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Social Media and Sentimental Reflections: A Study on Digital Nostalgia Culture

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Abstract: ***Nostalgia, a sentimental longing for the past, has taken on a new dimension in the digital age. This study explores how social media platforms, such as Instagram and Facebook contribute to the creation and consumption of digital nostalgia culture. This study explores the role of social media in shaping digital nostalgia culture, focusing specifically on user experiences. It examines how individuals interact with nostalgic content, why they seek such experiences, and how these interactions influence their emotional well-being and identity. The study utilizes media theories like Uses and Gratifications Theory and Media Richness Theory to explain how social media users fulfill emotional needs and engage with nostalgic content. The methodology involves a user-centric approach, employing a survey as the primary tool for data collection. The survey captures insights into users' motivations, emotional responses, and patterns of interaction with nostalgic posts on platforms like Instagram and Facebook. This study highlights how social media has become a space where people relive and celebrate their memories, creating a shared culture of nostalgia in the digital age.***

Keywords: Digital Nostalgia, Social Media Culture, Sentimental Reflections, Memory and Identity, Nostalgic Content, User Engagement, Cultural Trends

I. INTRODUCTION

1) Understanding Social Media: The Dominance of Facebook and Instagram

Social media platforms have become an integral part of modern life, fundamentally reshaping how individuals connect, communicate, and preserve memories. Among these platforms, Facebook and Instagram stand out as global leaders, influencing billions of users worldwide. Facebook, with its comprehensive features such as posts, photo albums, and the iconic "On This Day" reminder, provides a digital diary that allows users to revisit their personal histories. Instagram, with its focus on visual storytelling, offers users an opportunity to curate their life moments through photos, videos, and interactive stories. Both platforms have not only changed the way people engage with each other but also how they engage with their own past, making nostalgia an inseparable element of their user experience.

The widespread adoption of Facebook and Instagram has created a space where users actively curate, store, and revisit their digital memories. By facilitating the sharing of life's moments, milestones, and even mundane events, these platforms have turned the personal act of reminiscing into a communal activity. This shift has given rise to a new cultural phenomenon: digital nostalgia, where technology becomes a bridge between the past and the present.

2) Nostalgia in the Digital Age

Nostalgia, once triggered by tangible objects such as photographs, letters, or mementos, has taken on an entirely new dimension in the digital age. Today, digital platforms like Facebook and Instagram have become powerful tools for invoking memories, allowing users to reflect on their past in an effortless, curated, and highly interactive manner. Features like Facebook's "Memories" or Instagram's use of hashtags such as #ThrowbackThursday and #FlashbackFriday encourage users to engage with moments that hold personal significance.

In the digital age, nostalgia is no longer confined to personal recollections but becomes a shared experience. Users can celebrate milestones, anniversaries, or childhood memories with friends and followers, receiving likes, comments, and emotional engagement in return. This shared nostalgia transforms individual reflections into collective memory, giving rise to a sense of belonging and interconnectedness. Facebook and Instagram have successfully made nostalgia an accessible, everyday phenomenon, deeply embedded in their platforms' design and functionality.

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3) The Role of Facebook and Instagram in Cultivating Digital Nostalgia

Facebook and Instagram have played a transformative role in how nostalgia is experienced and shared. Facebook, the older of the two platforms, emphasizes memory retrieval through its "On This Day" feature, which allows users to revisit posts, photos, and interactions from specific dates in previous years. This feature not only rekindles forgotten memories but also invites users to reflect on their personal growth and relationships over time. Similarly, Instagram capitalizes on its visually driven design, enabling users to post aesthetically curated throwbacks that resonate emotionally with their audience.

The interactive nature of these platforms further amplifies their nostalgic appeal. A post celebrating a childhood photo or a travel memory can spark conversations, comments, and reactions, turning a solitary moment of reflection into a communal experience. Instagram's use of stories and reels also offers users creative ways to narrate and relive their past, often with the added elements of music, captions, and filters. Both platforms make nostalgia a dynamic, interactive experience that fosters emotional connections among users.

Moreover, by archiving content, Facebook and Instagram function as digital time capsules. Users can effortlessly scroll back through years of memories, gaining instant access to moments that may otherwise have faded over time. This archival feature not only preserves personal histories but also helps shape users' sense of identity, as they revisit and reinterpret the moments that define them.

4) Why Digital Nostalgia Matters

Digital nostalgia on Facebook and Instagram holds profound significance, both individually and socially. For individuals, engaging with nostalgic content provides a sense of comfort, stability, and emotional grounding. In a fast-paced, ever-changing digital world, the ability to pause and revisit cherished memories offers a welcome reprieve. Users can reconnect with their past selves, relive joyous occasions, and even find solace in bittersweet moments. This act of revisiting the past reinforces their personal identity and helps bridge the gap between who they were and who they are today.

At the societal level, digital nostalgia fosters shared cultural experiences. Posts highlighting common milestones, such as school graduations, childhood games, or popular trends, resonate with diverse audiences, creating a sense of community. On Instagram, for example, a photo of a vintage toy or a childhood snack can spark a wave of engagement from users who share similar memories. Similarly, Facebook's memory-sharing features often remind users of group events, friendships, and shared achievements, encouraging a collective celebration of the past.

In this way, Facebook and Instagram serve as modern-day storytellers, capturing and preserving the moments that matter most. Their role in cultivating digital nostalgia is not merely incidental but central to their design, as they continue to redefine how individuals and communities engage with the past in meaningful and lasting ways.

5) Objectives of the Study

- To explore how Facebook and Instagram contribute to the creation and consumption of digital nostalgia culture.
- To examine users' motivations for engaging with nostalgic content on social media and its impact on their emotional well-being.
- To identify the types of nostalgic content most commonly interacted with and the ways users engage with such posts.
- To analyze the role of social media in shaping users' sense of personal identity and fostering connections through shared nostalgic experiences.

6) Scope of the Study

This study focuses on understanding how social media platforms especially Facebook and Instagram shape digital nostalgia culture by examining user interactions with nostalgic content on these platforms. It explores the types of nostalgic content users engage with, the motivations behind such interactions, and their emotional and social impacts. By analyzing how features like Facebook's "Memories" and Instagram's visual storytelling foster nostalgia, the study aims to uncover the broader implications of social media in preserving personal and cultural memories.

The findings are relevant to researchers, social media platforms, and users, offering insights into the evolving dynamics of memory, identity, and emotional well-being in the digital age.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review is a comprehensive summary and critical analysis of existing research, studies, and academic writings on a specific topic or area of study. It serves as the foundation for new research by providing an overview of what is already known, identifying gaps in knowledge, and contextualizing the current study within the broader scholarly conversation.

