

Still Hangin' Tough: Nostalgia, Fan Loyalty and the Reinvention of New Kids on the Block (NKOTB)

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ABSTRACT

New Kids on the Block (NKOTB) emerged as one of the most commercially visible American boy bands of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Following its 2008 reunion, the group developed a sustained second career built around nostalgia, long-term fan loyalty, live performance, merchandise, new recordings, and premium fan experiences. This article examines how NKOTB has maintained cultural relevance and commercial viability within the contemporary nostalgia economy. It uses an integrative literature review, qualitative single-case study, and structured document analysis. The documentary corpus includes official artist and record-company announcements, album and tour materials, venue and residency information, and descriptions of premium fan experiences relating primarily to the post-reunion period. Documents were selected through explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, logged by source type and date, and analysed through two-stage coding, thematic comparison, temporal mapping, and pattern matching against concepts from nostalgia, fandom, legacy branding, and the experience economy. A bounded comparison with research on adult Backstreet Boys fandom and retro-branded music concerts is also used to assess which findings may extend beyond NKOTB. The analysis identifies four connected dynamics: autobiographical nostalgia, fan community, continuity combined with reinvention, and the commercial expansion of live experiences. NKOTB's release of *Still Kids*, revival of the Magic Summer identity, and establishment of The Right Stuff Las Vegas residency show how cultural memory can become a contemporary music-business resource. However, premium access and destination-based participation also raise concerns about inequality and the monetisation of loyalty. Because the study relies on documents rather than newly collected interviews or survey responses, its claims concern branding strategies and publicly represented fan relations rather than the private experiences of all fans. The article concludes that NKOTB remains relevant by treating nostalgia as a participatory and adaptable relationship between performers, audiences, and industry intermediaries.

Keywords: New Kids on the Block, boy bands, nostalgia economy, music fandom, legacy branding, popular music, live music

INTRODUCTION

Popular music is commonly organised around ideas of newness, youth and cultural change. Performers are expected to remain current within an industry characterised by changing technologies, audience preferences and modes of consumption. This creates challenges for boy bands because their identities are usually constructed around youthfulness, physical attractiveness, carefully differentiated personalities, choreographed performance and romantic accessibility. When the performers and their original audiences grow older, the continued use of the boy-band identity may appear commercially and culturally contradictory. New Kids on the Block, commonly abbreviated as NKOTB, offers an important case through which to examine this contradiction. The American group consists of Donnie Wahlberg, Joey McIntyre, Danny Wood and brothers Jonathan and Jordan Knight. Formed in Boston during the 1980s, NKOTB became an international popular-culture phenomenon through hit recordings, music videos, concert tours, television appearances and extensive merchandising. Its most commercially successful period was associated with albums such as *Hangin' Tough* and *Step by Step*, which helped establish a business model later adopted by several male pop groups. The group's original popularity

declined during the first half of the 1990s. Following the release of *Face the Music* in 1994, NKOTB entered a prolonged hiatus. However, its 2008 reunion began a second and more sustained career phase. The reunited group did not attempt to present itself as a direct competitor to contemporary teenage performers. Instead, it gradually accepted its position as a legacy boy band whose members and original fans had matured together. This strategy has included new albums, reunion tours, package concerts with other established artists, themed cruises, merchandise, fan conventions, meet-and-greet opportunities and social-media communication. In 2024, NKOTB released *Still Kids*, its first full studio album in 11 years (BMG, 2024). The title communicates both continuity and self-awareness: the members are no longer physically young, but the emotional and symbolic meanings attached to youth remain central to their relationship with fans. The group also revived the *Magic Summer* identity for a 2024 tour featuring Paula Abdul and DJ Jazzy Jeff. The name deliberately recalled NKOTB's 1990 *Magic Summer Tour* while adapting the concept for a contemporary audience. This was followed by *The Right Stuff*, the group's first Las Vegas residency at Dolby Live in Park MGM. Performances were subsequently scheduled through 2026, accompanied by merchandise, destination activities and premium fan experiences (MGM Resorts International, 2026; *New Kids on the Block*, 2026). These developments position NKOTB within what may be termed the nostalgia economy: a commercial environment in which memories, historical identities, cultural heritage and emotional attachments are transformed into marketable recordings, performances products and experiences. Nostalgia in this context is not limited to passive recollection. It is produced through interactions among artists, audiences, media industries, technologies and live-event organisers. This article addresses the following research question:

