

Marketing Communication Strategy through Nostalgia: A Qualitative Study at Zangrandi Ice Cream Surabaya

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ABSTRACT

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This research investigates the marketing communication strategy through nostalgia implemented by Zangrandi Ice Cream Surabaya to maintain its presence amidst the rapid growth of digital consumption and competition from modern brands. The study aims to analyze the integration of historical identity and customer experience in preserving Zangrandi legendary status as a communication asset. Using a descriptive qualitative approach data were gathered through in depth interviews with management and loyal customers as well as direct field observations. The findings indicate that Zangrandi communication relies on the consistency of its 1930 authentic recipes and the use of its colonial style heritage building as a non verbal communication medium. Furthermore the customer experience is structured through five dimensions Sense, Feel, Think, Act, and Relate which foster deep emotional bonds and trigger organic word of mouth. This study concludes that Zangrandi survival is not a result of aggressive digital promotion but the successful transformation of historical memory into a high value social communication experience. These results suggest that heritage businesses can leverage historical identity as a strategic communication tool to build consumer loyalty and reputational resilience in a competitive market.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has fundamentally altered various sectors of human life particularly regarding communication patterns and consumption behavior. In the culinary industry this shift is characterized by the increasing dominance of online food delivery services and digital applications, allowing consumers to access products without visiting physical locations. Data from Databoks indicates that the Gross Merchandise Value for online food in Indonesia has shown a consistent upward trend and is projected to reach 6.4 billion dollars by 2025. This digitalization requires culinary businesses to continuously adjust how they build relationships with consumers amidst rapidly changing market dynamics and a growing preference for digital efficiency (Sari & Suwandi, 2025).

However this digital transition poses a significant threat to established businesses that fail to adapt to technological advancements and increasingly competitive market conditions. Many small and medium enterprises have experienced declines or even closure due to their inability to synchronize traditional operations with modern market demands (Shalihah et al., 2022). The industry is currently saturated with modern ice cream brands such as Mixue and Aice that leverage extensive distribution networks and low cost pricing to capture a broad consumer base. This environment creates a situation where competitive survival depends not only on product quality but also on the ability to maintain a unique brand appeal in a crowded digital marketplace.

In contrast to these modern trends Zangrandi Ice Cream in Surabaya serves as a unique case of a heritage business that maintains its relevance through physical experience and historical identity. Established in 1930 during the colonial era the brand operates within a designated cultural heritage building, positioning it as both a culinary icon and a protected historical asset (DISBUDPORAPAR Kota Surabaya, 2024). Reports indicate that approximately 40 percent of its visitors travel from outside Surabaya, driven by a desire to reconnect with childhood memories and introduce the legendary brand to younger generations (Kompas.com, 2025). This phenomenon suggests that Zangrandi's survival is anchored in its status as a cultural landmark rather than aggressive digital expansion.

The physical environment of Zangrandi functions

as more than just an aesthetic backdrop; it operates as a medium of symbolic communication that carries deep social and cultural meaning for its visitors. Interior elements and historical architecture influence visitor comfort and attention, ultimately shaping their perception of the brand's legendary identity (Putri & Audi, 2019). Through the lens of nostalgic marketing these elements of the past are utilized to foster emotional bonds and a sense of psychological comfort. By maintaining its 1930s colonial atmosphere and authentic recipes Zangrandi successfully transforms its physical space into a communication tool that triggers organic word of mouth recommendations among consumers (Pudrianisa & Amali, 2025).

Previous research on Zangrandi has primarily utilized quantitative methods to measure the impact of nostalgic marketing on brand loyalty and customer satisfaction (Saputra & Kartini, 2025). Other studies have explored the application of nostalgia in cultural tourism events to analyze how traditional symbols attract visitors. Consequently there is a distinct research gap regarding how a legendary culinary institution strategically manages its historical identity as a core marketing communication asset to navigate the pressures of digital disruption. Most existing literature focuses on consumer emotional responses rather than the specific management processes used to preserve authentic non-verbal communication through heritage assets (Reynaldi, 2025).