1) "Keeping Memories Alive: A Decennial Study of Social Media"

Anderson in 2015 explores how social media plays a role in helping users preserve and recall personal memories over a decade-long period through his work.It explores how platforms like Facebook and Instagram act as digital archives, allowing users to store, retrieve, and relive moments from their lives. The paper highlights the significance of Facebook's "On This Day" feature and Instagram's #ThrowbackThursday in creating recurring cycles of nostalgia. The research also delves into how these features impact emotional well-being, with findings suggesting that users experience both joy and reflection when revisiting older posts. The study emphasizes the importance of these platforms in bridging generational gaps and facilitating collective memory creation.

2) "*Nostalgiacores and the Algorithmic Culture of Digital Platforms"*

The article Nostalgiacores and the Algorithmic Culture of Digital Platforms by Martinez in 2018examines the emergence of nostalgic subcultures or "nostalgiacores" on platforms like Instagram. It focuses on how algorithms influence the visibility and popularity of nostalgic content, often leading to the creation of communities centered around shared memories. The study discusses the blending of personal nostalgia with popular culture, such as vintage aesthetics and retro music, that appeals to younger generations. It also critiques the commodification of nostalgia by platforms, as algorithms are designed to promote content that maximizes user engagement. The research provides a critical lens on how nostalgia is curated, consumed, and monetized in the digital age.

3) "The Good Old Days': An Examination of Nostalgia in Facebook Posts"

Patel through his work 'The Good Old Days': An Examination of Nostalgia in Facebook Posts in 2017 investigates how nostalgia manifests in Facebook posts, focusing on the emotional tones and themes users employ when reflecting on their past. By analyzing a large sample of Facebook posts, the research categorizes nostalgic content into personal milestones, shared cultural experiences, and collective events such as holidays or festivals. It reveals that nostalgia often serves as a coping mechanism, helping users deal with present challenges by reminiscing about simpler or happier times. The findings highlight how nostalgia fosters emotional connections between users, enhancing the sense of community on the platform.

4) "Digital Nostalgia and Mediated Authenticity on Instagram"

Lee in 2019 explores the intersection of nostalgia and authenticity on Instagram. This research explores the intersection of nostalgia and authenticity on Instagram. It argues that users curate nostalgic content to evoke authenticity in their online personas. The paper examines the use of filters, captions, and retro aesthetics in posts, noting how these elements help recreate a sense of the past. The study also delves into how Instagram users seek to balance the curated nature of social media with the raw emotional appeal of nostalgic memories. Findings suggest that nostalgia serves as a tool for self-expression, allowing users to connect with their followers on a more emotional level.

5) "Quantified Nostalgia: Social Media, Metrics, and Memory"

Jacobsen and Beer in 2021, introduce the concept of "quantified nostalgia" to describe how engagement metrics such as likes, shares, and comments influence the value users assign to their digital memories. It critiques how these metrics create a feedback loop, encouraging users to share more nostalgic content to gain validation and attention from their networks. The paper examines the psychological effects of this phenomenon, noting that while users may feel more connected to their past, they may also become overly reliant on external validation. The study highlights the dual role of social media as both a memory-preserving tool and a platform that commodifies personal experiences.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed in this study to investigate the role of social media in shaping digital nostalgia culture. It encompasses the definitions of key terms, the theoretical framework, the methods used for data collection, the sample details, and the study's limitations.

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1) Keyword Definitions

- Digital Nostalgia: A sentimental longing for the past that is experienced through digital platforms, particularly social media.
- Social Media Culture: The behaviors, norms, and social practices that emerge from the interactions and exchanges occurring on social media platforms.
- User Engagement: The ways in which users interact with online content, including liking, sharing, and commenting on posts.
- Nostalgic Content: Posts or media that evoke memories of the past, often featuring personal or culturally significant images, videos, or stories.

2) Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two key theories:

- Uses and Gratifications Theory: This theory posits that individuals actively seek out media to satisfy specific needs and desires. In the context of digital nostalgia, users may engage with nostalgic content to fulfill emotional needs such as connection, identity reinforcement, and escapism.
- Media Richness Theory: This theory suggests that different types of media provide varying levels of richness or depth in communication. Social media platforms, with their combination of text, images, and videos, allow for rich and engaging expressions of nostalgia, enhancing the emotional connection users have with their memories.

3) Method

A quantitative research design was employed for this study, utilizing a questionnaire survey as the primary data collection tool. The survey was structured to capture insights on user motivations, emotional responses, and interaction patterns with nostalgic posts on social media.

- Questionnaire Development: A structured questionnaire was developed, comprising closed-ended questions to quantify user engagement and emotional responses to nostalgic content. The questions were designed to align with the study's key themes and theoretical framework.
- Sample Size and Selection: The study included a random sample of 100 participants selected from various demographics to ensure diversity in responses. The selection was made to capture a wide range of user experiences related to social media nostalgia.
- Data Collection Method: The questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms, allowing participants to respond conveniently online. Invitations to partake in the study were shared through social media platforms, enhancing the relevance of the sample population.

4) Limitations of the Study

Although this study provides valuable insights into digital nostalgia culture, several limitations should be acknowledged:

- Sample Size: While a sample of 100 responses allows for generalization, a larger sample size could enhance the robustness and reliability of the findings.
- Self-Reporting Bias: The reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias, as participants may present responses that align with social desirability or overlook certain aspects of their engagement with nostalgic content.
- Cultural Variability: The study may not fully capture the nuances of how digital nostalgia varies across different cultures, as the sample may be predominantly drawn from specific demographic groups.
- Temporal Factor: The experiences of nostalgia identified may be influenced by recent events or changes in participants' lives, which cannot be controlled during data collection.

IV. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter focuses on the collection and analysis of data gathered through a structured questionnaire aimed at understanding user engagement with nostalgic content on Facebook and Instagram. The survey captured various aspects, including platform usage patterns, frequency of using social media platforms, types of content engaged with, and emotional responses. The data collected will be presented through charts and graphs, followed by a detailed analysis to interpret user behavior and trends related to digital nostalgia.