How have New Kids on the Block used nostalgia, fan engagement and legacy-branding strategies to maintain cultural relevance and commercial viability in the contemporary music industry? Three related objectives guide the discussion:

- To examine how nostalgia and autobiographical memory support NKOTB's continuing relationship with its original audience.
- To analyse how long-term fandom contributes to the preservation and commercial value of the NKOTB brand.
- To compare the NKOTB case with research on other legacy-pop and boy-band audiences to identify strategies that may be transferable beyond a single group.

The article argues that NKOTB's longevity is based on a form of participatory nostalgia. Rather than simply presenting old songs to passive consumers, the group provides settings in which fans collectively revisit their youth, maintain social relationships and contribute to the continuing meaning of the NKOTB brand.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Popular-Music Nostalgia and Autobiographical Memory

Nostalgia refers to an emotional engagement with a meaningful past. Boym (2001) distinguishes between restorative and reflective nostalgia. Restorative nostalgia attempts to reconstruct a lost past as though it could be fully recovered, whereas reflective nostalgia recognises distance, change and the passage of time. The contemporary appeal of NKOTB is more closely associated with reflective nostalgia because neither the performers nor their audiences can literally return to the late 1980s. Instead, they reinterpret that period from their current positions as ageing performers and adult fans. Music is particularly effective as a stimulus for autobiographical memory. Janata et al. (2007) found that familiar popular music can evoke detailed memories connected to particular people, places and life events. Such music-evoked autobiographical memories are often emotionally vivid because songs become attached to meaningful stages of an individual's life.

Research also suggests that music encountered during adolescence and early adulthood may retain particular significance. Loveday et al. (2020) identify a self-defining period in which personally meaningful music becomes closely connected with identity. This is relevant to NKOTB because many original Blockheads first encountered the group during adolescence. Songs such as "I'll Be Loving You (Forever)", "You Got It (The Right Stuff)", "Hangin' Tough" and "Step by Step" may therefore function as more than entertainment. They may represent school friendships, family relationships, first concerts, early romantic feelings or the development

of personal identity. Davis (1979) proposes that nostalgia can support identity continuity during periods of social or personal change. For adult fans, listening to or watching NKOTB may reconnect the present self with an earlier version of the self. The nostalgic music event does not erase adulthood, but it can temporarily reactivate feelings associated with adolescence, excitement and collective belonging. Popular-music nostalgia also exists within wider cultural and industrial structures. Reynolds (2011) uses the term “retromania” to describe popular culture’s growing preoccupation with its own past. Digital platforms intensify this process by making historical songs, videos, interviews and performances continuously available. Earlier media content no longer disappears when its initial commercial cycle ends. It can be rediscovered, circulated and incorporated into contemporary fan practices. However, nostalgia should not automatically be understood as resistance to creativity. Istvandy (2025) argues that revival and renewal may involve new meanings rather than straightforward repetition. Legacy performers can use past material as a foundation for contemporary production, allowing audiences to engage with both historical familiarity and present-day interpretation.

Fandom as Participation and Community

Fandom has frequently been described in dismissive terms, especially when it involves teenage girls and women. Enthusiastic female audiences have historically been represented as irrational, excessively emotional or vulnerable to commercial manipulation. Such representations overlook the knowledge, creativity and social organisation present within fan communities. Jenkins (1992) rejects the idea of audiences as passive recipients and conceptualises fans as active participants who interpret, circulate and transform media content. Through discussion, collecting, creative production and community formation, fans contribute to the cultural meanings associated with performers. Hills (2002) similarly explains that fandom combines emotional investment with cultural knowledge and social identity. Fans develop systems of distinction based on commitment, experience and specialised knowledge. Concert attendance, merchandise ownership and knowledge of a performer’s history can become evidence of authenticity within a fan community. Duffett (2013) emphasises that popular-music fandom is not limited to admiration for celebrities. It also involves relationships among fans and the construction of identities around shared musical attachments. In the case of NKOTB, the name “Blockheads” gives the fan community a recognisable collective identity. The term allows fans to present themselves as members of a continuing social group rather than isolated consumers.

