, resulting in us firstly conducting focus groups consisting of people with different backgrounds, and then lastly putting them together for the participants to discuss and explain their own experiences with each other. This has resulted in us minimizing our own bias and influence on the participants' insights. Lastly, in the analysis, we together as research partners discussed our findings and thoughts to avoid our own subjective bias and misinterpreting the data.

3.7 Limitations

In connection to reflexivity, one sign of being reflexive is to acknowledge the limitations of the study. One limitation was that the participants were all relatively homogenous. Even though we included people from both genders, different ages, backgrounds, and interests in football, they were still all students in the same city, Lund, and all were natives from Sweden. This also meant that some of the people knew each other, and even one or both of us, from before. For example, in group two there were six people in total and two of the female participants knew each other from before. This could risk the participants knowing each other and having biases which could be a clear limitation. However, this can also foster an environment where people feel more comfortable. Thus, this may also have encouraged participants to share more profound insights, in turn creating a better discussion. Moreover, since only a few of the respondents were already acquainted, we do not see that the focus groups were negatively impacted.

Another significant limitation of this study is the narrow age range of participants. The aim was to collect insights from a younger audience, which we have done. However, the gathered data is from individuals aged between 22 to 26 years old. Although the study aimed to explore unique experiences and interpretations rather than generate generalizable results, the restricted age range could limit the inclusion of diverse perspectives from other age groups. One implication of the narrow age range could be a potential homogeneity in participant perspectives, given the similarities in life stages, cultural influences, and societal contexts among individuals within this age group. This homogeneity could limit the depth of understanding and variability in responses, thus reducing the richness and complexity of the data. Furthermore, because focus groups involve participants meeting together with the interviewer, there's a risk that the group's opinions could be influenced by common beliefs and participant biases (Smithson, 2000). It is therefore we used purposive sampling and tried to create groups where we knew there would be less risk of a dominant person taking over.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

When conducting research, it is important to reflect on the possible ethical issues that may arise. This is why we have sought to continuously have ethical considerations in mind throughout the research process. For example, to ensure the well-being and comfort of the focus group participants we made sure to get all participants' consent to record audio from the sessions since this was important for facilitating the transcribing of the sessions. Furthermore, we also asked the participants if they preferred to participate anonymously or if we could write out their names in the presentation of the empirical material. We acknowledge that during qualitative studies when personal opinions are gathered, some people might have concerns regarding whether they want their thoughts and rationale publicly presented without them being anonymous. Meanwhile, we believed that the planned topics of discussion in the focus group sessions were unlikely to be considered especially sensitive by the individuals involved. However, to ensure the ethicality of this research, participants were given the choice of making this decision themselves. Thus, all of the participants accepted that their names be presented together with the empirical data.

Moreover, we decided not to present to the group participants any exact details of what we aimed to study and what our research question was. The information given at the start of the group sessions was that the main topic of discussion was football shirts and that there were no right or wrong answers. This was because we did not want the participants to feel prompted to answer questions or discuss in particular ways just because they felt that they had to help us out. Since we only wanted to hear their true and honest opinions, we believed that the best way to achieve this was to tell them as little as possible about the aim of our research. Reflecting upon this, it could be said that not disclosing all information to the participants is morally and ethically dubious. However, due to the rather insensitive nature of the discussion topic, we believed this to be the best course of action to ensure the quality of the study.

3.9 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, we have presented our methodological choices and considerations throughout the process of conducting this study. We have described how the work has been processed and

we have argued for why we have chosen certain routes. The chapter encapsulates all of our methodological choices and the key elements covered within the methodology, providing a structured overview of the research design, data collection methods, analysis procedures, ethical considerations, and limitations.

4 Empirical Analysis

Our empirical analysis will present three separate themes that emerged during our data analysis. The themes are all permeated with nostalgia, which is also the overarching bridge in the empirical analysis chapter. These three themes could be seen as tools or lenses to see how the interactive cultural process has shaped the participants' view on nostalgic aspects of football apparel. Where we present how that process has shaped how the participants value aesthetic aspects, their group affiliation and modernity.

4.1 Aesthetic aspects

The first theme and driving factor towards preferring retro products that surfaced in our focus groups was that the retro designs and retro shirts seemed to appeal more to the participants than more contemporary designs, something which aligns with the findings of Scola (2019) who concluded that retro designs were more often preferred over modern clothing designs. In our findings, several individuals expressed that they preferred retro design because it looked more appealing to them and that it sometimes represented different individual memories, saying that nostalgia played a big part in motivating them to buy certain shirts. The participants also preferred and liked retro shirts more than modern ones to a higher extent. Scola, Gordon and Dwyer (2022) found that when an individual had nostalgic feelings about a sports brand, they were also more likely to buy products from that brand if the products were retro-inspired. We too found evidence of this, since many of the people who participated in the focus groups were fans of a club from where they had bought retro-inspired products lately. This also aligns with the theories about nostalgia being powerful enough to impact purchase intention (Alkhafagi, 2023; Muehling & Sprött, 2004). These notions were further strengthened when focus group one was presented with a dilemma. They were asked to choose between a modern 2023/24-season match shirt from the world-famous Spanish club, Real Madrid, and a retro shirt from the club's 1999/00 season (see Appendix A), where most of the participants chose the retro one due to its aesthetic appeal.

“I would go with the retro shirt 100% because it looks better... You can see the fit of it... how slim number one [the modern one] is.” - (Markus, Group 1).

In both this particular case and in general, a common reason why retro kits appealed more was either that they fit better or because they had certain nostalgic memories connected to them. This could further be understood by looking into focus group two who largely shared group one’s ideas that most of them thought the retro shirt looked better than the modern one, both in the Real Madrid case, but also in general. Even though both groups agreed, their explanations for why they preferred the retro shirt were quite different and they had different motivations as to why retro football shirts look nicer than modern ones. While group one thought more about the retro shirts representing a football-related time or memory, group two emphasized that retro shirts represented a better fashion sense.

“...I think it’s just good looking... because it has become quite trendy with, you know, sporty clothes.” - (Rebecka, Group 2)

While these findings go in line with earlier research, which points out that retro sportswear is preferred to modern ones (Scola, 2019; Scola, Gordon, Dwyer, 2022) and that nostalgia is powerful (Alkhafagi, 2023; Muehling & Sprott, 2004), we can also broaden this understanding by adding new theoretical context. For instance, Rebecka admits that she likes retro shirts because other people have together created such hype surrounding retro sports clothes that it has become trendy. This was further elaborated when she discussed her own retro football shirt. Here, she tells the group that she has the national team shirt of West Germany from 1990, which she thinks looks great as a fashion item. However, aside from the aesthetic appeal of the shirt, she does not really know much more about it. Ida, another participant, continued this argument and told everyone that when her father got her an Inter Milan shirt when she was young, she thought it looked really ugly. Conversely, nowadays when she looks at it, she believes that it looks good and expresses to the group that she regrets not using it more in the past. Victor (Group 2) agreed with this, and added that he believes this trend to be ongoing in the whole fashion industry, not only within the world of football merchandise.