This study addresses this gap by conducting a qualitative analysis of the marketing communication strategy based on nostalgic marketing at Zangrandi Ice Cream Surabaya. The research objective is to understand how the integration of historical identity, multi sensory experiences, and organic word of mouth contributes to the brand resilience in the modern era. By examining these intergenerational communication processes this study offers new insights into how heritage businesses can leverage historical authenticity as a strategic tool for survival. Ultimately the research explores how Zangrandi transforms past memories into a sustainable social experience that protects its reputation amidst an increasingly digitalized culinary landscape. Furthermore, the findings are expected to provide practical insights for heritage businesses in developing sustainable marketing communication strategies while preserving their cultural identity. The study also contributes to the development of marketing communications science by enriching the

understanding of nostalgic marketing as a strategic communication approach for maintaining the competitiveness of heritage brands in the digital era.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Marketing Communication Strategy and Nostalgic Marketing

Marketing communication strategy serves as the primary instrument for a company to inform, persuade, and remind consumers about the brands or products they represent. This communicative process functions as the fundamental voice of the firm, aimed at building long-term relationships and establishing a specific brand image in the minds of the target audience. In the context of the culinary industry, this strategy is not limited to formal promotion but involves the creation of meaningful experiences and interactive activities to ensure the brand's identity remains consistent with actual audience perceptions. These strategic activities allow a brand to bridge the gap between corporate identity and the subjective reality experienced by consumers in their daily social lives (Wahyuni & Masyurah, 2022).

One effective approach for heritage businesses to maintain their market position is nostalgic marketing, which utilizes historical symbols and elements of the past to foster deep emotional bonds. By leveraging collective memories and a sense of heritage, this method allows individuals to reconnect with their personal identities through current consumption (Saputra & Kartini, 2025). The consistent implementation of vintage atmospheres and authentic identity triggers is crucial for evoking emotional resonance and differentiating a brand from modern, fast-changing industrial trends. This differentiation provides a sense of psychological comfort and stability that functions as a strong competitive advantage against standardized modern brands.

The integration of marketing communication and nostalgia transforms a brand's historical legacy into a sustainable communication asset that maintains its relevance across different generations. Through this perspective, consumers do not merely receive informative messages but build a psychological attachment through the interpretation of history displayed by the business. Ultimately, this strategic approach allows legendary institutions to preserve their reputation and social value, ensuring that the brand remains a recognized cultural icon in a

competitive digital landscape. By positioning history as a core value, heritage businesses can secure a unique market niche that cannot be easily replicated through conventional marketing tactics (Pudrianisa & Amali, 2025).

Experiential marketing

The Experiential marketing is understood as a framework that shifts the focus from traditional product functionality to the creation of holistic and memorable consumer journeys. This approach suggests that modern consumers are no longer satisfied with the utility of a product alone but actively seek out unique sensory and emotional interactions during their visit (Rismawati & Hasbi, 2020). By prioritizing the creation of a lasting impression rather than just a transaction, a business can establish a strong point of differentiation that is difficult for competitors to replicate. This strategic shift allows a brand to create a more profound impact on the audience by turning every interaction into a meaningful personal event.

This strategy is operationalized through five strategic modules sense, feel, think, act, and relate which aim to engage various aspects of the consumer's perception. The sense is sight, sound, scent, and touch to create an immediate sensory impact through the brand environment. Feel dimension targets the customer inner emotions and moods to foster a deep psychological bond with the brand. By generating positive feelings such as comfort or excitement a company can transform a simple purchase into a meaningful emotional interaction that strengthens the overall brand perception. Meanwhile think dimension encourages cognitive engagement prompting visitors to intellectually process and reflect upon the brand identity or historical significance. These components work in synergy to ensure that the consumer is not just a passive observer but an active participant in the brand narrative.

The act and relate dimensions influence long term physical behaviors and the development of social connections among consumers. These modules allow a brand to transcend its commercial function and become part of a larger community or a collective social identity (Calista, 2024). Through these multi dimensional interactions experiential marketing transforms a standard service into a personal journey

that fosters deep engagement and long-term brand relevance. The result is a sustainable relationship where the brand becomes a permanent fixture in the consumer's social and personal life.