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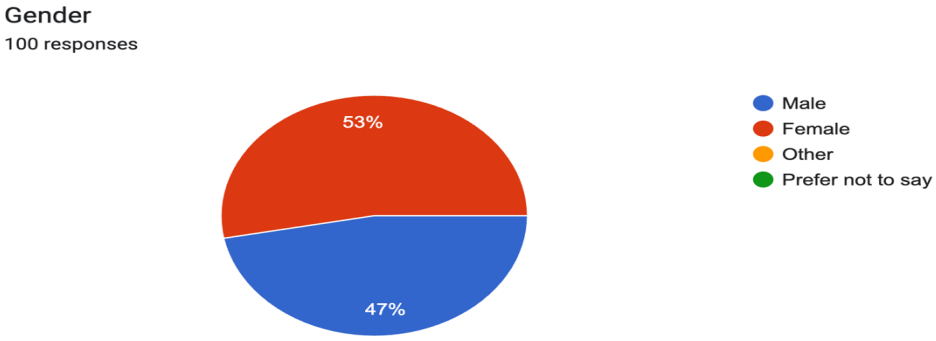


Figure 4:1

The chart shows that 53% of respondents identify as female and 47% as male, the analysis would note the predominance of female respondents.

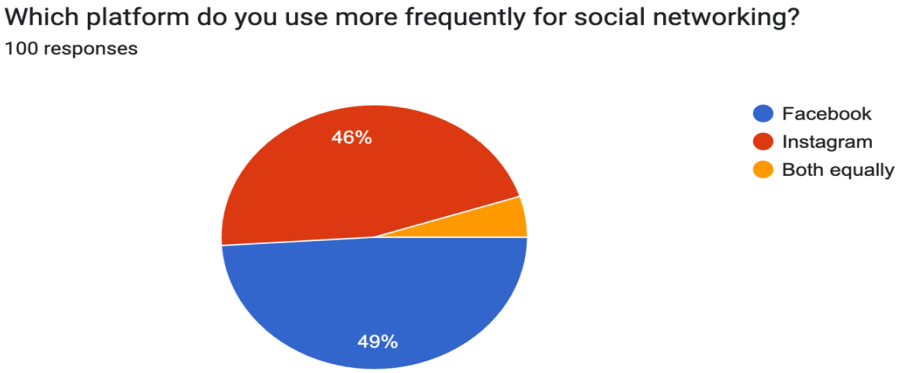


Figure 4:2

49% of respondents use Facebook more frequently and 46% of respondents use Instagram more frequently. 5% of respondents use both platforms equally. This indicates that Facebook is slightly more popular than Instagram among the respondents, with a small percentage using both platforms equally.

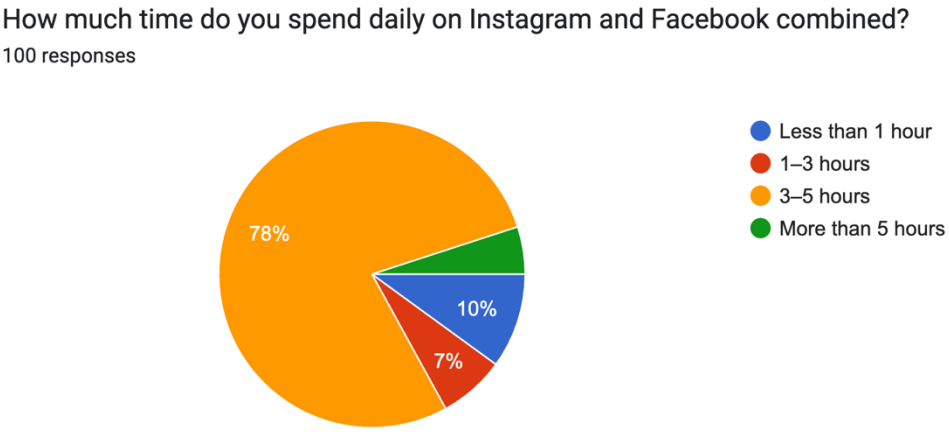


Figure 4:3

This pie chart illustrates the distribution of time spent daily on Instagram and Facebook combined, based on 100 responses. The largest segment, representing 78% of respondents, spends 1–3 hours daily on these platforms. A smaller portion, 10%, spends less than 1 hour, while 7% spend 3–5 hours. The smallest group, 5%, spends more than 5 hours. This data highlights that most users dedicate a moderate amount of time (1–3 hours) to these social media platforms daily.

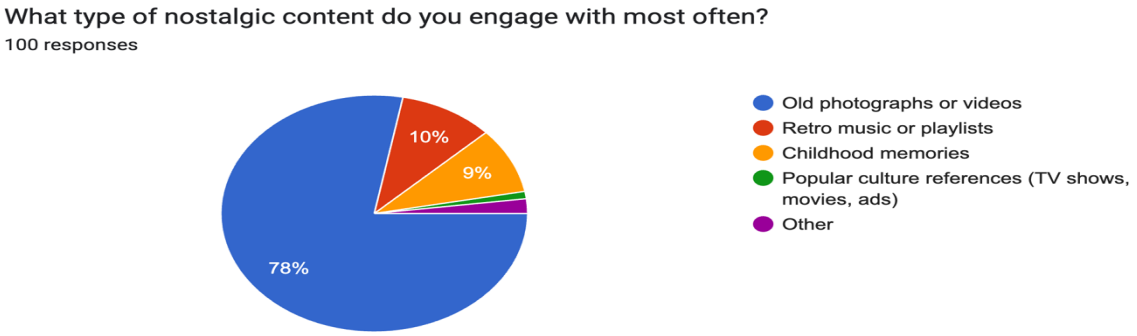


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78% of respondents enjoys old photographs or videos as nostalgic content and 10% consumes retro music or playlists followed by childhood memories by 9%.

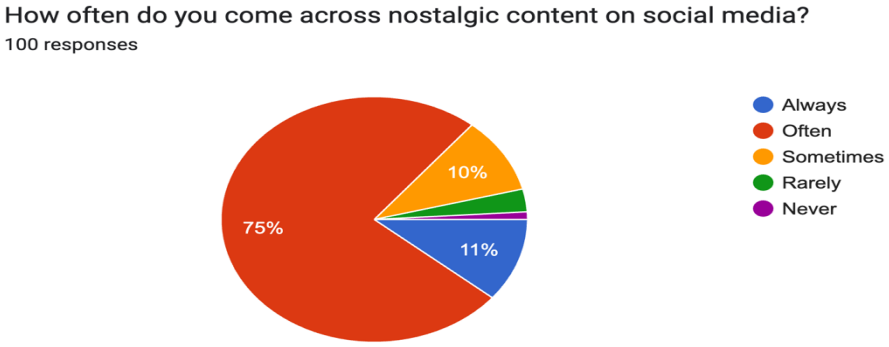


Figure 4.5

The majority of respondents (75%) indicated that they "Often" come across nostalgic content, followed by 11% who selected "Always." A smaller portion, 10%, reported "Sometimes" encountering such content, while only 3% and 1% chose "Rarely" and "Never," respectively. This suggests that nostalgic content is a common experience for most users on social media platforms.

