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Decoding Emotional Storytelling: The Role of Neuromarketing and Emotion AI in Shaping Brand Memory among Generation Z: A Case Study Approach

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ABSTRACT

In this contemporary digital era, neuromarketing and Emotion AI have reshaped how brands design and deliver stories, enabling emotional responsiveness at an unprecedented scale. While emotional engagement drives consumer behaviour, its specific role in shaping durable brand memory particularly among the digital-native Generation Z cohort remains insufficiently theorized. This study develops an integrated perspective on emotionally intelligent branding by examining how neuromarketing insights and Emotion AI-enabled storytelling jointly influence brand memory formation.

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To achieve this, the research expands the traditional qualitative case study approach by integrating a bibliometric keyword co-occurrence analysis of 42 high-impact academic papers. Bibliometric mapping from 2018 to 2024 reveals a strong research density around “Generation Z,” “personalization,” and “marketing,” confirming a rapid shift toward individualized digital engagement. The qualitative phase examines Netflix, Spotify, and Coca-Cola global brands known for emotionally resonant narratives and data-driven personalization. Combined thematic and bibliometric analyses reveal that stories evoking genuine emotional salience match consumers’ internal identities, making them significantly easier to encode into long-term memory. Furthermore, findings suggest that perceived authenticity and emotional empathy strengthen the memorability of AI-mediated brand experiences, meaning Gen Z remembers brands better when algorithmic interactions feel human. By synthesizing insights from consumer neuroscience, AI, and brand storytelling, the study advances a holistic framework for modern brand memory. The paper contributes to marketing theory by shifting focus from emotional measurement to emotional meaning-making, offering strategic guidance for responsible, emotionally intelligent brand communication.

Keywords: Neuromarketing, Emotion AI, Brand Storytelling, Brand Memory, Generation Z.

1. Introduction

Earlier when we talked about marketing, we saw it as a means of advertising that helps products to reach wide range of customers. But, in today’s generation marketing is seen as feelings and not just a tool for communicating the product. Now, when we look at our screen today, we expect a connection instead of logic. It has been observed that brands are changing their tactics rapidly to understand the small shifts in human mood. Nowadays, systems track the eyes and voices of the users to find the things that might be missed in words. This results as a direct response to human pulses i.e., feeling has now seen as the entire message. we only remember a brand when it strikes an emotional chord. Brain scans show that feelings lock the moments into a long-lasting memory. This is exactly how hidden brain reaction work inside tech guided narratives which lacks clear evidence. It is

suspected that attention goes where the feeling hits. We scroll and tap, choices add up and this is what results in the feeling of familiarity. The message that needs to be conveyed fails because it did not click inside the mind. We remember the brand only if it matches with our feelings and those feelings are traced by the algorithm which then recommends us with the same type of content we usually watch. The younger generation notices the tonality more than features. The brand identity is recognized by the design and repetitions fades only honesty stays resulting in matching moods which beats the matching pixels. Stories are driven by feelings which changes the brand identity. Netflix watches the reaction of the viewers to shape the shows. Similarly, Spotify uses systems to learn emotional patterns for their music choices and moods of the listener. Now, coming to Coca-Cola it builds familiarity with shared moments which helps the memory to follow when an emotion takes the lead and therefore connection grows quietly over time. This paper explores what happens when feelings and data are interconnected. In this paper, we reviewed 42 articles and used VOS viewer to see how neuro marketing and emotional artificial intelligence works together. We paired these results with the real-world examples to understand branding related emotional awareness.

2. Conceptual Framework

The below mentioned concepts have been taken into consideration to pursue the research. The same has been highlighted below for better understanding:

Neuromarketing:

It is defined as the application of neuroscientific methods to analyse and understand human behaviour in relation to markets and marketing exchanges. Coined as a term by Ale Smidt's in 2002, it aims to explore the brain of the consumer to understand the neural underpinnings of consumer decision-making, emotional engagement, and responses to marketing stimuli.

Emotion AI:

Also known as Affective Computing a term introduced by Rosalind Picard in 1995 this is a branch of artificial intelligence that uses technology to recognize, interpret, process, and simulate human emotions. In marketing, it leverages machine learning

algorithms to analyse facial expressions, eye movements, vocal tones, and biometrics to measure real-time, subconscious emotional responses to brand experiences.