Long-term boy-band fandom is particularly relevant to the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Chin and Morimoto (2018) note that fan identities can continue across major life transitions instead of disappearing when audiences mature. Research on adult Backstreet Boys fans similarly demonstrates how a group and its audience may undergo a mutual transition into maturity, creating new opportunities for engagement once fans become socially and financially independent (Williams, 2018). The continuity of fandom has also been strengthened by digital communication. Social media enables fans to share archival materials, concert photographs, personal memories and information about upcoming events. It maintains engagement between official album and touring cycles and permits fans to organise travel, accommodation and group attendance. For legacy performers, digital fandom therefore represents an important form of cultural labour. Fans circulate promotional content, maintain the visibility of the group and introduce its music to family members or younger audiences. Although this activity may not be formally compensated, it contributes to the durability of the artist’s brand.

Legacy Branding and the Experience Economy

A legacy artist possesses historical recognition, an established catalogue and an audience with long-term emotional attachments. Nevertheless, cultural heritage alone does not guarantee continuing success. The legacy identity must be maintained and reinterpreted in ways that remain meaningful within the contemporary market. Retro branding involves the revival of products, images or experiences associated with an earlier period. Brown et al. (2003) argue that successful retro brands combine familiarity with renewal. They remain recognisable while incorporating sufficient change to avoid becoming static reproductions. Russell et al. (2019) demonstrate that retro-branded music concerts can connect past and present through nostalgic imagery, performance and audience experience. Nostalgia proneness may strengthen consumers’ emotional responses and their attachment to the revived brand. In the case of NKOTB, recognisable songs, choreography, visual symbols and member identities provide continuity, while new recordings, staging and digital engagement provide renewal. Pine and Gilmore’s (1999) concept of the experience economy is also relevant. In an experience economy, consumers

purchase memorable participation rather than only physical goods or basic services. A live concert creates value through atmosphere, emotional involvement, social interaction and a sense of occasion.

Live music is especially important in an era when recorded music is widely accessible through streaming. The recording can be reproduced almost without limitation, but physical presence at a performance remains scarce. VIP packages, backstage access, photographs and meet-and-greet opportunities further differentiate the experience by creating levels of exclusivity. This experience-based model is highly compatible with nostalgia. A fan is not merely purchasing the opportunity to hear a familiar song. The fan is purchasing entry into a temporary environment in which personal history, collective memory and social relationships can be performed.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts an integrative literature review combined with a qualitative single-case-study design and structured document analysis. An integrative review is appropriate when a research problem requires theoretical, empirical, historical, and industry materials to be interpreted together (Snyder, 2019; Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). The case-study design enables detailed examination of a contemporary cultural and commercial phenomenon within its wider context (Yin, 2018). NKOTB was selected because the group achieved major youth-market success, experienced a prolonged hiatus, and then established a durable post-reunion career. The principal unit of analysis is the group's post-2008 legacy-brand strategy, with particular attention to the 2024-2026 album, touring, and residency cycle. The study is document based. It does not claim to report original fan attitudes, private executive decision-making, or the intentions of band members beyond what is expressed in publicly available materials. This boundary is important because documentary representations of fandom and branding cannot substitute for direct interviews or survey evidence.

Literature-Search and Selection Strategy

The literature search was organised around six concept clusters: popular-music nostalgia; music-evoked autobiographical memory; participatory and adult fandom; boy-band ageing and career continuity; retro and legacy branding; and live music within the experience economy. Search terms included combinations of "popular music nostalgia," "music autobiographical memory," "adult music fandom," "boy-band fandom," "legacy artists," "retro branding," "nostalgia concerts," and "experience economy." Sources were included when they (a) were peer-reviewed articles, scholarly books, or academic chapters; (b) offered a concept or empirical finding directly relevant to the research question; and (c) contributed to interpretation of nostalgia, fan loyalty, branding, ageing performers, or live experience. Foundational works were retained when they supplied essential theoretical concepts. Sources were excluded when they were only tangentially related, duplicated arguments already represented in the corpus, lacked identifiable authorship, or offered promotional claims without analytical value. The review was integrative rather than exhaustive and did not constitute a statistical meta-analysis.