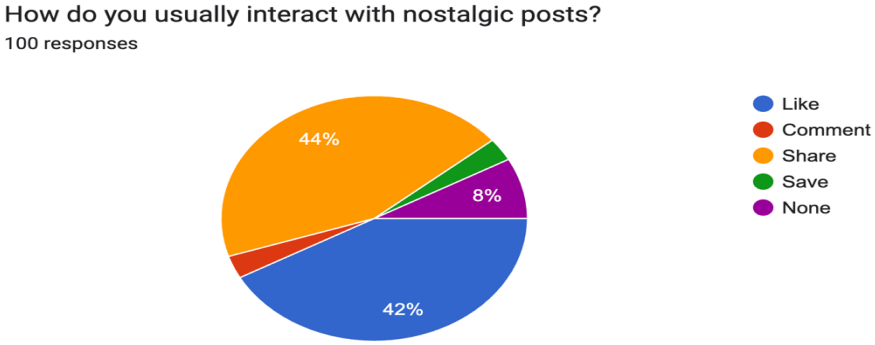


Figure 4.:6

The pie chart illustrates how people typically interact with nostalgic posts on social media, based on 100 responses. The most common interaction is sharing, accounting for 44% of responses, followed closely by liking at 42%. commenting nostalgic posts is less frequent, indicating that all participants engage with nostalgic posts in some way.

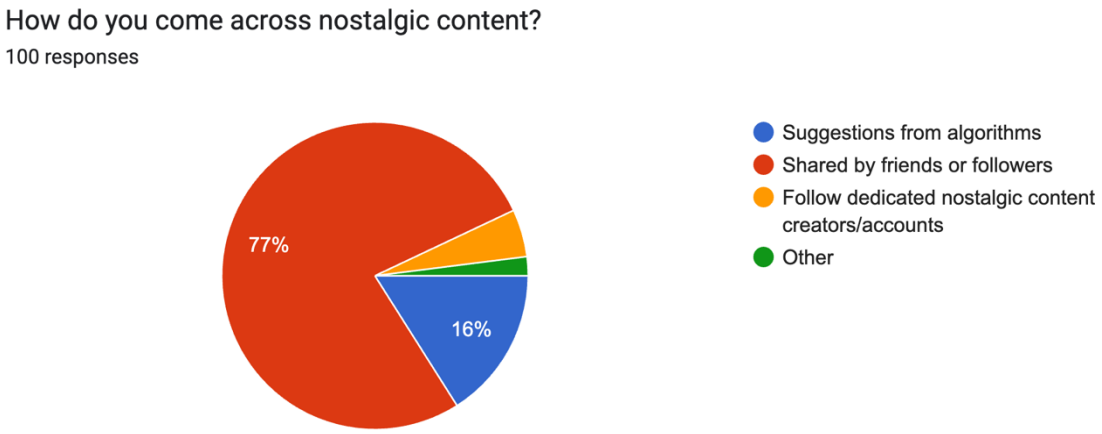


Figure 4:5

The largest portion, 77%, indicates that nostalgic content is most commonly shared by friends or followers. Suggestions from algorithms account for 16%, while 5% of respondents follow dedicated nostalgic content creators or accounts. A small 2% falls under the "Other" category. This data highlights the significant role of social sharing in encountering nostalgic material compared to algorithmic suggestions or specific content creators.

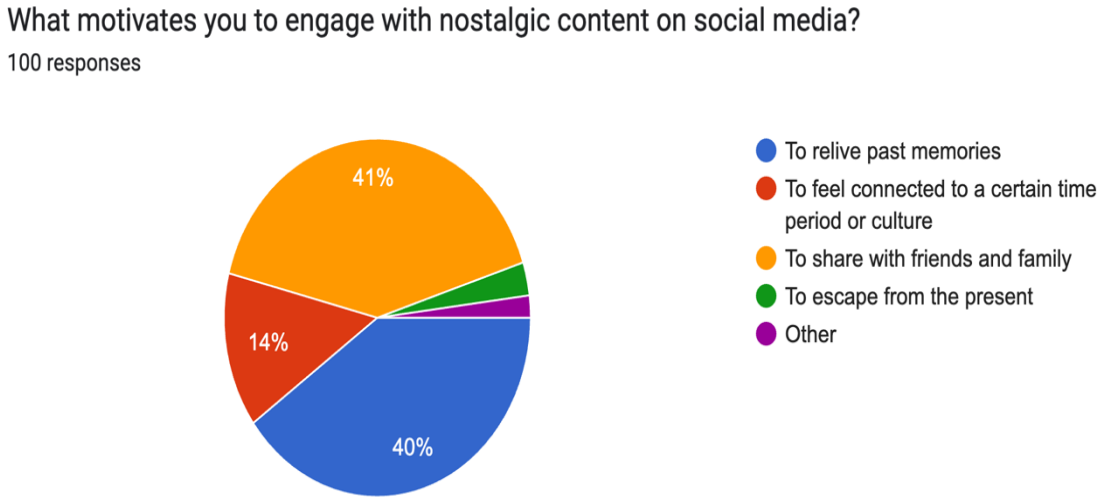


Figure 4:6

The largest segment, representing 41%, indicates that people engage with nostalgic content "To share with friends and family," Close behind, 40% of respondents do so "To relive past memories. A smaller portion, 14%, engages ‘’To feel connected to certain time period or culture’’ while only 4% use nostalgic content "To escape from the present." The smallest category, "Other," accounts for just 1%. This data highlights that personal and cultural connections are the primary drivers of nostalgic engagement on social media.

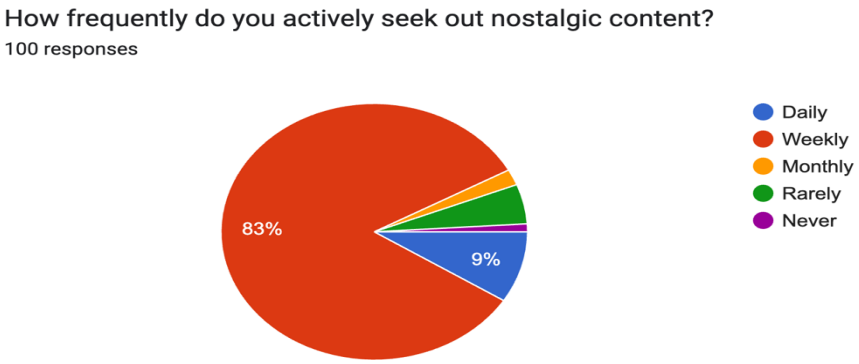


Figure 4:7

The data shows that a significant majority (83%) seek nostalgic content on a weekly basis, followed by 9% who do so daily, with smaller percentages for monthly and rarely frequencies. The distribution strongly suggests that actively seeking nostalgic content is a regular habit for most respondents, with weekly consumption being the overwhelmingly preferred frequency.