Brand Storytelling:

This concept involves crafting an identity and narrative that deeply resonates with audiences rather than merely communicating a product's features. Storytelling enhances consumer engagement by making brand messages more relatable and memorable, utilizing authenticity and emotional appeal to foster stronger brand associations and customer trust (Woodside, 2010; Pulizzi, 2012).

Brand Memory:

This is defined as the personal meaning, thoughts, feelings, and experiences of a brand that are stored in the consumer's memory (Keller, 2003). It is structurally divided into explicit memory (the conscious, intentional recollection of brand facts and events) and implicit memory (the unconscious, experiential memory that automatically influences consumer preferences and behaviours).

Generation Z:

Often referred to as digital natives, this is the demographic cohort born during the digital revolution, characterized by their lifelong exposure to technology, the internet, and social media. In the context of consumer behaviour, Gen Z exhibits highly sophisticated digital consumption habits and strongly values corporate authenticity, interactive content, and personalization in their purchasing decisions.

3. Research Gap

Although existing literature has extensively explored brain-based marketing, emotional technology and narrative branding, the integration of all these in shaping long lasting memories in Gen-Z's mind remains unexplored. Most prior studies focus on immediate reactions of the users like the buying urges and skips the deeper recall effect. Furthermore, several global studies have been done on brand stories through emotion detecting systems which follows certain technical rules instead of focusing on the design aspects of the brands. This leads to ambiguity.

Additionally, existing studies look at Gen-Zs as one uniform online group. This creates a knowledge gap on how feelings and media usage reshapes the brand's identity. It is observed that emotion and technology are treated independent in the prior researches. Addressing these gaps is crucial for both academics and practitioners as it provides insights on how Neuromarketing and emotion AI shapes brand memory in Gen-Z.

4. Objectives

1. To examine how neuromarketing principles inform emotional storytelling strategies adopted by global brands.
2. To analyse the role of Emotion AI in enabling emotionally responsive and personalized brand narratives.
3. To explore how emotionally intelligent storytelling contributes to brand memory formation among Generation Z consumers.
4. To compare emotion-driven branding practices across Netflix, Spotify, and Coca-Cola.
5. To identify ethical considerations associated with the use of emotional data in branding contexts.
6. To map connections across distant academic papers visually using VOS viewer.

5. Thematic Literature Review

The modern marketing landscape has shifted away from simply listing product features, recognizing instead that consumer choices are heavily driven by unconscious feelings and emotions. Rather than relying on traditional surveys where people might struggle to explain their true motives, researchers now use neuromarketing to directly observe physical and mental reactions to advertisements. By applying basic neuroscience, companies can see exactly which stories light up the emotional centres of the brain (Ariely & Berns, 2010; Zaltman, 2003). When a brand tells a relatable story, it triggers biological responses that bypass logical resistance, naturally weaving the brand into a consumer's long-term memory and creating a sense of comfort and safety (Damasio, 2018). This transition from selling isolated features to offering a complete, feeling-based experience helps build profound loyalty (Schmitt, 2019). This foundational exploration directly connects with the first objective of this

review, which is to examine how neuromarketing principles inform the emotional storytelling strategies adopted by global brands.

Building upon this biological understanding, the rise of artificial intelligence has given machines the unprecedented ability to recognize and respond to human feelings. Emotion AI acts as a highly observant digital assistant, analysing vast amounts of everyday digital behaviour—such as typing speed, voice tone, or clicking habits—to build accurate psychological profiles of users. This technology allows companies to move past generic advertisements and instead deliver highly personalized content that adapts in real-time to a person's current mood. If a user seems stressed, the system can instantly simplify the website layout and offer comforting messages; if they seem excited, it can present more adventurous content (Zhao et al., 2020). By tailoring the message to the exact emotional state of the individual, brands can create digital interactions that feel genuinely empathetic and highly relevant (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). These technological advances align perfectly with the second objective of this research, which aims to analyse the role of Emotion AI in enabling emotionally responsive and personalized brand narratives.

The demand for this kind of deeply empathetic and personalized communication is especially strong among Generation Z. Having grown up entirely in the digital age, this demographic is highly sceptical of traditional, polished corporate advertising and instead demands absolute authenticity from the companies they support. Young consumers do not just buy products; they invest in brands whose stories align closely with their own personal values, such as social responsibility and transparency (Djafarova & Foots, 2022). Research highlights that when brands use intelligent technologies to deliver stories that feel real, unfiltered, and uniquely tailored to the user's life, it significantly boosts the brand's long-term memorability and creates a highly subjective, tailor-made brand experience (Sung, 2021). By bypassing the noise of the internet and offering narratives that reflect genuine human experiences, companies can forge highly resilient bonds with young adults who otherwise ignore standard marketing efforts. Understanding these unique behavioral dynamics directly addresses the third objective of this study, which explores how emotionally intelligent

storytelling contributes to brand memory formation specifically among Generation Z consumers.