It is the understanding of what is appealing in different cultural contexts that pushes Rebecka (Group 2) to embrace wearing sporty clothes, for Ida (Group 2) to suddenly think of her old Inter Milan shirt as good looking, or for Markus (Group 1) to see the new Real Madrid shirt

as too slim-fit. Here, the interactive cultural process of individuals collectively agreeing upon the value of clothing items, has resulted in the retro apparel being more appealing. The participants have observed how these retro garments align with the current values and symbols that are sought after in fashion trends, which coordinates with the notion that we use symbolic meanings in consumption to express our identities (Belk, 1988; McCracken, 1986; Holt, 2002; Rokka & Ulver, 2023; Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1998). In Ida's case you could also argue that her old shirt becomes important now when the trend has hit, just because it is her own old shirt. It is linked to Belk's (1990, 1991) discussion of keeping a "sense of past", where Ida's shirt has memories connected to it, a tangible link to her own self. Furthermore, the participants show signs of wanting to be part of this trend, wearing clothes because it is at this moment in time more socially preferred than before. Here, collective or communal nostalgia can be a likely explanation to why all of a sudden old shirts like West Germany 1990 and 20 year old Inter Milan shirts have become trendy (Han & Newman, 2022; Wildschut et al., 2014) Where the participants in our focus groups have understood that the value of older shirts has increased because of its nostalgic aspects. Before it became a trend, the shirts had less linking value and therefore they were not as interesting. But since it has become a trend, the linking value has increased (Cova, 1997). The comments about the clothes being ugly before also emphasizes that it is important to fit in. This also goes in line with the notion of humans seeking community and wanting to fit in (Kaiser, 1997; Cova, 1997).

Further on, both groups were shown eight different football shirts, where the mission was to collectively agree and choose a single shirt that they would buy together. In this process, the co-created values became evident as they had to make decisions together, demonstrating how the interactive element influenced their discussions. Because of the different levels of football interests between the groups, they were shown different assortments of shirts. However, they still had a good understanding of what the different shirts represented and what symbolic values they mirrored. In group one, who was presented with shirts of both historical value (to football fans) and modern ones (see Appendix B), one person immediately dismissed shirt number 5, a more modern Real Madrid shirt, due to its modern design and the group quickly agreed. The next to be dismissed was a modern Ajax shirt (number 7) because of its color scheme's rather obvious associations to rasta culture. Simultaneously, two participants liked the shirt but were shot down which led to the Ajax shirt not being mentioned again. After

several minutes of discussion, Group one chose an ACF Fiorentina shirt from the 1998/99 season. It started with Gustaf (Group 1) saying “*What do you think about a Batistuta Fiorentina shirt?*”. Batistuta, being a classic and well-known Argentinian footballer during the 1990’s and early 2000’s. After this comment he got massive support from the others. When asked why Batistuta was preferred, it was said that he was the first player of this Fiorentina generation to come to mind, and Gustaf (Group 1) continued with saying “*He is the perfect level of, you know, good player and it is something funny about having him.*” Interestingly, however, all participants admitted to never having seen the “legendary” Gabriel Batistuta play and they were not able to come up with a different player from that team. Related to this, Gustaf (Group 1) said:

“It is possible that Batistuta has been romanticized a bit by us... I mean, I’ve never seen him play. I’ve hardly seen a goal from him and I suppose none of us have...”

So why did they all want to express their liking for a Fiorentina shirt with Gabriel Batistuta’s name from the 1990’s? They agreed that it was because they wanted to make others understand that they knew football history.

“It’s fun with other football-interested people who can point out if you have a random player which they can react to, ‘yes, nice shirt’, but if you have an Mbappé [shirt], no one will ever point or it is not the same thing.” - (Markus, Group 1)

What all of these comments show is the interplay between the participants and how they impact each other in the process of making a football shirt choice, the interactive cultural process shaping how nostalgic value is considered. And in this case, it is clear that the interactive cultural process has resulted in a connected nostalgic value to Batistuta, which has made that specific socially preferable, even though they have no own memories of him. Here, several concepts are in play. For example, the discussion shows that it is important to conform to the group. It is possible that this was a result of the rather specific task at hand, which was to agree in unison. However, the comments at the same time shows us that there seems to be a common cultural understanding of the context (McCracken, 1986). Therefore, they know what is expected for them as football fans. Thus saying the wrong things or liking the wrong shirts is important to avoid going against the group, an action working against the strive for belonging (Cova, 1997; Kaiser, 1997). Additionally, there are signs of the group’s active

creation to be football experts, in other words how they build their identity to be accepted by the others in the group (Holt, 2002; Cova, 1997).

Focus group two were presented with the same task but with different shirts (see Appendix C), four modern ones and four retro ones. They started discussing not wanting the Real Madrid shirt (number 5) since several of the group participants were fans of FC Barcelona, a rivaling club. Therefore, many of them naturally also liked the FC Barcelona shirt (number 6) which led the discussion towards the topic of club membership. However this soon changed when one person brought up the fashion appeal of the shirts. In this group, the participants agreed that three of the modern ones could be dismissed instantly. However, they did not dismiss the fourth modern shirt, a shirt from Brazilian club Vasco da Gama (number 8). Ultimately, this proved to be the shirt the group preferred the most due to its design. Interestingly, the group was convinced that the shirt they had picked was a design from some decades ago, but later found out that it was a newly produced concept shirt from the season 2022/23, but with a retro-inspired design. Furthermore, a commonality of the shirts group two liked was that they all had a collar. One participant stated: *“I like the ones with a collar, I can take any of those with a collar.”* (Rebecka, Group 2). Following this were several comments like: *“Collars are cool.”* (Victor, Group 2), *“...they [collars] are cool because it makes them [football shirts] less sporty...”* (Ida, Group 2). This goes in line with focus group two thinking about retro football shirts as being more of fashion items than focus group one thought. For example, Rebecka from group two meant that you can wear collared shirts in public because of their “boxy fit”, in contrast she thought that the modern ones are too “slim”.