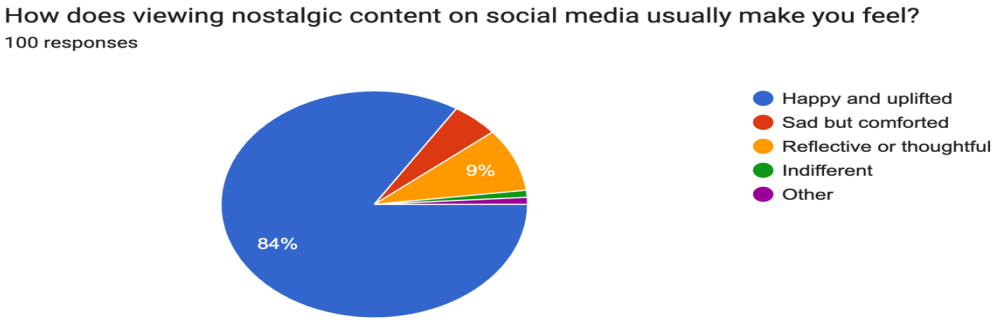


Figure 4:8

The majority of the respondents believes that viewing nostalgic content on social media usually makes them happy and uplifted. 9% believes reflective and thoughtful to the nostalgic contents on social media platforms.

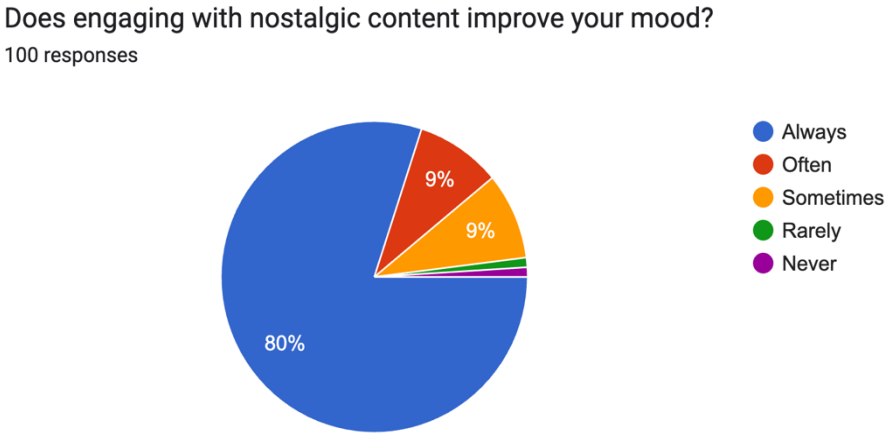


Figure 4:9

The data reveals an overwhelming majority of 80% of respondents indicating that nostalgic content "Always" improves their mood, represented by the large blue segment. The remaining responses are split between "Often" and "Sometimes" at about 9% each (shown in red and orange), with a very small percentage indicating "Rarely" or "Never" (shown in green and purple slices). This distribution strongly suggests that nostalgic content has a significantly positive impact on people's moods for the vast majority of respondents.

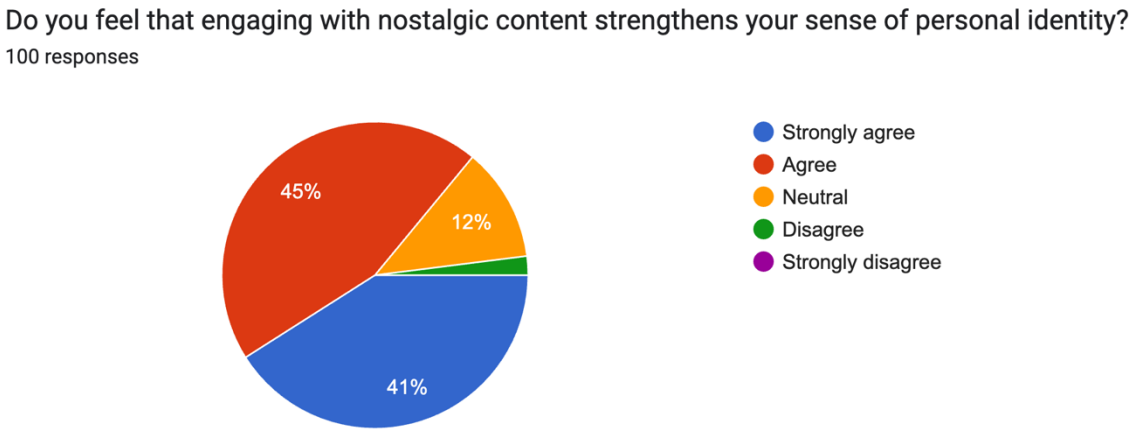


Figure 4:10

The chart is divided into five segments: "Strongly agree" (41%), "Agree" (12%), "Neutral" (2%), "Disagree" (45%), and "Strongly disagree" (0%). The majority of respondents either "Strongly agree" or "Disagree," indicating a polarized perspective on the topic, with minimal neutrality and no strong disagreement. This suggests that nostalgic content has a significant but varied impact on individuals' sense of personal identity.

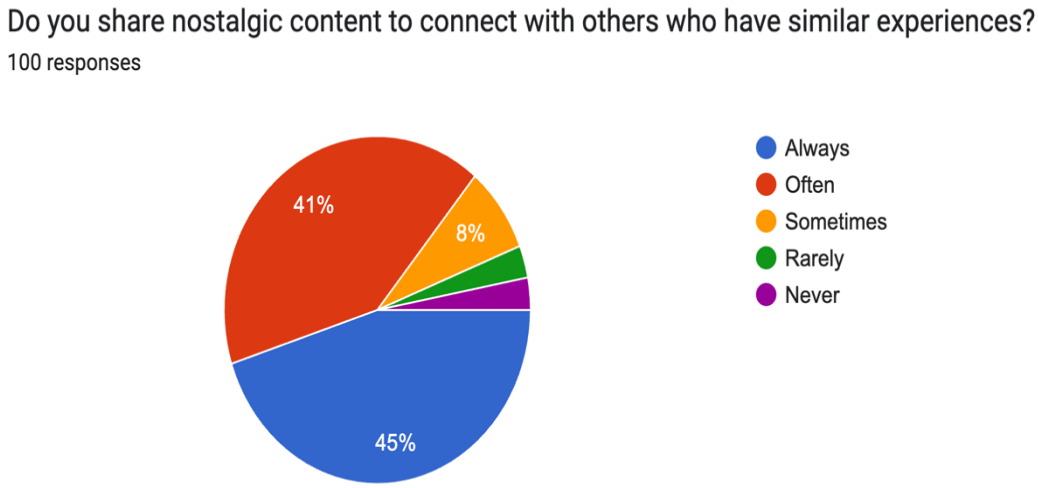


Figure 4:11

Out of 100 responses, the majority of participants indicated that they share nostalgic content frequently, with 45% responding "Always" and 41% responding "Often." A smaller portion of respondents selected "Sometimes" (8%), while only 3% chose "Rarely" and another 3% chose "Never." This suggests that sharing nostalgic content is a common way for people to connect with others who have similar experiences.