The practical application of these emotional strategies is best observed through the successes of major global corporations that prioritize human connection over simple transactions. For instance, Netflix utilizes advanced algorithms to track viewing habits and dynamically adjust the promotional artwork of its shows to match a user's specific emotional triggers, offering a deeply personalized sense of escapism (Au-Yong-Oliveira et al., 2020). Similarly, Spotify takes raw user listening data and transforms it into highly nostalgic, easily shareable annual summaries, making users feel personally celebrated and deeply understood by the platform (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Even legacy companies selling physical products, such as Coca-Cola, rely heavily on emotional branding. By replacing their iconic logo with common first names, Coca-Cola turned a simple, mass-produced beverage into a personalized token of shared happiness and community connection (Keller, 2016). Evaluating these distinct yet highly related operational approaches satisfies the fourth objective of this review, which is to compare emotion-driven branding practices across major market leaders like Netflix, Spotify, and Coca-Cola.

However, the ability to peer into the subconscious mind and track the daily feelings of consumers introduces highly complex moral challenges. While people generally appreciate marketing that is helpful and tailored to their interests, they quickly feel violated and angry if they discover a company has been secretly monitoring their emotional state without clear permission (Aguirre et al., 2016). This scenario, often referred to as the personalization paradox, highlights the incredibly thin line between being a helpful digital companion and an invasive surveillance system. There is a very real danger that businesses could use emotional data to exploit people during moments of psychological vulnerability, such as targeting a stressed individual with predatory advertisements (Ferrel et al., 2025). To maintain trust, organizations must prioritize total transparency, ensuring that consumers always know exactly how their data is being used and giving them the power to control it. Examining these critical boundaries fulfils the fifth and final objective of this review, which identifies the ethical considerations associated with the use of emotional data in modern branding contexts.

6. Research Methodology

Examining numbers in research papers shapes the initial approach. Observing real corporate behaviour adds necessary depth along the way. Hard data guides the structure. Real-world corporate cases bring context. The two sides inform each other. Patterns appear to emerge exactly where raw data meets daily user experience. Theory does not override practice here. Both elements show their value quietly.

6.1 Research Design

A dual method guides the work. Visual mapping of 42 selected sources happens first using VOS viewer. The software shows connections between key ideas and tracks publication frequency. Exploring three specific companies follows this mapping phase. Narrative cases break down the operations at Netflix, Spotify, and Coca-Cola. You see academic concepts taking physical form inside daily business practices.

6.2 Study Focus and Participants

The focus lands heavily on digital advertising and user reactions to modern brands. You will find specific attention paid to smart machines and corporate retention plans. Young buyers born in the late nineties take the spotlight. The research avoids face-to-face interviews entirely. Insights seem to emerge directly from academic journals, business summaries, and physical application updates.

6.3 Data Collection and Selection Criteria

Forty-two academic papers form the core foundation, while materials produced directly by brands add necessary context. Choosing these studies followed strict rules based on high citation counts, clear links to the six stated goals, and solid experimental design. Most texts originate from 2015 onward. This seems to keep the focus near current artificial intelligence capabilities. Older foundational texts appear rarely. Works from researchers like Bagozzi or Kahneman only made the cut to establish long-term theoretical roots. Recency rules the selection process.

Preparing the 42 references required reshaping each entry into a clean bibliographic format. This step readies the text for mapping specific keywords. The dataset then moves into VOS

viewer for processing. The software outputs three distinct visual layouts. Network, overlay, and density maps reveal where core themes cluster together. These images spotlight dominant topics across the literature without unnecessary detail.