In this material we also find evidence for the interaction between the participants affecting their attitude towards retro contra modern shirts. When one person led the discussion to be about the shirts being more of a fashion piece rather than a symbol for club membership, the discussion quickly took another turn and they agreed that one shirt was the best. This could be a sign of the group members trying to conform to each other (Kaiser, 1997; Cova, 1997) or them just expressing their fashion opinions, that they know that certain garments would be good looking and be socially accepted, and at the same time not contradict their self-image (Stone, 1962; Sirgy, 1982). Either way, the influence they had on each other shows that the interaction between them and the understanding they have attained earlier impacts the end result and their preferences when it comes to attitudes towards retro football apparel.

Additionally, an example of how nostalgic aspects could enhance the value of a shirt was when we presented focus group one with a Borussia Dortmund shirt from 1997 (see Appendix D). The initial reaction was that it was quite ugly, had the wrong colors (a different nuance of yellow than they associated the club Borussia Dortmund with) and that it was quite uninteresting in general. When they had come to this conclusion, we told them that this was actually the shirt the team wore when they won the prestigious UEFA Champions League tournament in 1997, the only time the club has won the tournament. Immediately, the value of the shirt seemed to increase. *“Now when you say it, this Champions League aspect. That they won it [that year], it does something. I could play in this shirt, it would actually be nice to have it.”* (Hannes, Group 1). And William (Group, 1) commented on the new information: *“It does something, clearly.”*

These quotes show how a simple notion, like the shirt having some valuable nostalgic aspects, can change how people value a shirt. All of a sudden it would not be as bad to own or wear it. The symbolic value that a Champions League-winning team has, clearly adds value to the shirt, and thus, for these participants, it is of higher interest for their identity construction (Belk, 1988; Holt, 2002; McCracken, 1986; Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1998). The notion that this particular shirt was the one Borussia Dortmund wore while winning the tournament also creates linking value (Cova, 1997) for the people that are aware of the prestige and history of the Champions League. Furthermore, the example underscores how the participants enhance the value of the nostalgic aspect, when they realize that it has the symbolic value of a prestigious tournament. Where individuals derive meaning and identity from material objects like sports memorabilia, which in turn can play a role in shaping consumer behavior (Rokka & Ulver, 2023). Additionally, the quotes show that individuals’ perceptions and decisions may be influenced by another person’s comments, such as acknowledging the shirt’s symbolic value because of the understanding that it has certain historical significance. Here, we observe the interactive process in action. Where individuals collectively assign value to objects within their culture (McCracken, 1986; Arvidsson, 2005).

Moreover, we presented focus group three with the fact that the earlier focus groups had discussed aesthetics of shirts in different ways. We said that group one had used a lot of football specific examples where an ACF Fiorentina shirt with the player Batistuta on the back was something all agreed on was nice looking, while group two had discussed it more from a fashion perspective. This revelation led to one person from group two thinking that

group one was a little bit pretentious. *“It becomes geekily exclusive.”* (Ida, Group 2). At first the other group two-member, Victor, agreed but after contemplating a bit he admitted to seeing it from group one’s point of view. When thinking about his own preferences, he realized that if he were to buy a shirt he would want a shirt that not everybody knows what it is. He then compared group one’s example with Batistuta to a new Paris Saint Germain (PSG) shirt with Mbappé (one of the best players in the world) on the back and French luxury brand Balmain as shirt sponsor on the front. To him, the PSG shirt was “too flashy”. Instead, he would rather have something he described as *“silent fashion”* and gave a rather narrow reference to the automobile industry:

“The ones who know, they know. It’s like driving an [BMW] M5, you want to be low key.” - (Victor, Group 2)

The discussion in focus group three provides a rich example of how collective and individual identity preferences manifest through the lens of football shirt aesthetics. Through the earlier discussions, it became clear that group one viewed football shirts through a sport-specific lens, valuing iconic examples like a Fiorentina shirt with Batistuta on the back. In contrast, group two approached the topic from a fashion perspective, leading to an initial perception of pretentiousness towards group one. This shows that the interactive cultural process in which a group negotiates the value of products can be vastly different and be based on a wide array of aspects, whether it be showing off one’s knowledge or dressing fashionably. Nonetheless, it comes down to the culturally shared symbols, narratives and values (McCracken, 1986). Victor’s (Group 2) preference for subtlety, expressed through his comparison of a “lowkey” BMW M5 to the understated appeal of a unique football shirt, illustrates a broader social process. This preference is not merely personal but is socially constructed through collective cultural values (McCracken, 1986; Arvidsson, 2005). The desire to blend in while still belonging to a knowledgeable community aligns with theories of community and identity construction (Cova, 1997; Belk, 1988). Individuals often derive their sense of identity from the groups they associate with, and these associations are reinforced through shared cultural symbols and values (Kaiser, 1997; Johnson, Lennon & Rudd, 2014). In this case, the preference for less flashy shirts reflects a communal understanding in Victor’s (Group 2) cultural context that value and identity are co-created through subtlety and exclusivity, rather than overt displays of status (McCracken, 1986).

4.2 Group Affiliation

Throughout the focus group sessions another theme of discussion became apparent. When the participants discussed and reasoned with each other, we could discern a sense of wanting to fit in with the individuals within the focus group by how they switched their use of language or even changed their viewpoint on a topic mid-session due to others expressing opposing arguments. Mostly, however, the sense of wanting to belong to a larger community came up as a driving factor for preferring retro apparel when the participants described their own preferences and consumption behavior. For example, in focus group two, the first association made when asked about football shirts in general was to the supportership of a football club which, of course, connects to a very obvious and visible type of community. This was agreed upon by many of the participants across both groups and some admitted to wearing football team apparel when watching games on the TV to feel a sense of community even from afar. Interestingly however, even if participants expressed that wearing their team's shirt made them feel pride and belonging to their team's supporter community, some of them did not like wearing football shirts in public and stated that it was unlikely that they would conceive of the idea of wearing any football shirt as a fashion item.

"I've tried a bit to wear it in public, but I can't. I think it's so silly somehow and that it's not good looking, although I kind of think the jerseys are nice football jerseys." - (Hannes, Group 1)

"...I wear it on match days and stuff like that just because I support them... Football apparel is for showing that you're a fan more than it is a fashion item, maybe." - (Alexander, Group 2).

It can be argued that these individuals feel like wearing football jerseys in public, as fashion items, would make them stand out too much. Hence, since communities can also be contexts and social settings, wanting to belong to one is not only shown in how we want to fit in but also in how we do not want to stand out (Kaiser, 1997; Cova, 1997). This also became clear when participants expressed that football jerseys could create a sense of belonging to much smaller communities such as friend groups or amateur football teams, meaning contexts where they feel comfortable, base community on a common interest and form a tight-knit collective spirit. This coordinates with the types of neo-tribal communities described by

Rokka and Ulver (2023). One of the participants above expressed that he felt uncomfortable wearing football shirts as fashion items or leisure wear, but also mentioned that he would often wear different football shirts playing football with his friends. He further stated that *“it’s rather important what group you’re playing with. Because if you’re alone [wearing a team’s jersey] it’s not that fun but if everyone brings a jersey it can be a fun thing.”* (Hannes, Group 1).

