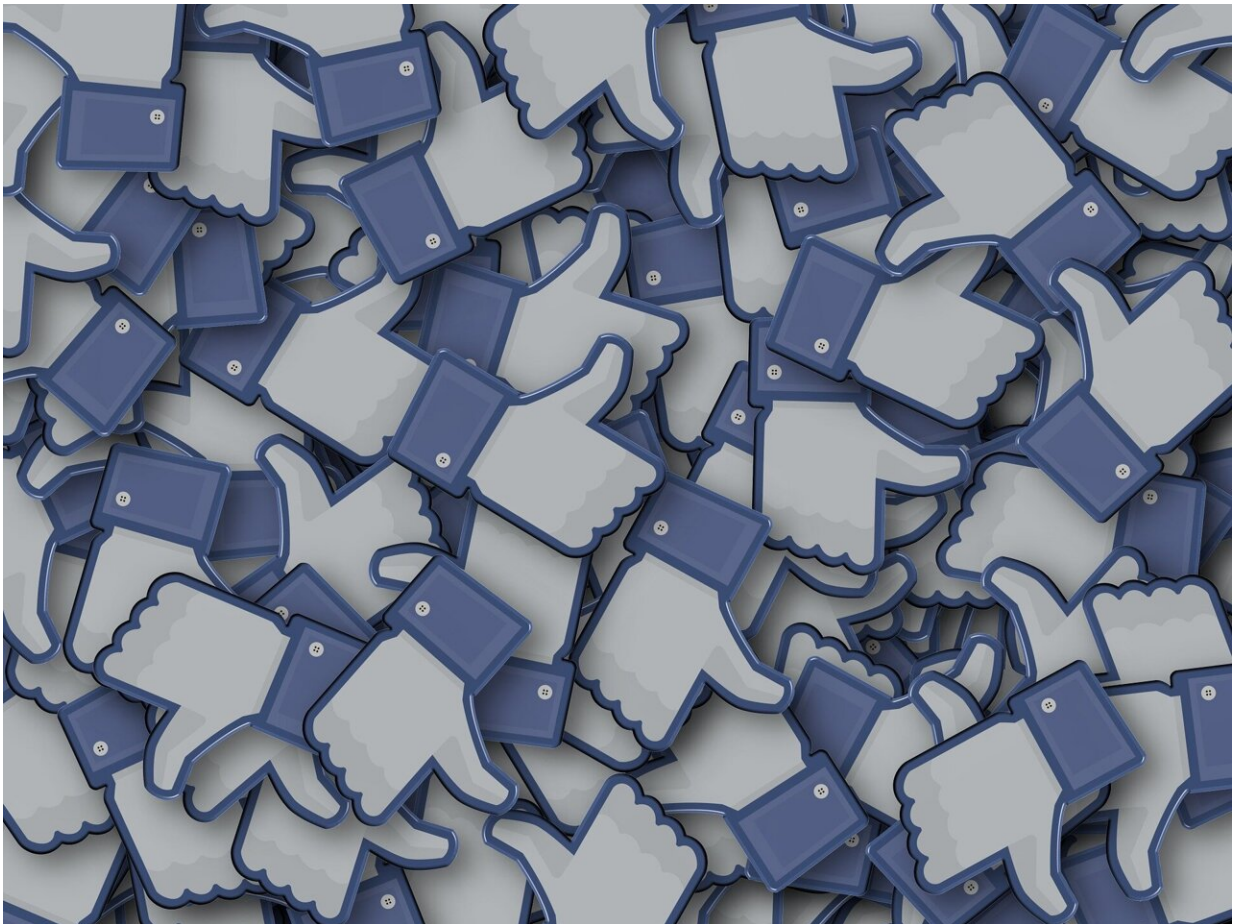


# Business owners: Nostalgia sells on social media

October 30 2023, by Laura Bailey

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There's a good reason those Budweiser Clydesdale commercials are

viewer favorites—they ooze nostalgia.

The same emotion is popular among NFL [social media](#) users, and the results could help increase social media engagement for regular business owners, as well as NFL franchises, according to [new research](#) by Wenche Wang, assistant professor of sport management at the University of Michigan School of Kinesiology, published in the *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*.

Wang examined 64,778 NFL Instagram posts and divided social media users on the site into two groups: NFL fans and general social media users. She found that posts that induced nostalgia were more likely to engage general social media users. Loyal fans, on the other hand, were more likely to engage with informational posts, she said.

This is important because customer engagement is the holy grail of social media strategy for any [business](#) because it increases [brand awareness](#), company loyalty and revenue, she said.

There are parallels between other businesses and the NFL franchises that Wang looked at, she said. Most businesses have "fans"—customers who will go to the company's social media page because they already like the product. Then there are the users who stumble upon the company's site while using social media.

"You always receive some attention from your own fans and then some who are just looking around and see the post," Wang said.

This is the low-hanging fruit likely to engage with nostalgic posts. NFL teams posted [special features](#) like Throwback Thursday or Flashback Friday, featuring tidbits about the history of the city or team or player, or even general historical events unrelated to the team. Other businesses can do the same, she said.

Both types of social media users paid attention to informational posts on NFL's Instagram, but fans were much more engaged with informational posts compared to general social media users.

"The fans used informational posts for real-time discussions about the game, so when a game is going on, they were using it as another platform to discuss the game together," Wang said.

The NFL teams didn't seem to be aware of how well the nostalgic posts were engaging users, Wang said. The posts they posted most often were garnering the least engagement.

For instance, about 6% of posts were holiday greetings or gratitude-type posts, which are used to build relationships. About 19% of posts encouraged people to take a quiz, or react or comment. None of these were effective in engaging users, Wang said.

"So simply asking people to engage, or conveying care with text or basic photos or [video content](#), did not seem to be very effective in engaging [social media users](#)," she said. "The ones I did find to be very effective in engaging users were the nostalgic posts, and that was only 1.7% of the sample."

Wang said it might be tough for the NFL to track posts effectively because of volume.

"When you're posting so much, you might not be able to systematically track which posts are most effective," she said.

**More information:** Wenche Wang, Customer engagement on social media: an examination of NFL teams' Instagram posts, *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship* (2023). [DOI: 10.1108/IJSMS-03-2023-0051](https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSMS-03-2023-0051)

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