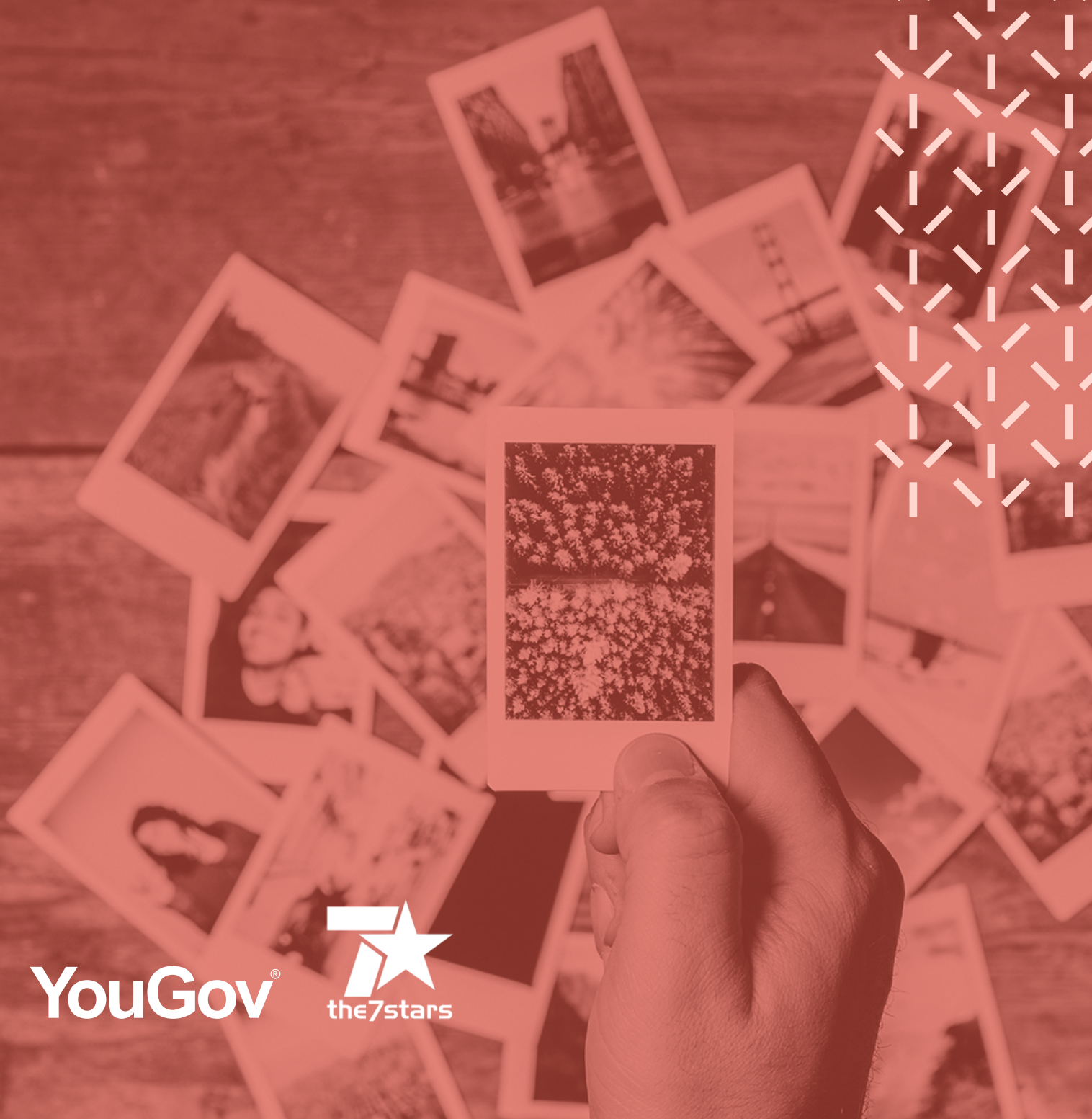


Nostalgia – is it what it used to be?

☰ The power of reminiscence in marketing



YouGov[®]



Foreword

Just within the past twelve months, we've witnessed an increasing trend towards the use of nostalgic themes and references, both in culture and more specifically in media.