As previously presented, the general consensus in both initial focus groups was that clothing items permeated with nostalgia were preferred over modern ones, even if the opposite was true in some individual cases. Interestingly, an argument for nostalgia clothing was that as an avid football fan, one can be seen to show a deeper knowledge of the sport and the club they support if they wear a team shirt with connections to the club’s history rather than wearing the latest team shirt. This means that football apparel can be a tool to show one’s belonging to a group, but also a means of gaining social status, approval and creating one’s identity in said group (Kaiser, 1997; Cova, 1997; Johnson, Lennon & Rudd, 2014). In regards to this, one participant stated:

“I think a large part of the vintage and retro thing is that if you’re a group of die-hard Arsenal supporters and one of your buddies shows up in the new Arsenal shirt it’s like ‘yeah, that’s good’. But if you show up in a 1977’s away shirt, match worn, it will be just ‘wow’. You stand out a bit. It’s a way to show a deeper connection and you’re portrayed as if you have deeper knowledge... I think it’s a way for many to stand out from the ordinary fans and show that you’re not basic.” - (Victor, Group 2).

This goes in line with Kaiser’s (1997) discussion about clothing as an identity element to get acceptance from a group and that we categorize people by tangible objects like the clothes they wear, representing abstract ideas of a community’s culture. For the people that are admirers of a specific brand, such as Arsenal in Victor’s (Group 2) example, Muniz & O’Guinn’s (2001) concept of brand community is applicable, where people get a sense of belonging based on differentiation to other groups. One could also argue that it is a neo-tribal community, where people meet because of shared interests, such as the club Arsenal and their football (Rokka & Ulver, 2023). Whether it is a friend group, brand community or a neo-tribal community, it seems that Victor, and in his view other football interested people, have

collectively agreed that choosing a nostalgic piece of memorabilia such as a shirt, is of higher value than choosing the latest shirt.

Similarly, when group one was tasked with collectively choosing from eight different jerseys from different clubs and eras, the aspect of showing one's football knowledge as a way to belong to the group also became clearly visible. One participant expressed his liking for a certain jersey from Italian club SS Lazio. However, when several of the other participants mentioned some of the club's right-wing and historically fascist supporter groups he seemed to be reminded and quickly withdrew his suggestion. This example shows how they understand the underlying symbolic meaning (McCracken, 1986), a sign of the interactive process now impacting their attitude towards a shirt. When one person liked the Lazio shirt, by the response of the group, he quickly changed his mind when he understood that it represented something that was not in line with the norm.

Instead, the group participants suggested and discussed the other shirts as the discussion moved towards which historical player name they would want printed on the back. As the discussion itself became a way for the participants to show their knowledge to each other, they also agreed on the importance of which player it is.

“It's like with all fashion that you don't exactly want what is the most well-known and mainstream and then you feel 'I know more than that, I have better knowledge of football than walking around with an Mbappé shirt'.” - (Hannes, Group 1)

This further highlights that wearing certain jerseys can impact how you are perceived by others, and that it is an important aspect when deciding which shirt to buy. You do not want to send the wrong signals to your cultural context (Cova, 1997; Kaiser, 1997; Johnson, Lennon & Rudd, 2014). Furthermore, it becomes clear that player names and team shirts signaling certain values might be more or less favorable in different social groups, with the French world-star player Kylian Mbappé being somewhat of a posterboy for the modern world of football where clubs are fueled by oil money from the Gulf states, an often-times criticized development in football supporter circles. Also, since Mbappé is arguably the most prominent player in football at the moment, it makes the choice seem too obvious and mainstream. By this, we can distinguish that certain shirts with certain names on the back become less admirable by your peers if the team or the player has the wrong connotations. This topic was

also discussed in group two where one participant emphasized that some teams' jerseys are more respected while others show less desirable traits such as someone simply being a fair weather supporter.

“If you're wearing a vintage Liverpool shirt, you might think ‘yes, he's a die-hard fan’. But if he shows up with a brand new [Manchester] City shirt. Then you know you can't trust them.” - (Victor, Group 2)

This shows that the value of a clothing item like a football shirt is heavily socially created and that consumer products are ways in which cultural identities, values and norms are expressed as proposed by Rokka and Ulver (2023). Therefore, our sense of belonging to different communities is shaped by the clothes we wear and the signals they send (Kaiser, 1997). To these people, wearing a jersey is more than a way to signal allegiance to one team or the other. It is a way to assert one's social status and belonging to a group through their identity creation.

However, one's sense of belonging to a group of football supporters does not necessarily rely on wearing historically significant match shirts and showing off one's trivia knowledge. Conversely, another participant expressed a different way to feel part of a community. Instead of searching for vintage apparel in second hand stores or shopping for remade retro shirts online, she believed that the most important part when consuming football apparel was supporting your club financially by buying from the club's official store. To her, this was the ultimate showcasing of loyalty to her community. Relatedly, another participant had recently purchased a retro shirt from her club's official web-shop. Hence, the participant arguing for the case of showing support by contributing financially expressed that *“...then it's a win-win situation... But I think wanting to benefit the club can have a rather large impact.”* (Ida, Group 2). This discussion relates to Cova's (1997) definition of communities as being characterized by shared interests, values and lifestyles. Being a fan and supporting your club by shopping from its official channels becomes a way to show one's contribution to the shared interest of the community. The clothing item according to her beliefs becomes an indicator of the values and the lifestyle shared by the people within the community.

Moreover, a discussion that highlighted communal nostalgia and the co-creation of value as factors influencing the preference for retro apparel over modern was the following: participants in focus group one debated whether to buy a modern or retro Real Madrid shirt.

