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Nostalgia in sport and leisure

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Abstract

As the COVID-19 crisis continues, society has re-engaged with nostalgia, especially in relation to sport and leisure. This review outlines the descriptive and analytical contours of the phenomenon and potentially useful explanatory paradigms. In doing so, this review first provides an overview of the recent studies on nostalgia in sport and leisure, especially within the context of COVID-19. Then, the review summarizes the four functions of nostalgia in sport and leisure, which include acting as a marketing tool, inducing positive behavior, serving as a buffer, and enhancing positive psychology. The review also discussed future research directions on nostalgia in sport and leisure contexts.

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The current issues and nostalgia

COVID-19 has caused a drastic shift in the lifestyles of millions of people worldwide [1–3]. It comes as an unprecedented disruption to the global community and economy [3,4], as SARS-CoV-2—the virus causing COVID-19—has claimed more than six million lives globally [5] and continues to spread and pose various health threats to individuals [1,6]. In particular, due to the constant outbreaks of COVID-19, people have experienced a high level of isolation and anxiety, which deteriorates their mental health [2,7–9]. As a reaction to the unpleasant present and unpredictable future [10], people are more likely to develop nostalgia, known as “a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past” [11,p.1266]. Researchers noted that nostalgia generated by positive memories is not just a longing for the past,

but it is strongly associated with a negative present or uncertain future, which leads to corresponding psychological and behavioral responses [10,12–14]. In other words, the unpleasantness of the current situation and the vivid contrast between the past and the present have triggered, intensified, and widespread the yearning for the past (i.e., nostalgia) [3,8].

There is little doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected leisure and sport activities profoundly [3,8,15]. Almost all sport-related venues and facilities—including gyms, sports halls, stadiums, and many others—were shuttered due to the restrictions on movement and mass-gathering during the early phase of the pandemic [16]. In addition, many sport games were canceled, and numerous broadcasters decided to replay past matches to maintain their interactions with sports fans [3,17]. Researchers highlighted that nostalgia buffers against unpleasant situations and can be used as an effective coping mechanism to deal with the negative present caused by the lockdown during the pandemic [3]. Arguably, a paradigm of sport and leisure nostalgia has recently been introduced. Nevertheless, despite a few studies explaining how nostalgia is related to peoples’ sport and leisure behaviors and life perceptions [3,8,18], the roles of nostalgia in sport and leisure participants’ cognitive–affective processes during the pandemic are yet to be clarified. Therefore, this review sets out the descriptive and analytical contours of the phenomenon and potentially useful explanatory paradigms by introducing the classification of sport nostalgia and then discussing the four critical functions of nostalgia in sport and leisure.

Sport nostalgia

The sport industry is growing rapidly nowadays, and sport nostalgia has also received significant attention from various angles. Interestingly, numerous studies on sport nostalgia have focused on the areas of sport tourism and marketing [14,19–21]. In particular, given the multifaceted concept of sport nostalgia, Cho et al. [10] initially developed a conceptual model presenting a straightforward and comprehensive understanding and classification of the construct. According to Cho et al. [10], sport nostalgia can be classified into four dimensions, depending on its structure (i.e., object-based and social relationship-based) and purpose (i.e., experience-based and identity-based) (as shown in Table 1).

		Purpose of Nostalgia	
		Experience-Based Nostalgia	Identity-Based Nostalgia
Structure of Nostalgia	Object-Based Nostalgia Interpersonal Relationship-Based Nostalgia	Nostalgia as Experience Nostalgia as Socialization	Nostalgia as Personal identity Nostalgia as Group identity

From this, sport nostalgia is broken down into four dimensions, namely, experience (i.e., nostalgic feelings related to positive memories of the experience itself, sights, and environments in which sport takes place), socialization (i.e., nostalgia associated with past relationships with others at sporting events), personal identity (i.e., nostalgic feelings toward one's identity focusing on roles in sport), and group identity (i.e., nostalgia related to an individual's group experience, culture, and norm) [10]. Based on the four dimensions, researchers have developed nostalgia scales [22–25] and examined the various roles of nostalgia in sport and leisure [e.g., 18,26–31]. In other words, the multidimensional approach to nostalgia allowed researchers to investigate how it functions in sport and leisure. The four primary functions of sport nostalgia are discussed below.