Word of Mouth

Word of Mouth essentially functions as an interpersonal communication channel where individuals exchange information and recommendations based on their actual experiences with a product or service (Fachreza & Soebiagdo, 2024). This communicative process occurs when customers share their subjective assessments or personal stories voluntarily within their social environment after a transaction has taken place. Unlike traditional marketing tools that are controlled by the firm this type of communication is organic and driven by the personal motivation of consumers to express their satisfaction. This natural flow of information ensures that a brand's identity becomes part of daily social conversation rather than appearing as just another commercial message.

The primary strength of Word of Mouth lies in its high level of credibility which often surpasses that of formal advertisements or promotional campaigns. Consumers tend to trust recommendations from friends, family, or even peers more than messages produced directly by a company because the source is perceived to have no commercial interest. In a competitive industry these honest evaluations function as social proof that guides potential customers in their decision making process while significantly reducing the perceived risk of choosing a brand. In an era of digital saturation these personal testimonies serve as a vital filter for consumers who are increasingly looking for authentic quality and proven experiences (Reynaldi, 2025).

Based on these theoretical perspectives, this study examines how Zangrandi Ice Cream Surabaya applies nostalgic marketing through experiential marketing and encourages positive Word of Mouth as an integrated marketing communication strategy. These concepts provide the analytical framework for understanding how the company's historical identity is communicated to consumers and contributes to maintaining its relevance as a heritage culinary business.

METHOD

Research Design and Object

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive type to provide a systematic overview of the nostalgic based marketing communication strategy at Zangrandi Ice Cream Surabaya. This approach is selected because the primary focus is to understand the communication process formed through the subjective experiences of consumers and the interpretation of historical identity which cannot be measured numerically. The research object centers on how the management utilizes heritage assets and the historical atmosphere as communication instruments to maintain brand existence amidst modern culinary competition. By observing phenomena in their natural setting, this study captures the reality of marketing communication that emerges organically through the interaction between physical space, products, and the audience.

Data Collection

Data is collected primarily through in depth interviews and direct observation to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the field dynamics. The informants for this study consist of seven individuals selected through purposive sampling, including two internal management representatives and five regular customers. The criteria for customer informants are strictly defined, requiring at least two visits, direct consumption at the venue rather than through delivery services, and a minimum age of eighteen years to ensure the accuracy of their emotional accounts.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process follows the interactive model developed by Miles Huberman which includes data collection, condensation, display, and conclusion drawing. During the condensation stage, all interview transcripts and field notes are filtered and categorized based on relevant dimensions of experiential marketing and word of mouth. The simplified data is then organized into narrative descriptions to reveal patterns between the management's planned strategies and the actual perceptions felt by consumers. The final stage involves verifying these findings with field evidence to ensure that the conclusions drawn are valid and capable of addressing the research objectives regarding the effectiveness of nostalgia-based communication.

RESULT

Profile of Zangrandi Ice Cream Surabaya

Zangrandi Ice Cream is a legendary culinary icon in Surabaya, established in 1930 by Roberto Zangrandi during the Dutch colonial era. While official records state 1930, historical evidence indicates business activities as early as 1924 under the name Renato Zangrandi Ijspaleis. In 1960, the business was transferred to Adi Tanumulia and has since been managed by the third generation of the Tanumulia family, maintaining its identity as an authentic Italian-style creamery.

To ensure business sustainability Zangrandi transitioned from family management to a professional corporate structure in 2012. This shift involves professional directors overseeing three main departments Sales, Production, and HR & Finance to strengthen operational efficiency. Despite this modernization, the management strictly adheres to original 1930 recipes using fresh ingredients to preserve the flavor consistency that defines the brand's heritage.

The physical outlet at Jalan Yos Sudarso No. 15 is officially designated as a Cultural Heritage Building under Surabaya Mayor's Decree No. 188.45/25/436.1.2/2009. This legal status requires the preservation of original colonial architecture, including vintage rattan chairs and wooden pillars from the 1930s. These preserved physical elements function as non-verbal communication tools, reinforcing the brand's historical narrative and longevity to every visiting customer.