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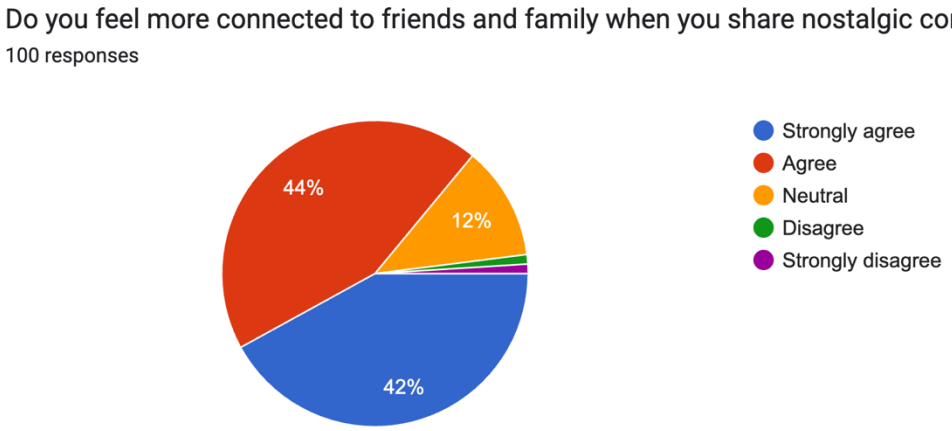


Figure 4:12

The majority of respondents either "Agree" (44%) or "Strongly agree" (42%), indicating that most people feel a stronger connection when sharing nostalgic content. A smaller portion remains "Neutral" (12%), while very few "Disagree" or "Strongly disagree," represented by minimal slices in green and purple, respectively. This suggests a strong positive sentiment toward the idea that sharing nostalgic content fosters connection with loved ones.

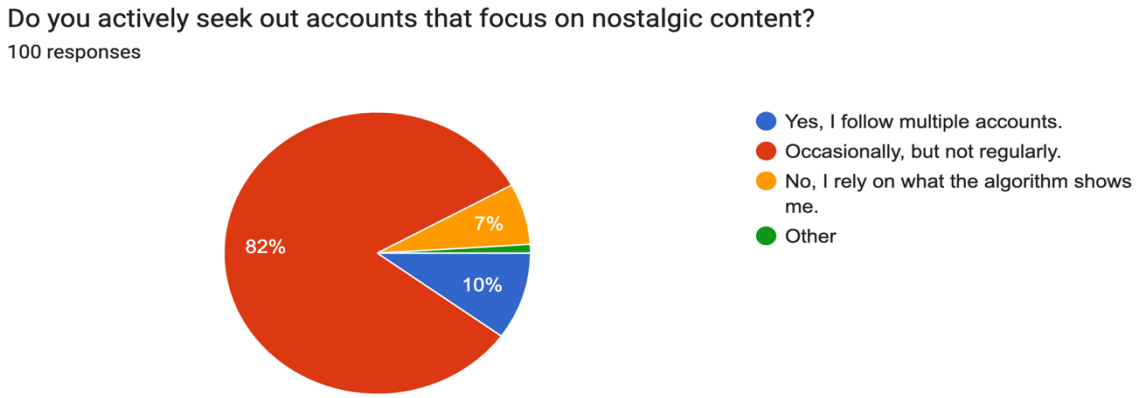


Figure 4:13

82% of respondents occasionally follow multiple accounts for seeking of nostalgic content. 10% regularly follows the same and this indicates the power of digital nostalgia.

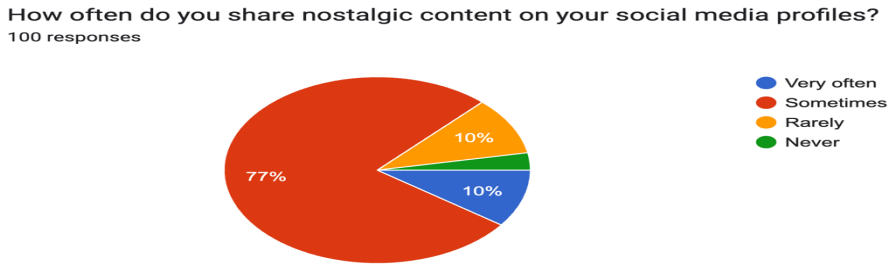


Figure 4:14

The majority number of respondents (77%) sometimes share nostalgic content on their social media profiles and 10% shared very often and rarely. This indicates the feeling of users to get connected with their past.

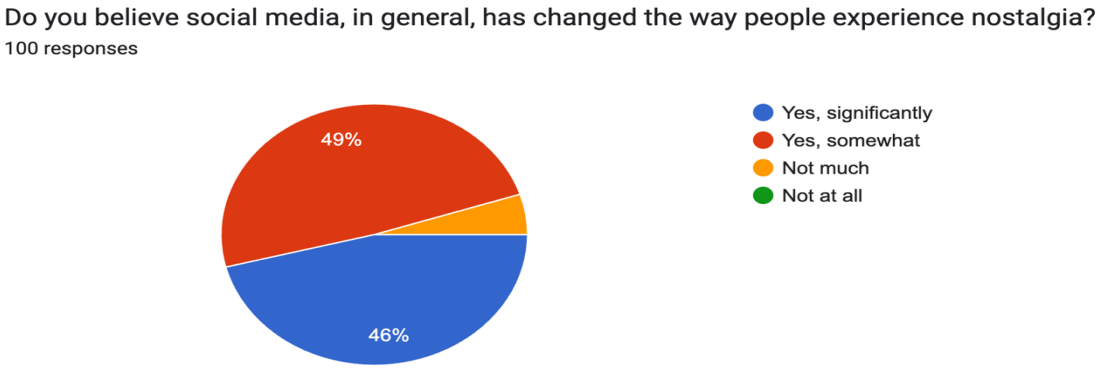


Figure 4:15

49% of respondents believes that social media has changed the way people experienced nostalgia at an extent and 46% believes significantly.