Nostalgia as a marketing tool

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly had a tremendously adverse impact on the sport globally, marking itself as the worst market shock in the modern history of the sector [32]. The European football leagues were called off for the first time since World War II [32,33]. In addition, the British Broadcasting Corporation rebroadcasted the radio commentary for the final day of the 2019 Ashes cricket series (England vs. Australia) during the lockdown [3]. Notably, Weed [34] suggested that the cancellation of sporting events has led to collective nostalgia, which antidotes the current pandemic's negativity by reminding people of an enjoyable pastime [3,9].

Sport nostalgia was undeniably heightened during the hiatus of the sporting industry [3]. Given that sport nostalgia is often a strong indicator of the intention to purchase [19,35], the increased sport nostalgia most likely leads to significant changes in how individuals perceive and consume sporting products during the COVID-19 pandemic [36]. For instance, Cho and Chiu [18] conducted a study on the intention to purchase indoor fitness products during the lockdown period and found an increase in the number of individuals participating in at-home workouts; people's perceptions of COVID-19 significantly influenced their intention to purchase such products [18]. It was also found that sport

nostalgia plays a significant role in sport consumers' compensatory consumption [36].

Moreover, during the pandemic, individuals have expressed nostalgic feelings about leisure by engaging in certain types of leisure consumption, including watching old movies and previous sports matches and connecting with family to reminisce [3]. Also, Yeung [8] found that Spotify users preferred old music, implying a change in their music consumption due to nostalgia. In other words, sport nostalgia can be used as an effective strategic tool for improving brand equity and purchase intention, ultimately promoting consumption in the sport and leisure industries [19,35,36]. Furthermore, it can be applied in marketing strategies to increase individuals' satisfaction and intention to consume in the future [8,18,21,31].

Inducing positive behavior

Research on nostalgia has actively emerged in various academic fields, and leisure is an area recently exploring this concept [23,37,38]. According to Cho [13], leisure nostalgia can be defined as a sentimental longing for a positive past leisure experience; it is linked to individuals' behavioral intention to engage in future leisure activities [39]. In addition, previous research found that leisure nostalgia positively influences various domains of people's lives. For example, Cho [40] noted that leisure nostalgia is likely to help school teachers be more satisfied with their leisure activities and be more committed to their work, which eventually decreases their turnover intention. Nostalgia also promotes motivation to work, leading individuals to work harder and perform better [41]. Cho [26] noted that leisure nostalgia could enhance employees' work engagement and task performance. Similarly, in tourism, researchers found to have a positive effect of nostalgia on tourists' behavioral responses, such as destination loyalty and intention to travel [42,43]. Consistent with the findings, sport nostalgia was found to play a crucial role in the intention to travel for sporting events [14,44]. In particular, sport nostalgia exerted a positive influence on satellite fans' motivation, increasing their intention to visit a stadium overseas [45]. Explicitly, sport nostalgia

enhances individuals' psychological commitment to a sports team, reinforcing their intention to travel [46].

In light of the current situation, leisure nostalgia can be triggered by past positive leisure experiences before the COVID-19 pandemic [3,47]. Unsurprisingly, when the lockdown restricted outdoor activities that necessitated mass gatherings, people adopted different leisure activities and routines [8,48]. During the pandemic, people engaged in more online leisure activities, such as online gaming, cloud socializing, and media streaming services, in response to the physical restrictions and longing for past leisure experiences [8,47]. In other words, individuals participated in virtual leisure to fulfill strong desires for leisure that might have been triggered by leisure nostalgia [3]. In addition, Wang and Xia [49] noted that nostalgia promotes the desire for leisure travel, probably resulting in the revenge travel phenomenon of the post-pandemic era. Although nostalgic feelings might have been evoked by the unpleasant present, it eventually shapes one's intention of engaging in compensatory behaviors in the future [3,8].