Streaming has been on the rise along with increasing sales of vinyl formats, while Instagram's popularity has equally been mirrored by a resurgence of the Polaroid imagery and retro filters. During the current unsettled political and economic climate, memories of past times can elicit powerful feelings of security, comfort and trust for the British public.

This presents an interesting challenge for brands. There appears to be an opportunity to provide a future focus on technological developments and fresh content, alongside some good old fashioned physical and emotional hooks for misty-eyed consumers. YouGov and the7stars have joined forces to investigate the most fondly remembered parts of our cultural history – and to unpick exactly why our nation looks back on its past with rose-tinted glasses.

Helen Rose, Insight & Analytics, the7Stars

"The past is never dead", as William Faulkner once wrote. "It's not even past." Our shared history provides context for our present and our future.






With this in mind, YouGov and the7stars have worked together to investigate British nostalgia – and how UK consumers view the country's real (and imagined) past. It's a rich, complex subject that touches on childhood and adulthood; politics and culture; hopes, regrets, and more. For businesses that target sentimental consumers with nostalgic ad campaigns, it's also been used as a source of commercial opportunities.

It's not hard to see why. This whitepaper reveals that, for many Brits, the past isn't really past: it's alive in memory, and it's shaping how they respond to marketing – and perhaps even the way they buy.

Amelia Brophy, Head of Data Products, YouGov



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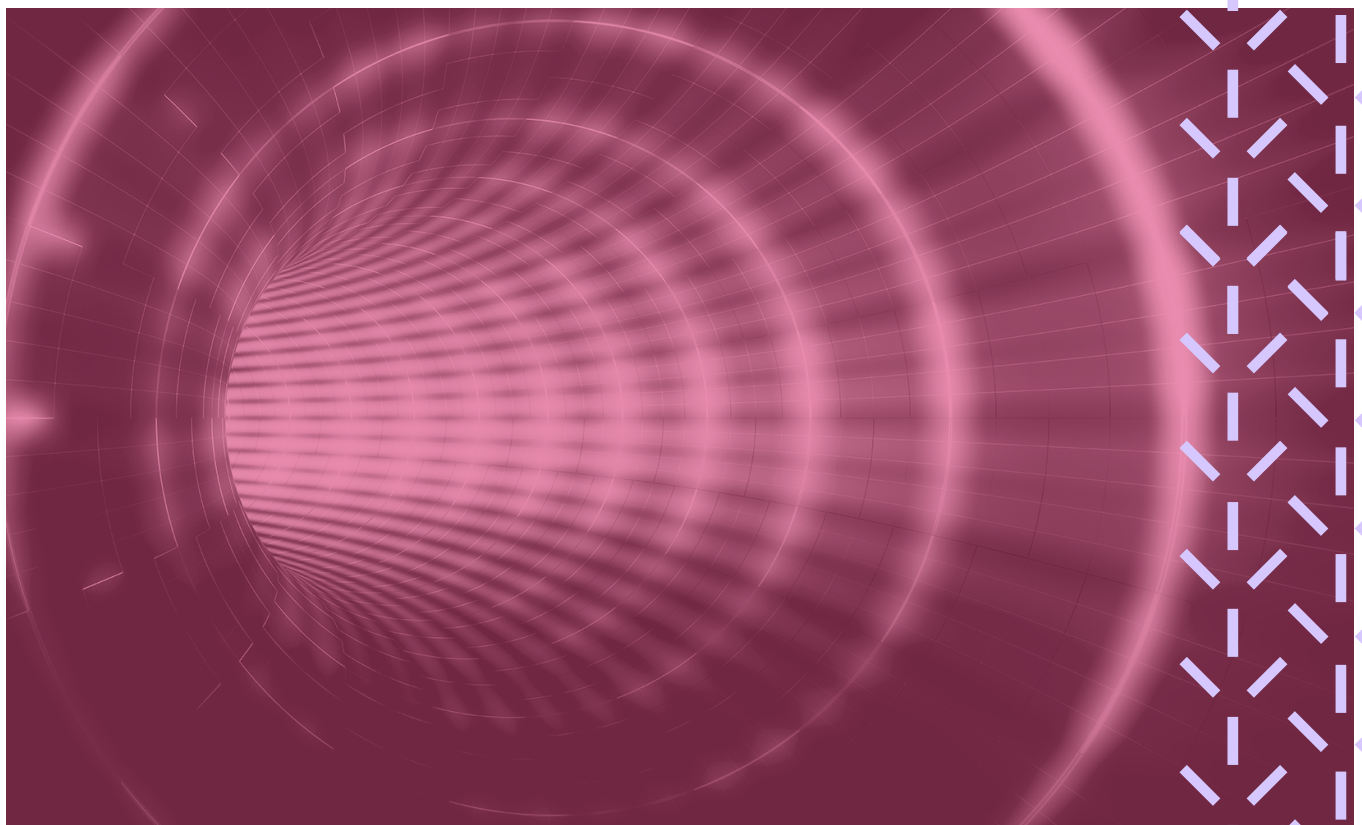
Introduction