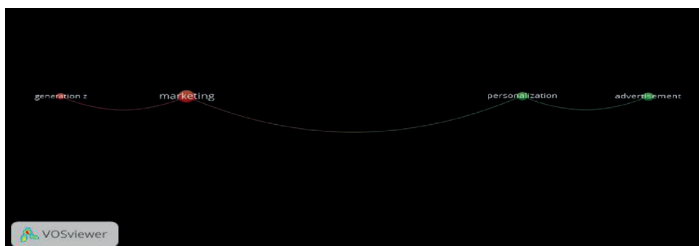
7. Analysis Results and Discussion

From here unfold findings shaped by VOS viewer maps alongside close-case comparisons, where real-world trends meet conceptual frames. Patterns drawn from data pair with ideas rooted in theory, each informing the other through layered observation. What emerges sits at the meeting point of measured output and interpretive depth, linked without forcing alignment. Mapping tools highlight connections while cases ground them in context, neither overriding the other. Together they form a view held together by correspondence, not assumption.

7.1 Bibliometric Analysis Using VOS viewer Keyword Map

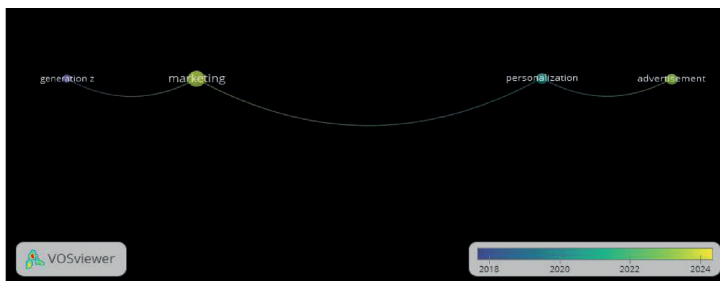
Starting off, the VOS viewer looked at 42 key sources using shared keywords to map out active research themes. Out of that information, three separate images emerged - each showing different patterns in how ideas connect:

1. **Network Visualization (Thematic Linkages):** The network map revealed prominent nodes centred around the keywords “**generation z**”, “**marketing**”, “**personalization**”, and “**advertisement**”. The tight interconnectivity between these nodes proves that modern marketing literature no longer treats advertising as a broad broadcast medium; rather, “**personalization**” acts as the critical bridge connecting “**marketing**” directly to “**generation z**”.

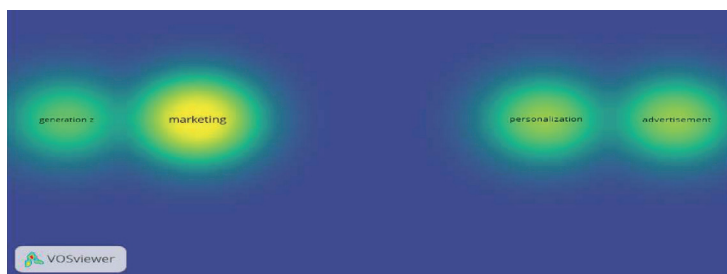


2. **Overlay Visualization (Chronological Evolution):** The overlay map plotted these keywords across a timeline from 2018 to 2024. The visual evidence demonstrates an

evolutionary trajectory: while foundational terms like “marketing” and “advertisement” dominated the earlier spectrum (2018-2020), the focus of high-impact research sharply shifted toward “generation z” and “personalization” in the later spectrum (2022-2024). This confirms that the integration of hyper-personalized, AI-driven targeting is a highly contemporary and rapidly accelerating phenomenon.



3. **Density Visualization (Research Hotspots):** The density map highlighted the most heavily researched areas within the sample. The “hotspots” burned brightest around “generation z” and “personalization,” visually validating those tailoring digital interactions to the individual emotional states of young consumers is currently the most intense area of focus within the academic marketing domain.



7.2 Feelings That Stick Brands in Your Mind

Emotions dictate brand retention across the observed examples. Stronger feelings increase the likelihood of significant imprint of certain brand in sub-conscious corner of the brain. Emotions appear to lead the entire process.

Netflix algorithms sort trailers and image previews to Favor scenes causing emotional shifts and influences decision making.

These sharp emotional spikes help the viewer to remember their initial reaction to a show. The human mind clings to these flashes rather than specific plot points. The viewers register the rush and subconscious pull towards the content; this pull recognition comes directly from physical sensation which leaves a lasting mark on your pulse.

Spotify playlists attempt to match your daily mood. Routines incorporating these specific sounds make picking up where you left off happen without conscious thought. Certain genre and musical arrangements pull memories to the surface over time. One remembers the moment wrapped around the track.

Coca-Cola relies on symbols over slogans. Seeing joy or memories linked to a product builds quiet familiarity over years. This bond stays when one's attention fades. Recognition lingers in subconscious mind without any manual effort.