Buffering role of nostalgia and enhancing positive psychology

Looking at past studies on leisure, researchers have emphasized two critical dimensions of leisure: freedom of choice and self-determination, which are crucial to the quality of the leisure experience [3,50,51]. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, restrictions on movement and social gathering greatly affected these two main factors of leisure [3,47,48]. In other words, a paradox has been created by COVID-19, where individuals are limited in their choices of leisure activities, especially outdoor and group-based ones, whereas they are also given opportunities to engage in intrinsically motivated leisure activities, thereby fulfilling their self-determination [3,50]. This led to a situation known as enforced leisure, while a sense of leisure nostalgia has become a coping strategy against this current stressful situation [3,47]. Therefore, individuals can enjoy a pleasant distraction from the negative present and have a chance to recapture or add meaning to leisure by reflecting on positive past leisure experiences.

Although the benefits of leisure nostalgia have been well documented, Cho [13] further highlighted the negative aspects that can arise from leisure nostalgia. Specifically, he contends that leisure nostalgia tends to increase work-to-leisure conflicts that can be detrimental to well-being. In other words, nostalgic feelings toward leisure activities can make people attribute their lack of leisure participation to their excessive workload and burden; this understanding of overworking may further distract them from work [13]. That is, the experience of leisure nostalgia affects cognitive appraisal and brings work-to-leisure conflicts to greater awareness, adversely impacting well-being

[13]. Nonetheless, leisure nostalgia is generally viewed as a positive contributor to individuals' behavioral and psychological responses [29,40]. More specifically, nostalgia has been found to promote individuals' well-being in sport and leisure. For example, previous research has revealed that nostalgia positively affects an individual's life satisfaction [39]; it also promotes leisure participants' perceived leisure benefits and personal growth, increasing happiness [52]. Recently, Roslan and Cho [29] showed how nostalgia can enhance well-being by strengthening one's willingness to explore novel behaviors and resilience during the pandemic.

Directions for future research

While researchers have noted that nostalgia acts as a buffer and psychological resource [53], it still remains unclear how nostalgia plays a crucial role in the post-pandemic age. Therefore, it is recommended that future research investigates the shift in sport and leisure nostalgia during the pandemic and its influences on individuals' lives and well-being. In addition, Cho and his colleagues [13,54] asserted that nostalgia may not always be associated with positive outcomes and can even cause negative results if people perceive their current situation as uncontrollable and hopeless and find it difficult to ride out the current events. In other words, when people realize they cannot achieve their desired outcomes, they may give up, and nostalgia may not work in that situation [54]. As their argument has not been empirically tested, future research is necessary to examine the relationship between nostalgia and various negative cognitive and emotional factors (e.g., risk perception, frustration, hopelessness, and depression) derived from negative current situations in sport and leisure contexts. Last, while the direct impact of sport nostalgia on consumption behavior during the pandemic has not been fully studied, it appears logical that sport nostalgia plays an essential role in consumers' decision-making. Indeed, besides the health risks of COVID-19, the uncertainty of the pandemic and measures to prevent its spread have shown a certain social and psychological impact on individuals [2,15]. With that being the case, the effect of sport nostalgia, which is a strong indicator of behavior, on engaging in sport behaviors post-pandemic could be an interesting direction for future studies.

Conclusion

This review identifies the four critical roles of sport and leisure nostalgia and suggests possible research directions in consideration of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and individuals' coping responses. Specifically, nostalgia, which is a predominantly positive emotion characterized by longing for the past, can function as a marketing tool, induce positive behavior, act as a buffer, and enhance positive psychology. Although some sport and leisure researchers have

conducted nostalgia research, our understanding of how nostalgia is related to psychological and behavioral outcomes of various research subjects in sport and leisure (e.g., sport volunteers, coaches, and athletes) is incomprehensive and incomplete. Therefore, more active research on sport and leisure nostalgia needs to be conducted on the basis of the four functions of nostalgia in addition to expanding the research area.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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