One participant said that he wanted the retro one since he thought it represented history and had a clean look, simultaneously he called the modern one “boring”. Another participant then asked what connections he had to the old one then, and argued that he himself had no connection to it or memories of it. The retro-admirer then agreed, he had no connection or memory of it, it was all made up, but he still preferred the old one. Another example of this evidence is, as earlier mentioned, the example of the club Fiorentina and the player Batistuta. Focus group one agreed that the Fiorentina shirt with Batistuta was the best shirt for several reasons, but at the same time agreed that they had no memories of the shirt or the player. Furthermore, several of the participants from both groups were supporters of specific teams, many of them also had retro shirts from these teams that they had recently bought. William (Group 1) had bought a Liverpool shirt emulating the club’s 2004 season with the name Gerrard on the back. He did not have that many memories from that time but said that Gerrard is an icon and symbolizes the whole team so well. Similarly, Markus (Group 1), a fan of Arsenal, had bought a retro Arsenal shirt from years before he was born on similar terms as William (Group 1). Another example is a quote from Markus (Group 1) when discussing which shirt and player the participants would have wanted from the Brazil 2002 national team:

*“...I would have a Ronaldo Nazario shirt. It’s just, yeah, I don’t remember much of it, but I have heard how **** good he was and how good he could have become.” -*
(Markus, Group 1)

These examples suggest a deeper connection between personal preferences and broader cultural or historical influences, in turn affecting their preference of retro shirts. With the help of communal or historical nostalgia, he has gotten certain associations with the shirt or team that they think fondly of. Thus, they could use these retro shirts as a piece in their identity construction (Belk, 1988; Holt, 2002; Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1998). The symbolic value that such a shirt gives is created by them together (McCracken, 1986; Arvidsson, 2005). By hyping players like Ronaldo, which they do not have their own memories of, it enhances the value and creates linking value of such a shirt (Cova, 1997). This gives strength to the hypothesis that it is the interactive cultural process between individuals that can shape nostalgia football consumption. This also aligns with how communal or historical nostalgia can have an impactful influence on people’s attitudes and in turn behavior (Han & Newman, 2022; Wildschut et al., 2014). This means that nostalgia created by outside influence and as a

social creation can have, and in this case have had, an impact when it comes to the retro football phenomena. For example, when one person discussed the modern versus old Real Madrid shirt, the modern one was labeled boring while the other was not. Arguably, the shirts are quite similar and if one is boring, the other one would also fit into that category. This enhances how nostalgia can add value and how it is created socially. In turn, this finding highlights how social influence can play a part in shaping nostalgia football apparel consumption.

There were however times when modern shirts were preferred to retro ones. Often this was connected to the fact that they felt that they had no connection to the retro shirt and they felt that it would be weird to wear. This was coherent in both focus groups. In these cases, there seemed to not be any profound historical or communal nostalgia connected to the shirts. Highlighting the importance of these socially created nostalgic aspects. Interestingly, in one case where a person disagreed with nostalgic aspects appealing to him, he explained that he associated older shirts with his youth, recalling the times when he wore them during football practices. For him, putting on an older football shirt would evoke the feeling of wearing a training shirt rather than a nostalgic sentiment. Consequently, he expressed a lack of desire to purchase or wear shirts from his youth, indicating that nostalgia did not positively influence his attitude towards older shirts. This finding is also interesting because it shows how his process of valuing his shirt when he was young has set deep associations. His process has made him connect retro football shirts with being used for exercising, and thus he cannot see himself wearing one. If he were to wear one he would stand out and thus not fit in (Kaiser, 1997; Cova, 1997). This example also shows how important the interactive process is in shaping how people perceive this nostalgic apparel and in turn their consumption behavior.

4.3 Rejecting Modernity

The third empirical theme that we noticed was that a driving factor as to why retro products were preferred seemed to be thoughts of the group participants' disliking towards modernity. However, this aversion materialized in different ways. In group one, it was more directed towards the modern world of football and therefore more concretely discussed in a football context, where many did not like how modern football has increasingly come to be about

money. Several times regarding different situations, the participants expressed their distaste for modern football. One person described how clubs nowadays “...release like eight kits a year... [because] now they are going to cash in.” (William, Group 1). Another participant expressed his concerns with football being watered down by too many matches being played and too many variations of match shirts being released, which, according to him, was a result of clubs and institutions being controlled by people wanting more and more money. When debating if this distaste for modern football might have an effect on not buying or liking modern football apparel, and instead preferring retro or vintage products, the answers differed. One individual said:

“It’s possible [that the connection is real]... if you compare the PSG shirt, it represents in some way modern football, and some of the older shirts, they represent, you know, a more pure football.” - (William, Group 1)

Another response was:

“In my opinion, that connection is a bit far-fetched. Personally, I have never thought about it that way.” - (Hannes, Group 1)

In group number two, the participants did not discuss how football has become influenced by money and greed and how different shirts symbolize different values. They did, however, discuss their feelings about how they thought that the fashion industry has become affected by society today, where second-hand shopping, retro and vintage consumption have become very popular and where fast fashion is generally regarded as bad. The participants of group two agreed that there is a link between buying vintage, second-hand and retro items in general and nostalgic football things in particular. Alexander, a participant in group two, elaborated this argument by saying:

“I agree, with that increased buying of second hand, in general, I think it contributes much to, you know, if people just go to second-hand stores, it probably is connected to football shirts as well. And then, I think, the more people in those stores, the more people will find these old things more often, more easily. So it contributes to more people buying and wearing it, so I think it is based on the global trend of second hand.” - (Alexander, Group 2)

Alexander's (Group 2) thoughts about how the retro trend in general and how stores contribute highlight how consumer behavior can influence brand value. This reflects Cassinger and Bertilsson's (2011) argument that co-creation is a cooperative process between brands and consumers. The quote suggests that participation in second-hand shopping reflects a desire for more sustainable practices, illustrating how brands must adapt to and engage with changing consumer dynamics to stay relevant and resonate with their consumers, since otherwise, customers will choose competitors. This also supports Vargo and Lusch's (2004) argument that it is not always clear who is actually creating value, the brand itself or the consumers.

Even though the two groups debated two different things; how modern society and modern football affect retro consumption, they seemed to come to similar conclusions. While group one thought that the distaste for modern football might encourage people to instead buy retro football products, which represent more pure values, group two thought that the distaste for modern consumption society might also encourage people to instead buy retro football products. These conclusions can be explained by similar factors. In group one's case, where modern football leaves a sour taste in the participants' mouths, there is a problem with what they associate with modern football. Today, it has become a norm to hate modern football, something that echoed in one of the participant's comments:

*"... it feels like about 99% of guys in Sweden have one thing in common, and that is that they hate modern football. What the ****? I don't hate everything about modern football"* - (Alexander, Group 1).

When he first said this, it was the first time someone had gone against the group and did not say anything negative towards modern football. After this, many of those who had shared the most negative comments about modern football agreed with Alexander (Group 1). In group two's case, similar thoughts, but towards modern consumption society echoed. Where a norm in their culturally cultivated world seemed to be a grudge against overconsumption.