Figure 1. Zangrandi Yos Sudarso



Informant Identities

The study involves seven informants selected through purposive sampling to ensure the depth and validity of the qualitative data obtained from the field. These informants are categorized into two primary groups: internal management representatives who

understand the strategic direction and external customers who provide a perspective on actual brand reception. The profiles of these informants, including their roles and demographic backgrounds, are systematically presented in Table 1 to provide a clear overview of the research subjects. By combining these two distinct viewpoints, the research captures a comprehensive picture of how nostalgic marketing is both planned by the firm and experienced by the audience.

The internal group consists of two key figures: Simon Cristian, the Operational Manager who has led the brand's professional transition since 2012, and Maya Vinalita, a Senior Supervisor with over a decade of service. Simon provides critical insights into the management's commitment to preserving 1930s recipes and the colonial architecture as a core communication asset. Meanwhile, Maya offers a frontline perspective on the daily interactions between staff and visitors, particularly regarding the implementation of service standards that evoke a sense of nostalgia. Their long-term involvement with Zangrandi ensures that the organizational data used in this study is grounded in significant institutional memory and operational expertise.

The second group includes five customers—Abdul, Aji, Bernard, Beatrice, and Mark—who range in age from 20 to 35 years and possess diverse professional backgrounds. These informants were selected based on strict criteria, including a minimum of two visits and a preference for direct on-site consumption to ensure they have fully experienced the brand's physical atmosphere. Their accounts represent a cross-generational demographic that values Zangrandi not just for its products, but as a site for personal reflection, family rituals, and cultural connection. This variety of customer perspectives is essential for analyzing how different individuals interpret the brand's historical symbols and transform their experiences into organic word-of-mouth recommendations.

Table 1. Profiles of Research Informants

No.	Name	Background	Age
1	Simon Cristian	Operational Manager	37 Years
2	Maya Vinalita	Senior Supervisor	31 Years
3	Abdul	Regular Customer	29 Years

4	Aji	Regular Customer	35 Years
5	Bernard	Regular Customer	26 Years
6	Beatrice	Regular Customer	23 Years
7	Mark	Regular Customer	20 Years



Description of Existing Marketing Communication Elements

The marketing communication activities at Zangrandi Ice Cream are executed through a combination of visual identity, product consistency, and digital presence. The brand visual identity is anchored by its iconic red logo which symbolizes the spirit of Italian culinary tradition and the preservation of its original 1930s architectural facade. In terms of product communication management maintains a strict policy regarding its signature menu such as Tutti Frutti and Macedonia which serve as physical symbols of the brand longevity. These elements are not merely commercial offerings but function as tangible evidence of the brand's history that visitors can perceive directly during their visit.

In the digital landscape Zangrandi primarily utilizes Instagram as its main communication channel to interact with customers and share visual content related to its heritage atmosphere. Interestingly management intentionally avoids using TikTok as a promotional platform to mitigate the risk of negative perceptions regarding product pricing from a broader non targeted audience. This selective media strategy is designed to protect the brand premium and legendary image while ensuring that digital engagement remains aligned with its established customer segment. Through Instagram Zangrandi focuses on providing information about seasonal menus and reposting customer experiences to maintain an organic connection with the public.

Furthermore nonverbal communication is

integrated into the daily service patterns at the Yos Sudarso outlet. This includes specific service standards where staff are trained to assist visitors in documenting their experiences at iconic spots within the building such as near the colonial style neon boxes or historical photographs. Other elements include the provision of free water after consumption and the distribution of complimentary greeting cards for special occasions which are intended to enhance the overall customer experience. These existing communication tools collectively form the basis for the brand presence, bridging the gap between its historical identity and modern consumer expectations.

Figure 2. Zangrandi interior

DISCUSSION

Implementation of Nostalgic Marketing through Authenticity and Historical Identity

In the strategic framework of Zangrandi nostalgic marketing is not merely an external promotional layer but functions as the fundamental identity that management refers to as the "soul" of the brand. Simon the operational manager explicitly states that the core value being sold is the historical narrative integrated with the product itself. This strategic direction aims to provide a guarantee of consistency where visitors will encounter the same atmosphere and quality whether they visit today or two decades in the future. This permanence allows the brand to remain a stable point of reference in the personal lives of customers even as their own ages and environments change. By positioning history as a living asset Zangrandi effectively differentiates itself from modern competitors that often prioritize fleeting trends over enduring identity.