Documentary Corpus and Selection

The case-study corpus comprised official artist announcements, record-company releases, album information, tour and venue materials, residency schedules, and descriptions of VIP or destination-based fan experiences. The main documentary period was 2008-2026, while earlier material was used only to establish the historical meaning of the legacy brand. Documents were included when they directly addressed at least one of four case dimensions: reunion and continued touring; the positioning of Still Kids; the revival of the Magic Summer identity; or The Right Stuff Las Vegas residency and related fan experiences. Official sources were prioritised for dates, product descriptions, schedules, and promotional language. Duplicate announcements, unsourced fan reposts, brief entertainment items with no original information, and documents unrelated to the research question were excluded. Because official materials serve commercial purposes, they were treated as strategic representations rather than neutral accounts. A source log was used to record document type, producer, publication date, relevance to the research question, and the case event to which each item referred.

Coding and Analytical Procedures

Analysis proceeded in four stages. First, all selected materials were read closely and entered into an evidence matrix organised by source type, date, case event, and relevant theoretical concept. Second, first-cycle coding identified descriptive features such as historical references, fan-address terms, continuity claims, newness claims, exclusivity, premium access, community language, and experience design. Third, second-cycle coding grouped these codes into broader analytical categories: autobiographical nostalgia, participatory fandom, continuity and reinvention, and commercialised experience. Fourth, the categories were compared across events and interpreted through Boym's reflective nostalgia, Jenkins's participatory fandom, retro-branding theory, and the experience-economy framework. The study used thematic analysis, temporal mapping, and pattern matching. Thematic analysis identified recurring meanings across the literature and documents. Temporal mapping compared how the group's branding evolved from reunion activity to new recordings, revived tour identities, and residency-based experiences. Pattern matching assessed whether the NKOTB evidence corresponded with theoretical expectations concerning reflective nostalgia, active fandom, retro-brand renewal, and experiential consumption. Negative or complicating evidence, including restricted access, premium pricing, and dependence on historical material, was retained to avoid presenting the case as uniformly successful.

Comparative Logic

A bounded comparative analysis was added to assess transferability beyond NKOTB. The NKOTB findings were compared with Williams's (2018) discussion of transitions and maturity in fan cultures, including adult Backstreet Boys fandom, and with Russell et al.'s (2019) study of retro-branded music concerts. The comparison does not claim equivalence among artists. Instead, it tests whether three mechanisms recur across cases: ageing alongside an established audience, combining familiar brand cues with renewed content, and converting memory into participatory live experiences.

Research Rigour and Limitations

Methodological rigour was strengthened through transparent selection criteria, a documented source log, an evidence matrix, staged coding, theoretical pattern matching, and attention to contradictory evidence. The analysis also distinguishes factual documentary information from interpretive claims. Nevertheless, the absence of original interviews or survey data limits the study's ability to describe how individual fans, promoters, executives, or band members understand nostalgia and loyalty. Primary qualitative research is therefore recommended as a subsequent phase rather than being simulated within the present document-based study.

Table 1. Document-selection, coding, and analytical framework

Analytical stage	Procedure	Examples of codes/evidence	Purpose
Source selection	Apply inclusion and exclusion criteria; record sources in a log	Official announcements, album information, tour and residency materials, scholarly literature	Create a transparent and relevant corpus
First-cycle coding	Code descriptive features in each source	Historical reference, fan address, newness, continuity, exclusivity, community, premium access	Identify observable branding and fandom features
Second-cycle coding	Group codes into analytical themes	Autobiographical nostalgia, participatory fandom, legacy renewal, commercialised experience	Develop higher-level explanations
Cross-case interpretation	Use temporal mapping, theory-based pattern matching, and bounded comparison	NKOTB events; adult Backstreet Boys fandom; retro-branded concerts	Assess change over time and possible transferability

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From Teen Idols to a Legacy Music Brand