What are the implications for nostalgic football products then? As the participant Hannes said, it might be far-fetched to draw a simple conclusion that the distaste towards modern football has a direct link to people buying retro football products. This is an applicable comment towards the distaste against modern consumption society as well. However, as Kaiser (1997), Belk (1988) and Arvidsson (2005) point out, our consumption choices represent values and

symbolic actions. When we did our initial interview, the interviewee was asked what he would feel if he were to walk around in his hometown or with his friend group in a modern Real Madrid shirt, he answered that it would feel strange. Not because they explicitly have said that no one can buy such a shirt, but because they implicitly have given each other signals that they as a group do not like the modernity that such a club represents. Therefore, their commonly created values prohibit such a purchase (McCracken, 1986). For some people sending these types of signals might be a reason not to buy a modern shirt, and instead glorify the past by buying a retro shirt. In this case, the interactive cultural process has increased the value of nostalgic apparel. Communal nostalgia or historical nostalgia makes the participants prefer retro design (Han & Newman, 2022; Wildschut et al., 2014; Baker & Kennedy, 1994) and what becomes really interesting is the fact that the result of this process has a huge impact. Even though some participants say they prefer retro shirts over modern ones due to the latter's association with overconsumption, many retro shirts contribute to the same issue. These shirts are newly produced but designed to look like the originals, leveraging nostalgia, and therefore it seems in our focus groups that they avoid being seen as part of the overconsumption problem. Communal or historical nostalgia in this sense, created and accepted by the participants, becomes powerful in impacting their behavior.

This leads us to try to understand what it is that makes the participants believe that retro shirts are more appealing when it comes to the context that they represent something older and as one person said: "pure football". Group one, who was very football-oriented and cared about minor details, thought that many of the modern shirts that they were presented with during the focus groups were too "cluttered" and that retro ones were more "clean". The new ones represented a break from tradition:

"I agree that many of these [modern] extra shirts are kind of the 'modern football' and are very cluttered, and do not even look like football shirts" - (Hannes, Group 1)

In this debate, we could see a lot of signs of the interactive and co-creating part influencing the discussants. Initially, an intriguing observation from group one was that as soon as they began discussing modern football or a kit they perceived as representative of modern football, they all started using curse words. The language became increasingly intense and they mutually fueled each other's distaste for modern, unattractive kits. The atmosphere in the

room evolved into a sort of contest, with participants competing to describe the kits in the most profound and humorous manner possible.

Further on, another sign of the interactive part playing its role is the quote about modern cluttered shirts not looking like football shirts, which indicates that there is a common view on how a football shirt should look. These values are co-created in their culturally constituted world, and they have adopted these views (McCracken, 1986; Arvidsson, 2005). And if the common view is that modern shirts often look like something else than just football shirts, it might not be hard to understand why people buy and prefer retro ones instead, shirts that to them look like “real” football shirts.

When we conducted focus group three we presented the discussants with the fact that a common theme in the initial groups was that they expressed concerns with modernity in different ways. Group one had a distaste towards modern football while group two felt the same but about modern consumption society. We asked them to comment on each other’s points and when the participants from group two heard that a new PSG or Real Madrid shirt for group one could represent the negative sides of modernity, Ida responded:

“I would be questioned if I would have bought a [new] Real Madrid shirt...but if I would have bought an old retro, no one would have questioned me.” - (Ida, Group 3).

Ida’s statement reflects her perception of how societal attitudes toward consumption and modernity influence individual choices and judgments. When she mentions being “questioned” for buying a new Real Madrid shirt, she implies that acquiring a new, contemporary sports jersey might be viewed negatively due to its association with the commercial and consumer-driven aspects of modern football culture. These are associations that you do not want to be associated with because of your self-perception (Belk, 1988; Rokka & Ulver, 2023; Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1998). By choosing a retro shirt, Ida implies that she would be seen as aligning with values perceived as more in line with how her peers would think (Kaiser, 1997; Cova, 1997; Johnson, Lennon & Rudd, 2014) Which goes in line with the focus groups thoughts about how fast-fashion is frowned upon in their culture.

4.4 Summary of Empirical Analysis

The empirical data collected and its analysis present several interesting points. Our focus groups worked as an intersection where participants could show how the interactive cultural process has shaped their view of the nostalgic aspects of football apparel. In regards to aesthetics, our study shows that the interactive cultural process of the participants has clear and profound ideas of what a good-looking football shirt is. More often than not, these ideas leaned towards older designs being superior to newer ones. Shirts with retro designs were often liked because of their fit, design or link to the past. The interactive cultural process resulting in these nostalgic aspects being valued higher seemed to be because of creating their identity and wants of belonging. The reasons they gave for why they liked the retro designs go in line with what was, for them, regarded as trendy at the moment, enhancing the notion that the interactive cultural process of giving value to different things has had an effect on how they value nostalgic football apparel compared to modern apparel.

The second theme was how we could see that preferring retro apparel was a sign of the participants wanting to fit in with a group, a larger community or a social context. For many of the participants, retro football apparel was a tool to fit in or create a sense of belonging to these communities. To do this they showed that they had understood what was socially desirable for the group context. For instance, in both focus group sessions, it became apparent that wearing nostalgically permeated football apparel was a way in which an individual could showcase their knowledge and ultimately create, reinforce or enhance their identity, whether it be through football trivia or one's fashion sense. Wearing football shirts could also be a way to feel connected with your community, such as your friend group. Furthermore, we could discern that wearing football apparel was a means of sensing a connection to one's community, such as feeling connected to the club you support. In this instance, some participants even disregarded the retro- and nostalgia-aspect of the shirts and focused more on purely being supporters.

Our final theme was that the focus groups showed different signs of wanting to reject modernity. These comments also showed how the interactive cultural process has shaped their attitude towards modernity, and thus their attitude towards modern football apparel. There was a common understanding that one should have concerns with both modern football and

modern consumption society. So when presented with a choice to choose between old and modern design, the groups were quite pleased with agreeing on preferring apparel with clear links to the past, which do not have the same associations as the modern ones. This part shows how our participants are driven by a feeling of wanting to be correct and behaving as supposed to, being cautious with being associated with things they know stand for values not sought after.

5 Conclusion

In this chapter we will summarize, discuss and conclude our findings regarding how interactive cultural processes have shaped nostalgic aspects of retro football apparel, which in turn has led to its popularity. We will also present the theoretical and practical implications that the study has brought. Ultimately, we will suggest future research and our own study's limitations.