The physical manifestation of this nostalgia is centered on the store status as a Cultural Heritage Building (Bangunan Cagar Budaya) which imposes strict legal limits on architectural modifications. Rather than viewing these restrictions as a hindrance management utilizes the original colonial facade and interior elements as powerful nonverbal communication tools. Key artifacts such as the vintage rattan chairs which cost approximately one million rupiah each to maintain and the original wooden pillars are preserved to ensure the visual reality matches historical photographs displayed on the walls. This commitment to visual authenticity is a deliberate

investment to keep the "time travel" experience intact for every visitor. Such details serve as tangible proof of the brand's longevity and provide a sense of stability that modern, industrialized food outlets cannot replicate.

Beyond the architectural shell the nostalgic strategy is reinforced through the uncompromising preservation of original 1930s recipes and signature menus. Items like Tutti Frutti and Macedonia are treated as sacred symbols of the brand heritage with management maintaining a "saklek" or rigid policy against altering their basic composition. This focus on authenticity extends to the raw materials specifically the use of fresh cows milk from Batu to ensure the flavor profile remains identical to what was served during the colonial era. Customers particularly those from older generations are noted to be highly sensitive to even minor deviations in taste, viewing the consistent flavor as a bridge to their own past. Thus the product functions as a sensory anchor that validates the historical claims of the business in every bite.

The effectiveness of this strategy is confirmed by the subjective experiences of visitors who describe their visits as a journey through time or a return to a familiar personal history. Customers like Aji and Beatrice report that the unchanging nature of the chairs, service uniforms, and overall layout triggers specific childhood memories of visiting with parents and grandparents. This "homie" atmosphere often evokes a sense of comfort similar to visiting a grandmother house and allowing the brand to transcend its commercial status and become part of a customer personal and family narrative. For younger generations, the heritage atmosphere offers a form of romanticized history where the building "speaks" of its colonial past through its antique design. Ultimately Zangrandi nostalgic marketing succeeds by aligning management rigid preservation efforts with the customers desire for authentic, stable, and emotionally resonant experiences.

Multidimensional Analysis of Experiential Marketing

The experiential marketing strategy at Zangrandi Ice Cream centers on a holistic consumer journey that transcends mere product consumption focusing instead on the integration of sensory stimuli and emotional resonance. This multidimensional approach is first established through the **sense** dimension where the

management utilizes the historical environment as a primary communicative asset. Visitors are immediately greeted by the 1930s colonial architecture, original rattan chairs, and wooden pillars that serve as tangible evidence of the brand longevity. Beyond visual aesthetics the sense experience is reinforced through the authentic texture of the ice cream the management maintains a specific quality standard where the melted product retains a thick, porridge like consistency due to the use of fresh cows milk from Batu. This sensory distinction allows customers to perceive the brand's authenticity through taste and touch differentiating Zangrandi from mass produced competitors that rely on artificial flavors.

The transition from physical stimuli to the **feel** dimension occurs as customers develop an emotional connection with the "homie" and tranquil atmosphere of the parlor. This emotional comfort often triggers personal nostalgia with some visitors comparing the interior warmth to their grandmothers house, which creates a sense of psychological safety and relaxation. To strengthen this bond the management implements personalized service standards where senior staff members recognize regular customers and anticipate their favorite orders. This level of interpersonal recognition makes guests feel valued and socially "at home" effectively transforming a simple transaction into a meaningful social interaction. The depth of this emotional attachment was particularly evident during the 2021 crisis where customers actively supported the brand out of a personal fear that their site of memory might close permanently.

The **think** dimension is operationalized by encouraging visitors to engage in cognitive reflection regarding the historical narrative of Surabaya and the brand itself. Through the display of archival photographs and historical stories within the menu the parlor functions as a living museum where customers intellectually process Zangrandi journey through different eras. Some visitors describe the experience as "the building speaking" about its colonial past prompting them to imagine the social life of the 1930s while sitting in the exact same space. This cognitive engagement is crucial because it validates the brand's status as a culinary pioneer ensuring that customers do not just consume a product but also intellectually appreciate the heritage being preserved.