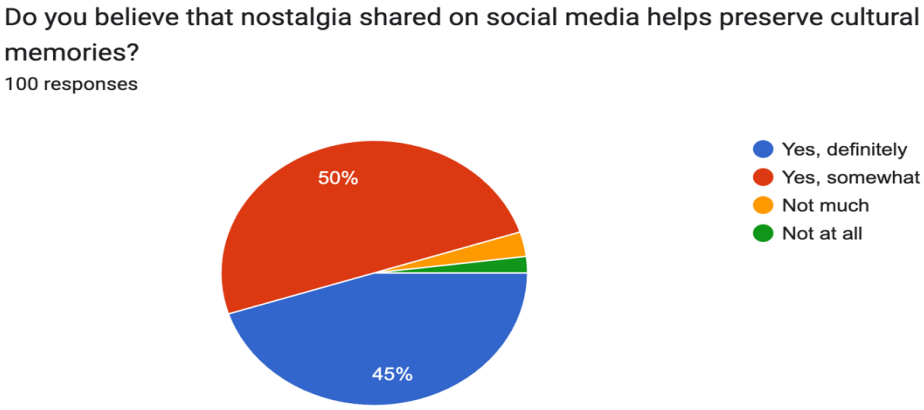


Figure 4:16

According to the respondents answer 50% believes at somewhat extent nostalgia shared on social media helps to preserve cultural or generational memories. And 45% strongly agree this statement.

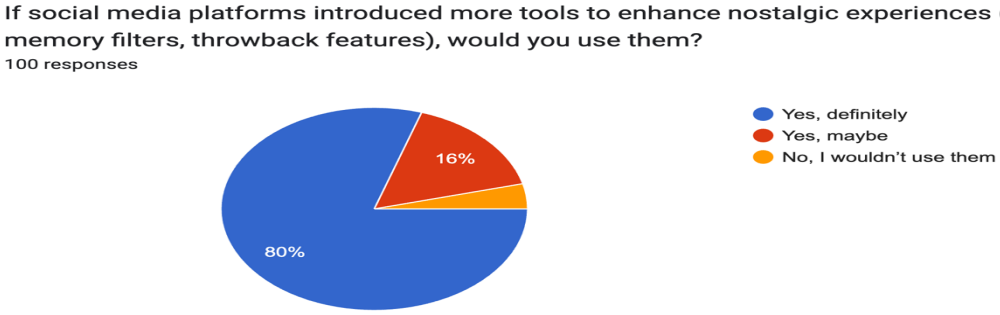


Figure 4:17

The pie chart reveals a compelling insight into users' attitudes toward nostalgic features on social media platforms, with an overwhelming 80% of respondents indicating they would "definitely" use enhanced nostalgic tools (such as memory filters and throwback features), while 16% expressed potential interest with a "maybe" response, and only a minimal 4% showing no interest. This strong positive skew, with a combined 96% showing some level of interest, demonstrates the significant potential for implementing nostalgia-driven features in social media platforms, suggesting that users have a strong emotional connection to their digital memories and are highly receptive to tools that help them revisit and enhance these experiences.

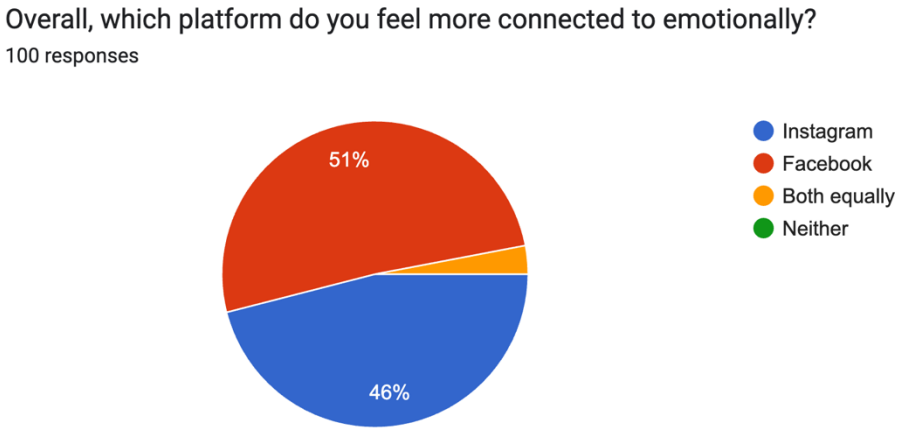


Figure 4:18

This pie chart represents responses from 100 people about which social media platform they feel more emotionally connected to. 46% of the respondents feel more emotionally connected to Instagram. 51% of the respondents feel more emotionally connected to Facebook. A very small portion of respondents (about 3%) indicated they feel equally connected to both platforms. The chart clearly shows that Facebook has a slight edge over Instagram in terms of emotional connection for the respondents, with a 5% higher share.

V. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This study underscores the profound impact of social media platforms, particularly Facebook and Instagram, in cultivating a vibrant digital nostalgia culture that resonates with users on multiple levels. The findings illustrate that engagement with nostalgic content is not merely a fleeting interest but a foundational component of users' online interactions. A significant majority of respondents indicated motivations to share nostalgic moments with friends and family, reflecting an intrinsic need for connection and community. This communal experience of nostalgia fosters a sense of belonging, as users collectively reminisce about shared milestones and cultural references, reinforcing social bonds.

Moreover, the data suggests that nostalgic engagement serves as an emotional refuge for users, providing solace and grounding in times of uncertainty or stress. The ability to revisit cherished memories allows individuals to reflect on their personal histories, facilitating a process of identity affirmation. This is especially relevant in a rapidly evolving digital environment, where users often seek stability and familiarity.

The findings also highlight how the features embedded within these social media platforms, such as Facebook's "On This Day" and Instagram's various throwback hashtags, are designed to encourage nostalgic interactions. These tools not only invite users to engage with their own pasts but also enhance the sharing of those experiences with broader audiences. Such functionalities transform individual reflections into collective narratives, thus bridging generational gaps and promoting cultural continuity.

In light of these insights, it is evident that social media serves as a powerful digital archive, enabling users to curate, preserve, and reflect on their memories and identities. This role transforms platforms into modern-day storytellers, where the past is celebrated and shared in meaningful ways. As users continue to navigate the complexities of modern life, the importance of engaging with nostalgia will likely grow, underpinning the drive for emotional connection and cultural resonance in their online experiences.

Overall, the study highlights the significance of understanding digital nostalgia as a crucial aspect of social media engagement, providing implications for future research and practical applications.