5.1 Research Findings

The aim of this study was to broaden the understanding of nostalgia in marketing by delving into the case of nostalgic football apparel. The empirical context that we chose led us to answer the following research question: *How do interactive cultural processes shape nostalgic feelings, and in turn, influence the consumer behavior of nostalgia apparel in football?*

Through our empirical analysis, we could discern and present three general themes that the different focus group discussions had which answered the research question. The common result of the themes was that we could see clear signs of how the interactive cultural process has shaped how the participants viewed and valued nostalgic aspects of football apparel. How the nostalgic elements were shaped could be seen in many ways. Mostly, the participants felt that the nostalgic aspects were of a positive nature. Firstly, we could see that the interactive cultural process made most of the participants aware of what kind of aesthetics were popular at the moment. This made them enhance the value of nostalgic apparel and as a result, the participants preferred apparel which had retro aesthetics.

Secondly, the participants showed plenty of signs of wanting to be part of a community or find a sense of belonging through their clothes consumption. To be part of a community, the participants showed that they had a clear understanding of what was socially desirable.

Hence, they used this understanding in different ways to, for example, construct their identity to fit into a group context.

Thirdly, we could see that the interactive cultural process made the participants aware of concerns surrounding the developments in the realm of modern football and our modern consumption society. Associations that were connected to modernity in football or society were frowned upon by many, and apparel that could be connected to these associations was regarded as undesirable in many different ways. This aversion to modernity led to a preference for clothes linked with the past, meaning apparel that plays on feelings of nostalgia, as participants sought to align with values and behaviors they deemed correct in a bigger context.

In conclusion, we have shown that the interactive cultural process has many implications on how people's perceptions of nostalgic elements of football apparel are shaped. Mainly, the processes have led to individuals perceiving nostalgic or retro football products as more appealing than other products with modern designs. This, in turn, meant that the interactive cultural processes that were evident in our focus groups to a high extent shaped the participants' consumer behavior when it came to nostalgic football apparel.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

Our research findings have contributed to several different theoretical understandings. First of all, our research has theoretical implications when it comes to nostalgia marketing and how that is used in a sports apparel context in particular. Even though our findings go in line with research that argues that nostalgia can be powerful in affecting brand attitude, purchase intention or increase sales (Alkhafagi, 2023; Muehling & Sprott, 2004; Sierra & McQuitty, 2007; Stern, 1990; Youn & Jin, 2017), this is not where our theoretical contribution is. As previously mentioned, nostalgia marketing has previously had a great focus towards the corporate perspective and neglected the consumer perspective (Mukhopadhyay, 2024; Scola, 2019), and this is where our findings really have contributed. We have been able to illuminate and broaden the understanding of why nostalgia in different forms as the previous research has shown can be so powerful. We have examples of how personal nostalgia, historical and collective or communal nostalgia (Han & Newman, 2022; Wildschut et al., 2014; Baker &

Kennedy, 1994), has been created and enhanced by the interactive cultural processes that the participants have been through. This in turn impacts consumer behavior related to the retro football apparel trend that has become increasingly popular lately. While nostalgia is powerful, our study shows how it becomes important to look beyond it, at the social process of how nostalgic value is being created and what kinds of aspects decide why nostalgia becomes powerful.

Our results have been able to contribute in a qualitative manner where a focus has been on revealing deeper insights into the minds of consumers. Earlier research in nostalgia marketing has also emphasized that more research has to be conducted in many different contexts (Mukhopadhyay, 2024; Scola, 2019). While earlier research highlights that nostalgia is often linked with a positive feeling (Baker & Kennedy, 1994; Stern, 1992), and therefore powerful as a marketing tool (Muehling & Sprott, 2004), we have presented empirical data that can elaborate this understanding. While most of our empirical findings indicate that nostalgia is positively linked to a good product perception, some feedback reveals that incorrect associations can cause people to dislike retro-inspired apparel. This occurs due to the interactive cultural process of valuing the apparel, resulting in lesser sought-after associations.

Besides the main contributions, our study contributes to the research field of consumer culture theory, where we have in our context been able to connect several participants' behaviors to identity construction or communal strives.

5.3 Practical Implications

Our study also brings forward several practical and managerial implications. To begin with, our findings reinforce the notion that nostalgia is a useful tool in marketing since many of the focus group participants preferred retro shirts over modern ones and talked about the nostalgic elements of various football shirts that were discussed more positively in general. However, nostalgia's effectiveness in marketing is not the main piece of our findings, but rather a contemporary result of the interactive cultural process where consumers create personal as well as collective preferences and attitudes towards different products, which we have further illuminated. Practitioners can benefit from the deepened understanding of this process and the contributions can aid in furthering the practical understanding of the consumption

phenomenon of retro and nostalgic football apparel. From a larger perspective, we have also contributed to the understanding of how consumer trends develop and evolve among consumers, where we show that the aspects of wanting to create a sense of belonging while simultaneously building one's identity play huge roles. Furthermore, the comments regarding the general aversion towards modernity among the focus group participants can give clues as to which attributes are important when it comes to how young consumers shape their preferences, but more importantly how, and why, these preferences are formed collectively.

Additionally, we offer a deeper explanation of how and why nostalgia in marketing works so well. It has become clear that the values embedded in nostalgia are heavily shaped by how consumers collectively discover, negotiate and agree upon what is collectively desirable in an interactive cultural process. As we argue that previous research has been conducted mainly from a corporate perspective, the findings from this research can aid marketers in understanding the consumer perspective of nostalgia products. Moreover, this extended perspective on nostalgia marketing would be beneficial for practitioners in order to more effectively leverage nostalgia in marketing since it illuminates the social process of how and why consumers assign value to the nostalgic elements inherent in products. Instead of leveraging nostalgia simply because it often works, marketers, brands and retailers in the industry of sports apparel can improve their competitiveness by knowing how consumers together use, discuss and think about nostalgic football apparel as a means to enhance identity and create a sense of belonging to a community. Through our findings, practitioners can also get a deeper understanding of how a consumption phenomenon based on nostalgic products is formed and evolved. Hence, marketers and brand managers can gain implications on how to better tailor marketing campaigns, product features and branding activities related to nostalgia.

5.4 Future Research and Limitations

Our research on nostalgia apparel in football has yielded significant insights. However, several limitations should be acknowledged and addressed in future studies. Firstly, our research might be seen as contextually narrow. It focuses exclusively on individuals from Sweden and particularly from one city, Lund. Future research should explore different

contexts, including diverse geographic locations and cultural settings, to determine if the interactive cultural processes shaping nostalgic feelings and consumption behavior observed in our study are consistent across various environments. For example, as we have mentioned before, nostalgia seems to be more prevalent in the younger generation (Friedman, 2016; Scola, Gordon & Dwyer, 2022). If our study were to be conducted with another generation instead, it might give other insights and possibly, the signs of the interactive cultural process would not be as profound. As Kaiser (1997) argues, people in the age group that we have conducted our study on are more affected by trends, it is in early adulthood when we are as most concerned with fitting into the social setting. It would therefore be interesting for further research to look at the phenomena from another perspective with other types of people. Similarly, we have a hard time thinking that a ten-year-old would express similar concerns regarding having a PSG shirt with the player Kylian Mbappé on the back that our participants expressed. A ten-year-old might not even be able to feel nostalgia yet.