Finally, the **act** and **relate** dimensions manifest

through long term behavioral changes and the formation of collective social identities. The **act** dimension is observed in the ritualized behaviors of customers who make Zangrandi a mandatory destination for family traditions such as post church visits or weekend gatherings. These experiences often lead to active documentation where customers capture photos at iconic spots frequently assisted by staff to share on social media, thereby integrating the brand into their modern digital lifestyle. This individual behavior expands into the **relate** dimension as Zangrandi becomes an intergenerational bridge within families where memories are passed from grandparents to grandchildren. Ultimately the brand transcends its commercial function to become a symbol of Surabaya urban identity, with residents proudly recommending it to outsiders as a representative landmark of the city cultural heritage.

Organic Word of Mouth and Reputational Resilience

The long term success of Zangrandi marketing communication is heavily anchored in the strength of organic word of mouth that emerges from deep consumer experiences. This communicative cycle begins with how customers first discover the brand which rarely occurs through formal advertisements but rather through interpersonal recommendations and social media. Informants such as Abdul, Aji, and Beatrice report that their initial introduction to Zangrandi came directly from their parents, who shared stories of the brand's legendary status since the colonial era. This generational transfer of information creates a pre existing positive perception even before the first visit. In a more modern context Bernard and Mark discovered the brand through the "buzz" on social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok, proving that digital presence acts as a modern-day digital word of mouth that triggers curiosity.

The study finds that all five customer informants Abdul, Aji, Bernard, Beatrice, and Mark actively participate in spreading the brand narrative to their own social circles. Aji, for instance utilizes digital tools like WhatsApp family groups to share photos and ensure his relatives know that Zangrandi remains an enjoyable destination. Bernard experience highlights the power of electronic word of mouth, where his Instagram stories about the "heritage vibes" at Zangrandi led his friends to visit the parlor themselves. Similarly Beatrice and Mark position Zangrandi as a "must visit" landmark recommending it to partners or relatives

from outside the city as a representative symbol of Surabaya identity. This consistent behavior across all informants confirms that the brand reputation is sustained by a voluntary marketing force that values the authentic experience over simple consumption.

From the management perspective Simon recognizes that this organic word of mouth serves as "free promotion" with immense strategic value. To facilitate this the staff is trained to be proactive in helping customers capture their memories in the most iconic spots, ensuring the brand visual identity is correctly represented in the digital stories shared online. This strategy transforms individual satisfied customers into credible advocates who shield the brand reputation. The ultimate proof of this resilience was seen during the 2021 crisis when rumors of the parlor closure surfaced. Maya the senior supervisor, noted that customers did not just express sadness but took action by purchasing products in bulk nearly exhausting the supply of cups as a form of social support to ensure the brand's survival. This defensive reaction from the public demonstrates that Zangrandi is no longer just a business, but a shared cultural asset that the community feels a personal responsibility to protect.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that Zangrandi Ice Cream Surabaya successfully implements a nostalgic marketing communication strategy by integrating a rigid historical identity with a multi dimensional consumer experience. History is not treated as a passive background but functions as a core communication asset that guarantees consistency across different generations. The success of this strategy is evidenced by the management ability to maintain authentic physical elements such as colonial architecture and 1930s recipes which serve as non verbal media conveying a message of brand longevity and reputation.

Through the lens of experiential marketing Zangrandi builds an emotional attachment that transcends basic commercial transactions. The sensory experience of authentic ice cream textures and a tranquil heritage atmosphere triggers cognitive reflection, where customers romanticize past memories and connect with the city historical identity. This process leads to ritualized behaviors and social

connections that position Zangrandi as a cross generational bridge within families. Ultimately these emotional experiences transform into a powerful organic word of mouth, where customers voluntarily act as protectors of the brand reputation, which was particularly evident during the 2021 closure crisis.

Practical suggestions for management include maintaining a selective digital risk mitigation policy to protect the premium image while remaining open to service innovations that reach younger generations without compromising authenticity. The limitations of this study include its focus on a single object and a specific group of informants meaning the results may not be generalizable to the entire heritage culinary industry. Future research is suggested to use quantitative methods to measure how nostalgia variables influence brand loyalty on a larger scale or to conduct comparative studies with other legendary businesses to enrich the perspective of culture-based marketing communication.

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