NKOTB's original brand was created through the combination of music, choreography, member personalities, visual media and merchandise. Each member was presented with recognisable characteristics, allowing fans to choose a favourite member while remaining attached to the group. The brand extended far beyond recordings. Posters, clothing, dolls and other merchandise integrated NKOTB into the daily lives of fans. Although this merchandising strategy was sometimes criticised as over-commercialisation, it created an immersive cultural environment. The group was present in bedrooms, school conversations, friendships and consumer practices. NKOTB's success also contributed to the commercial framework later associated with groups such as Backstreet Boys, NSYNC and subsequent global idol groups. However, its history must be placed within a longer racial and musical genealogy. Producer Maurice Starr had previously worked with New Edition, and the NKOTB sound drew from African American pop, soul and rhythm-and-blues traditions. The group's history therefore reflects wider questions concerning racialised marketing and the circulation of Black musical styles within mainstream pop. During the 1990s, changing musical tastes reduced the commercial power of the group's teenage image. Grunge, hip-hop, alternative rock and contemporary R&B gained prominence, while highly manufactured pop became a frequent subject of criticism. Yet the emotional significance of NKOTB did not disappear when the group entered its hiatus. Earlier songs, images and merchandise continued to connect fans with meaningful life periods. The 2008 reunion activated this retained emotional value. The group could no longer be promoted convincingly through literal youthfulness. Instead, it reconstructed itself as a legacy brand whose ageing process was shared with its audience.

Nostalgia as a Shared Performance

NKOTB concerts activate music-evoked autobiographical memory. When fans hear songs first encountered during adolescence, they may remember specific friendships, bedrooms, magazines, television performances or earlier concerts. The emotional response is consequently directed toward both the group and the fan's personal history. The contemporary concert enables these memories to become collective. Thousands of audience members sing the same songs while recognising that they share similar generational experiences. Nostalgia is transformed from an individual memory into a public performance of cultural belonging. The group's current presentation demonstrates reflective rather than restorative nostalgia. NKOTB does not completely recreate the late 1980s or deny that its members have aged. Instead, the performances often use humour and self-awareness to acknowledge the distance between the group's original "New Kids" identity and its mature status. The album title *Still Kids* captures this position. The title does not need to be interpreted as a literal claim of youth. It suggests that playfulness, enthusiasm and emotional connections associated with youth can remain accessible in adulthood. In this way, ageing is transformed from a threat to the brand into one of its central themes. The Magic Summer 2024 Tour used a similar strategy. By reviving the name of the group's 1990 tour, NKOTB offered immediate historical recognition. However, the 2024 production was not an exact reproduction. Contemporary staging and performances were placed within a familiar symbolic framework. This balance between continuity and reinvention is crucial. Too much change could weaken the emotional familiarity valued by fans, while too little change could make the group appear artistically inactive. NKOTB responds by retaining its core identity while adding new content and redesigned experiences.

Blockheads and the Value of Long-Term Fan Loyalty

The Blockhead identity gives NKOTB fandom a sense of continuity and belonging. Fans are not addressed merely as ticket buyers but as members of a named community with a shared history. For many participants, fan-to-fan relationships are as important as the relationship with the performers. Concerts and residencies provide opportunities to reunite with friends, meet online acquaintances and participate in rituals of collective memory. This helps explain why fans may attend several performances containing many of the same songs. Each event offers a renewed social experience. Digital platforms support this continuity by allowing Blockheads to share memories, concert footage and archival materials. Fan participation also keeps the NKOTB brand visible

between major releases. Through reposting, discussion and personal testimony, fans contribute to the circulation of the group's history. Long-term fandom involves accumulated cultural knowledge. Fans who attended earlier tours, followed the group before its hiatus or collected original merchandise possess forms of historical credibility within the community. At the same time, new or younger fans may enter through family relationships, streaming platforms or contemporary media appearances. The relationship between NKOTB and its fans has therefore changed. During the group's original peak, fans primarily encountered the members through television, magazines and professionally controlled appearances. Contemporary social media offers a greater appearance of direct communication and personal recognition. This accessibility remains commercially structured. Some forms of interaction are available publicly, whereas others are included in premium experiences. Nevertheless, the group's frequent acknowledgement of Blockheads reinforces a narrative of mutual loyalty: the fans sustained the group, and the group returned to continue the relationship.