Moreover, our research has uncovered that nostalgia is not always a positive influence on consumer behavior. Negative nostalgia can arise from inappropriate associations, leading to adverse reactions to nostalgia-inspired products. To better understand this phenomenon, further research is necessary to look into the mechanisms behind negative nostalgia. Investigating what triggers negative nostalgic feelings and how these feelings impact consumer behavior is crucial. Such insights could inform the development of more refined marketing strategies that minimize the risk of negative associations and enhance the positive aspects of nostalgia.

In summary, while our research provides valuable contributions to the understanding of nostalgia marketing, expanding the scope to include diverse contexts and age groups, as well as exploring the psychological underpinnings of negative nostalgia, will be essential for developing a more comprehensive understanding of nostalgic aspects in marketing.

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Appendix A - Modern vs Retro Real Madrid



Appendix B - Eight choices Focus group 1



Appendix C - Eight choices Focus group 2



Appendix D - Modern vs Retro Dortmund shirt



Appendix E - Topic guide for Focus groups

Here we present our different topics that were up for discussion in the focus groups. To some questions we also showed them pictures for context. The topics are in Swedish, since we conducted our focus group in Swedish.

Alla ni har ju en (retro)fotbollströja eller har använt en fotbollströja, kan ni berätta om den, vad den betyder, varför ni skaffade just den, vad känner ni när ni bär den?

Ni alla ska nu gemensamt komma överens om en valfri fotbollströja att köpa, från valfritt år, och vilket namn på ryggen som helst, vilken hade ni valt? (Obs! inspirationsbilder) (see Appendix B and C)

Om ni skulle köpa en fotbollströja idag, vilken skulle ni föredra? Varför? Vad för känslor har ni kopplat? Om ni skulle gå runt på stan i den, vad skulle ni känna? Vad tror ni andra tänker om er då? (see Appendix A)

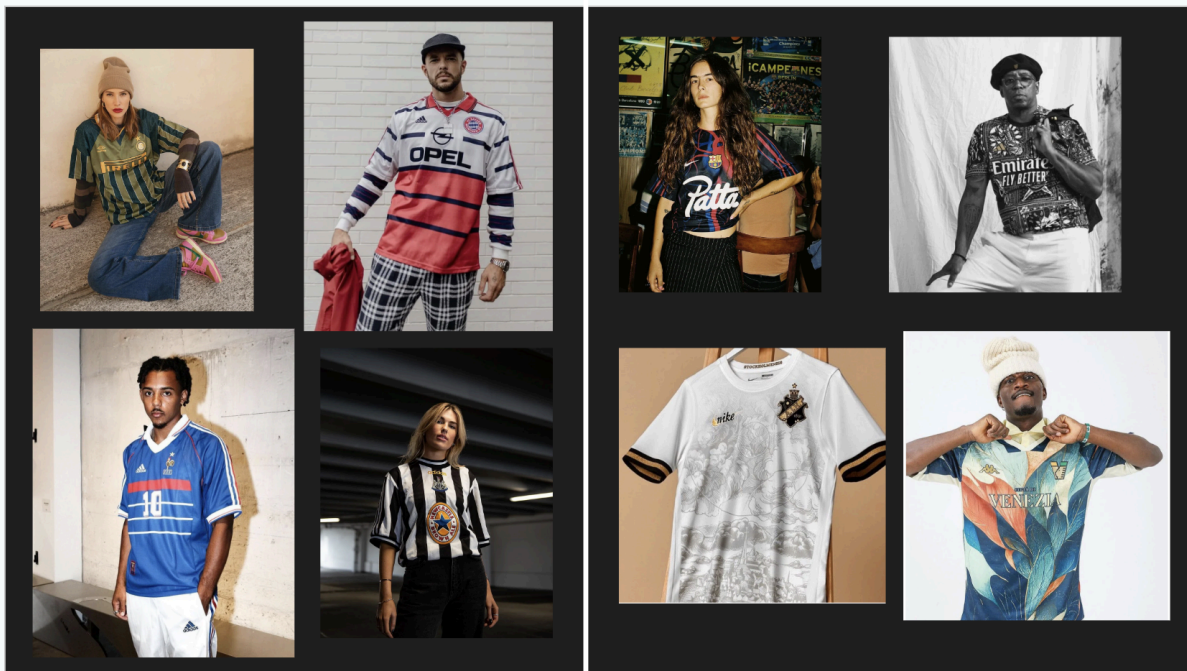
Moderna vs gamla klubbemblem?



Ni får välja: ni ska köpa en brasiliansk tröja från 2002, med spelare och nummer, vilken väljer och varför? Vad representerar den?



Här är lite olika bilder på fotbollströjor som mode. till vänster är retrotröjor medans till höger är det olika koncepttröjor som klubbar släppt. Vad tycker ni om de olika kategorierna. Vilken sida hade ni valt? Är det olika grejer stilmässigt? Vad föredrar ni?



Hur hade det känts att gå runt med en (retro)fotbollströja?

- skolan

- jobbet?
- på fotbollsplan
- puben
- på stan
- stranden

Nu ska ni få se lite olika fotbollströjor som vi vill att ni diskuterar. Hade ni kunnat köpa någon av dem? Vilken? Varför då? Varför inte den andra?





Vad tycker ni om fotbollskläder/tröjor som modeplagg?

Det har blivit ganska populärt att ha fotbollsrelaterade plagg, nu har ni ju sett en hel del tröjor och så men det finns även en trend där man använder lags halsdukar som plagg, vad tror ni det beror på?



- Om ni bara jämför med 5-10 år sedan, när ni kanske gick på gymnasiet, tror ni ni hade kunnat gå runt i en då?
- Ni kanske känner att ni inte kan det nu heller, men hade det varit mer accepterat nu?

Statement on the use of AI

In our study, we have not used any AI assistance to write any text. However, we have used AI as an assistance when it comes to helping us come up with questions for our initial interview. This was just an initial interview where we wanted to understand what kinds of themes and discussion points that were interesting. Therefore, we felt that we had to craft as many questions as possible, because the idea was to test different routes before our important focus groups. Therefore, we used ChatGPT by OpenAI to come up with interview questions for the initial interview. Furthermore, we have used the programme to come up with synonyms and words we ourselves could not manage to find.