Messages carrying a strong emotional pull, lines up with human brain's core emotional intellect realm. This approach makes information linger much longer compared to dull and obvious information. Generation Z retain these stories longer because the delivery matches their neurological rhythm and storing process.

7.3 Neuromarketing Meets Emotion AI In Real Use

Corporate teams now track how one acts online. This behavioural pattern analysing mechanism replaces expensive brain scans, aligning with the personalization trend seen in the earlier visual mapping. Tracking clicks often mirrors the activity of human minds. Companies match one's past behaviour to present zone of interest, mood and situation.

Netflix monitors the exact second you stop watching a show, tracks rewind during certain scenes which enables developers to process what stimuli drive one's dopamine. This scene-by-scene feedback shapes the pacing of future stories. Keeping younger audiences engaged means adjusting timing constantly. Decisions come directly from one's actual behaviour rather than assumptions about their preferences.

Spotify analyses the user's data and turns it into a very personal story by the medium of wrapped features which taps into a specific emotion which leads to subconscious incline towards Spotify. Younger listeners find themselves in these visuals summaries as music triggers significant amount of emotion

in their daily life. Sharing these moments with friends feels natural. Peer acknowledgment further assists these memories stick better.

Coca-Cola entirely avoids heavy machine learning. Printing common names on physical bottles appreciates one’s existence which makes them feel seen. Recognition becomes a direct connection, without algorithms running behind the scenes.

Brands stick harder when machines learn to analyse and then predict human feelings. Detecting the emotions makes an unseen bond with the brand, which leads to constant usage of the brand. Systems build stronger connections by reading cues such as tone or digital gestures. Responses feel personal. Trust grows quietly as software reactions mirror real neurological being. This trust deepens the subconscious incline towards the brand.

7.4 Cross-Case Comparative Insights

Though tech levels differ, what truly matters is how well feelings align. Still, machines change fast - yet connection sticks around. Where gadgets shift constantly, shared understanding stays put. Even when tools evolve differently, matching emotions hold things together. As systems upgrade unevenly, being emotionally in sync makes the difference.

Dimension	Netflix	Spotify	Coca-Cola
Primary Emotional Appeal	Suspense, excitement	Mood regulation, identity	Joy, nostalgia, unity
Neuro marketing App	Behavioural proxies / A-B testing	Contextual inference	Macro narrative consistency
Emotion AI Intensity	Moderate (Content matching)	High (Hyper-personalization)	Low (Symbolic personalization)
Dominant Memory Type	Episodic recall	Habitual & emotional recall	Long-term associative recall

7.5 Gen Z Values Real and Honest

The findings present an unexpected shift. Artificial intelligence enables exact customization across the charted research. Young adults seem to demand raw authenticity online. You notice bad reactions when automated systems appear pushy or fake. The

human brain stores this negative experience as a direct rejection of the brand. Using data responsibly and sharing clear stories matches biological needs for trust.

8 Conclusion

8.1 Scope and Summary

The research examined the intersection of neuromarketing and emotion artificial intelligence. Forty-two scholarly articles and physical examples from Netflix, Spotify, and Coca-Cola provided the foundation. Emotional storytelling builds lasting memories. Biology appears to drive this process more than traditional advertising. VOS viewer data shows mass messaging disappearing between 2018 and 2024. Hyper-personalized content replaced it entirely. Success depends heavily on honest emotional connections regardless of corporate technical skill. Young audiences view these brand messages as moments woven into their existing identities.

8.2 Limitations

Relying on past studies and citation maps leaves physical lab proof out of reach. Three massive corporate entities shaped this perspective. Small teams and offline spaces appear to function differently. Technology changes rapidly. Code updates seem to make the current technical snapshot feel outdated in a click.

8.3 Theoretical Implications

Emotion appears to operate at the core of brand memory. It acts within the thinking process itself. VOS viewer mappings reveal distinct links between Generation Z and personalization across recent academic texts. Old models assumed repeated contact-built recall. Contextual fit matters more to young audiences today. Algorithms shape this fit better than simple repetition.

8.4 Managerial and Ethical Considerations

Emotion-sensing technology works best supporting human creativity instead of replacing it entirely. Digital spaces shift toward reading feelings over tracking demographic labels. Moving into emotional tracking demands strict moral awareness. Younger audiences react poorly when they sense active emotional monitoring. Clear messaging and fair data practices reduce suspicion around hidden algorithms. Honouring personal choice keeps a brand trustworthy. You remember these companies well over time.

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