Still Kids and the Importance of New Music

The release of *Still Kids* in 2024 challenges the idea that NKOTB is concerned only with reproducing its historical catalogue. The album contained 14 tracks and represented the group's first full studio album in 11 years (BMG, 2024). New music serves several strategic purposes for legacy artists. It signals that the group remains creatively active, provides material for media promotion and adds a contemporary chapter to its career narrative. New songs may also support touring by balancing familiar hits with present-day production. However, contemporary releases by legacy acts operate within a very different market from that of the late 1980s. Streaming has fragmented audiences and created intense competition for attention. A new NKOTB album is unlikely to reproduce the same form of mass chart dominance as *Hangin' Tough*. Its commercial and symbolic value should therefore be assessed differently. *Still Kids* does not need to replace the group's earlier catalogue. It renews fan engagement and demonstrates that the performers view themselves as an active group rather than a temporary reunion project. The new material also strengthens authenticity. Continued recording supports the argument that the group has an artistic relationship in the present, even though its historical songs remain central to its live appeal.

The Right Stuff and the Experience Economy

The Las Vegas residency represents an important development in the group's business model. Residencies allow artists to create a stable, destination-based production rather than transporting the same show continuously between cities. They can also offer more elaborate staging and a range of related events. For fans, travelling to Las Vegas transforms the performance into a broader social and tourism experience. The event may involve accommodation, dining, shopping, fan gatherings and repeated concert attendance. The residency therefore operates as an NKOTB environment rather than simply a sequence of songs. This supports Pine and Gilmore's (1999) experience-economy concept. The principal product is a memorable event in which the consumer participates emotionally. Familiar songs create the soundtrack, but the full value is produced through atmosphere, travel, friendship, visual performance and proximity to the group. VIP packages and meet-and-greet opportunities extend this system. They offer differentiated levels of access, including premium seating, photographs, merchandise or backstage-related activities. Emotional closeness is transformed into a purchasable experience. The economic suitability of this model is partly connected to the maturation of the audience. Fans who initially relied on parents to purchase records or tickets are now financially independent adults. Some possess the income required for travel and premium packages. Nevertheless, the model raises questions about inequality. The most exclusive forms of access are available primarily to fans with greater financial resources. Fandom is therefore organised through commercial tiers, even though emotional loyalty may be equally strong among fans who cannot afford premium participation. This does not mean that fans are simply exploited. Participants may knowingly choose to spend money on experiences they regard as highly meaningful. The residency may represent a reunion, personal celebration or fulfilment of a long-standing wish. The emotions are genuine, even though the industry commercially structures the conditions through which they are expressed.

Comparative Insights: NKOTB and Other Legacy-Pop Cases

The mechanisms identified in the NKOTB case are not entirely unique. Research on adult Backstreet Boys fandom shows that fan identities can continue through ageing, career transitions, and changing life circumstances

rather than ending with adolescence (Williams, 2018). This supports the broader proposition that a boy band's commercial afterlife depends partly on whether performers and audiences can reinterpret maturity as shared continuity rather than brand failure.

The comparison also highlights a difference. NKOTB's contemporary model places unusually strong emphasis on named fan identity, repeated destination experiences, direct acknowledgement of Blockheads, and the reuse of historically specific tour and song titles. These features intensify the sense that the current product is a continuation of a particular relationship rather than a general revival of an earlier musical era. Russell et al. (2019) show that retro-branded concerts create value by blending familiar symbols with present-day production. NKOTB follows this pattern through recognisable songs, choreography, visual references, and historical labels, while adding new music, contemporary staging, social-media communication, and residency-based experiences. This suggests that the broader strategy is transferable: legacy acts can retain recognisable brand cues while introducing enough renewal to justify present-day participation. However, the comparison also sets limits on generalisation. The strategy is most likely to work when an artist possesses a recognisable catalogue, a clearly named or socially connected fan community, and sufficient historical meaning to support repeated live participation. Artists without these resources may not benefit equally from nostalgia-based branding. Comparative evidence therefore supports the mechanisms of continuity, community, and experiential renewal, but not the assumption that all legacy artists can reproduce NKOTB's commercial model.