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Future studies could delve deeper into the nuanced ways nostalgia intersects with various demographic factors and explore the psychological impacts of these online engagements. As social media continues to evolve, recognizing and harnessing the emotional power of nostalgia can facilitate more meaningful user experiences and foster deeper connections within the digital landscape.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

1. Gender*

Male
Female
Other
Prefer not to say

2. Which platform do you use more frequently for social networking?*

Facebook
Instagram
Both equally

3. How much time do you spend daily on Instagram and Facebook combined?*

Less than 1 hour
1–3 hours
3–5 hours
More than 5 hours

4. How often do you come across nostalgic content on social media?*

Always
Often
Sometimes
Rarely
Never

5. What type of nostalgic content do you engage with most often?*

Old photographs or videos
Retro music or playlists
Childhood memories
Popular culture references (TV shows, movies, ads)
Other

6. How do you usually interact with nostalgic posts?*

Like
Comment
Share
Save
None

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7. How do you come across nostalgic content?*

Suggestions from algorithms
Shared by friends or followers
Follow dedicated nostalgic content creators/accounts
Other

8. What motivates you to engage with nostalgic content on social media?*

To relive past memories
To feel connected to a certain time period or culture
To share with friends and family
To escape from the present
Other

9. How frequently do you actively seek out nostalgic content?*

Daily
Weekly
Monthly
Rarely
Never

10. How does viewing nostalgic content on social media usually make you feel?*

Happy and uplifted
Sad but comforted
Reflective or thoughtful
Indifferent
Other

11. Does engaging with nostalgic content improve your mood?*

Always
Often
Sometimes
Rarely
Never

12. Do you feel that engaging with nostalgic content strengthens your sense of personal identity?*

Strongly agree
Agree
Neutral
Disagree
Strongly disagree

13. Do you share nostalgic content to connect with others who have similar experiences?*

Always
Often
Sometimes
Rarely
Never

14. Do you feel more connected to friends and family when you share nostalgic content?*

Strongly agree
Agree
Neutral
Disagree
Strongly disagree

15. Do you actively seek out accounts that focus on nostalgic content?*

Yes, I follow multiple accounts.

Occasionally, but not regularly.
No, I rely on what the algorithm shows me.
Other

16. How often do you share nostalgic content on your social media profiles?*

Very often
Sometimes
Rarely
Never

17. Do you believe social media, in general, has changed the way people experience nostalgia?*

Yes, significantly
Yes, somewhat
Not much
Not at all

18. Do you believe that nostalgia shared on social media helps preserve cultural or generational memories?*

Yes, definitely
Yes, somewhat
Not much
Not at all

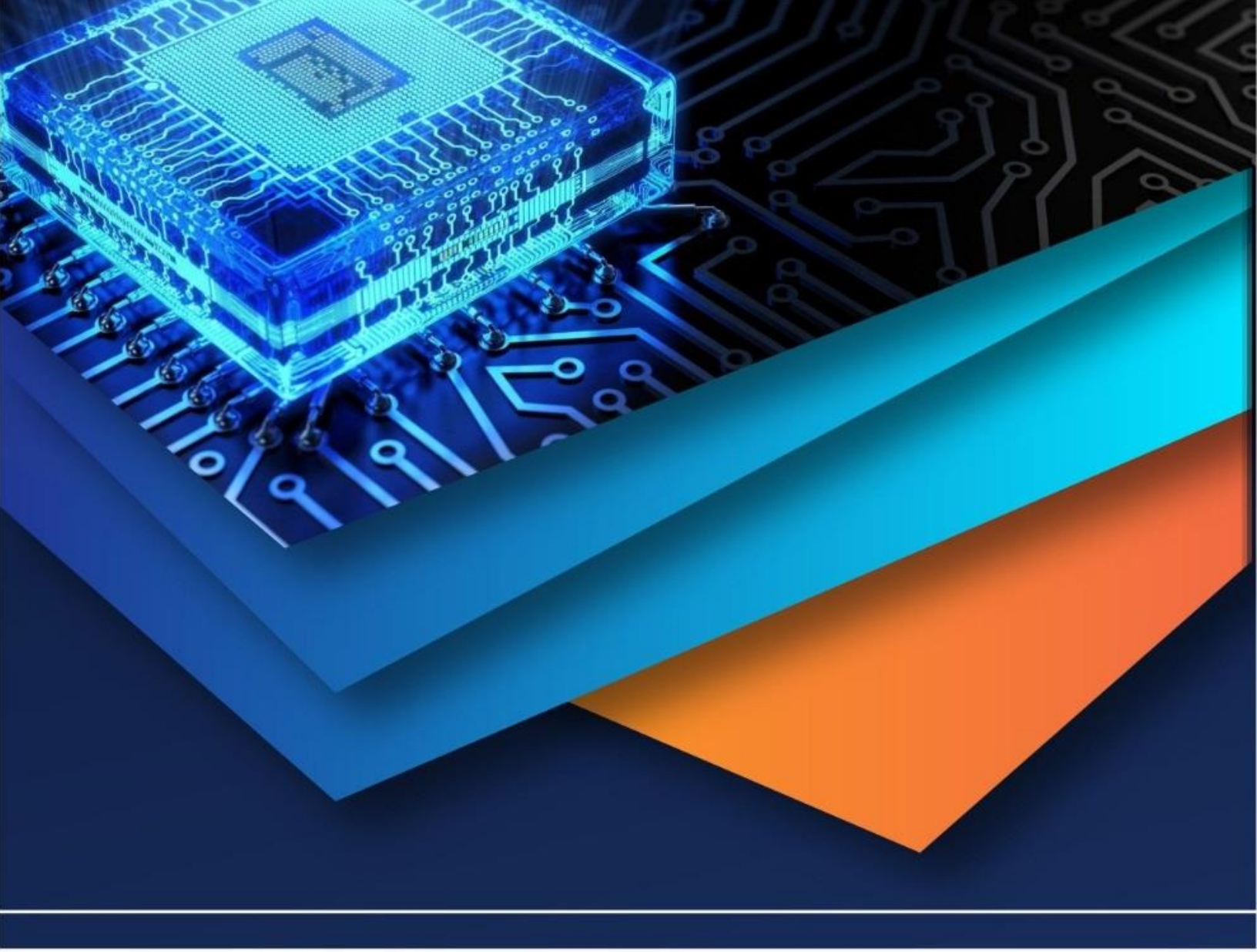
19. If social media platforms introduced more tools to enhance nostalgic experiences (e.g., special memory filters, throwback features), would you use them?*

Yes, definitely
Yes, maybe
No, I wouldn't use them

20. Overall, which platform do you feel more connected to emotionally? *

Instagram
Facebook
Both equally
Neither

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