Cultural Relevance Beyond Chart Dominance

NKOTB's contemporary relevance should not be evaluated only through chart positions. Legacy acts may remain culturally meaningful without dominating youth-oriented streaming or radio. The group's importance can be identified in its influence on the modern boy-band business model, its relationship with female fan culture, its extensive use of merchandising and its adaptation to the nostalgia economy. It also offers evidence that the meanings of popular music change as performers and audiences age. Songs originally marketed as teenage love songs can later become collective expressions of friendship, memory and survival. "Hangin' Tough," for example, may now symbolise not only youthful confidence but also the durability of the relationship among the group members and their audience. The contradiction contained within the name "New Kids on the Block" has consequently become productive. The members are clearly no longer new or children. However, the name represents a continuous cultural identity. Through humour and acknowledgement of ageing, the group avoids presenting maturity as a failure. Authenticity in this context does not require the performers to remain unchanged. It depends on whether their current presentation appears consistent with their history and their relationship with fans. The continuing involvement of the five familiar members, recognition of Blockheads and willingness to perform signature songs support this continuity.

Methodological Limitations and Future Research

The study's document-based design offers insight into publicly articulated branding strategies, but it cannot establish how all fans interpret nostalgia or why individual consumers purchase tickets, merchandise, or premium experiences. Official documents also tend to present events positively and may understate disappointment, financial barriers, or internal strategic disagreement. Future research should conduct semi-structured interviews or focus groups with long-term Blockheads from different age, income, and geographic groups. Interviews with promoters, music executives, tour designers, and, where access is possible, band members could clarify how nostalgia is deliberately planned and evaluated. A fan survey could test the relative influence of autobiographical memory, community belonging, new music, social-media engagement, and premium access on attendance and purchasing decisions. A larger comparative design should examine NKOTB alongside groups such as Backstreet Boys and other legacy pop acts. Such research could determine whether named fan communities, shared ageing, catalogue strength, new recordings, and destination-based experiences consistently predict successful legacy branding or whether their effects depend on genre, market, gender, and cultural context.

CONCLUSION

This article examined how New Kids on the Block has used nostalgia, fan engagement, and legacy branding to maintain cultural relevance and commercial viability. Through an integrative literature review, structured

document analysis, qualitative case-study interpretation, and bounded comparison, four interconnected mechanisms were identified: autobiographical nostalgia, long-term fan community, continuity combined with reinvention, and the commercial expansion of live experiences. NKOTB's longevity is not based solely on the continued popularity of its late-1980s and early-1990s recordings. The group has actively reconstructed its identity as a mature legacy boy band. The release of *Still Kids*, revival of the Magic Summer tour identity and establishment of The Right Stuff residency demonstrate how historical recognition can relate to contemporary music-business practices. The Blockhead community is central to this process. Fans preserve and circulate the group's cultural meaning through memory, discussion, attendance and repeated participation. They should therefore be understood as contributors to the legacy brand rather than passive recipients of nostalgic marketing. The NKOTB case also demonstrates that nostalgia can be both emotionally authentic and commercially organised. Fans' memories and relationships are genuine, but they are translated into tickets, travel, merchandise and premium access. The nostalgia economy transforms cultural memory into an experience-based business model.

This model contains tensions. Premium participation may exclude fans with fewer financial resources, while continued dependence on historical material may restrict artistic development. Nevertheless, NKOTB has reduced these risks by producing new music and acknowledging rather than concealing the ageing of both performers and audiences. The group's survival illustrates a broader transformation in popular music. A boy band does not necessarily disappear when its members cease to represent conventional youthfulness. It may become a site through which adult audiences revisit, reinterpret and share memories of youth. *New Kids on the Block* remains culturally relevant not by pretending that time has stood still but by incorporating the passage of time into its identity. The group and its audience have aged together, turning an earlier teenage relationship into a continuing form of cultural belonging. In this context, "Hangin' Tough" has become more than the title of a successful album. It describes the group's ability to survive changing technologies, musical trends and stages of life within the contemporary nostalgia economy. The comparative evidence suggests that shared ageing, recognisable brand cues, active fan communities, and renewed live experiences may also support other legacy-pop acts. However, direct interviews and surveys are needed before claims can be made about fan motivations or industry decision-making across a wider population.

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