The UK is a nostalgic nation. Despite major cultural, medical, and technological advances, twice as many Brits would prefer to travel backward in time than forward into the future.

And looking back isn't just a passing interest: almost half regularly reminisce, and among them, nearly one in ten are almost always nostalgic.

This white paper explores the objects of Britain's nostalgia and examines its power across the population. It draws a clear line between authentic nostalgia – where respondents have sentimental feelings about past periods of their lives – and fauxstalgia, where respondents embrace the symbols, trends, and aesthetics of times and places that they never experienced and never visited.

With a special focus on nostalgia as a marketing tool, we aim to establish exactly why the past is such a powerful brand.



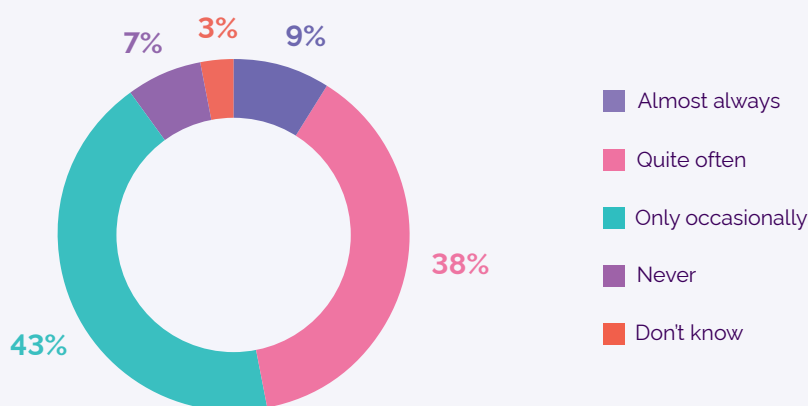
01 | How big a part does the past play in our present?



Nostalgia – How big a part does the past play in our present?



How often do you think fondly about the past and the way things used to be?



Modern life can feel fast-paced and ever-changing, so it's no surprise that the vast majority of Brits (90%) spend at least some time thinking fondly about the way things used to be.

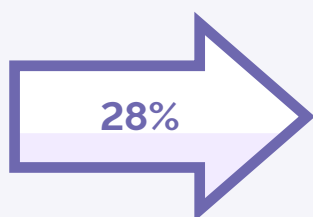
What's perhaps more unexpected is just how much we reminisce.

Nearly a tenth 'almost always' think fondly of the past, while a further 38% do so 'quite often'. In fact, only seven percent of us never reminisce – suggesting that those living fully in the moment remain a small minority.

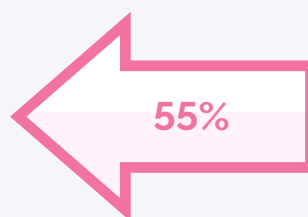
In fact, the UK is so nostalgic that, given a hypothetical choice between visiting a bygone age and getting a glimpse of the future, almost twice as many of us (55%) would opt to use time travel to turn the clock back.



If time travel were to become possible, which would you prefer?



To go forwards to the future



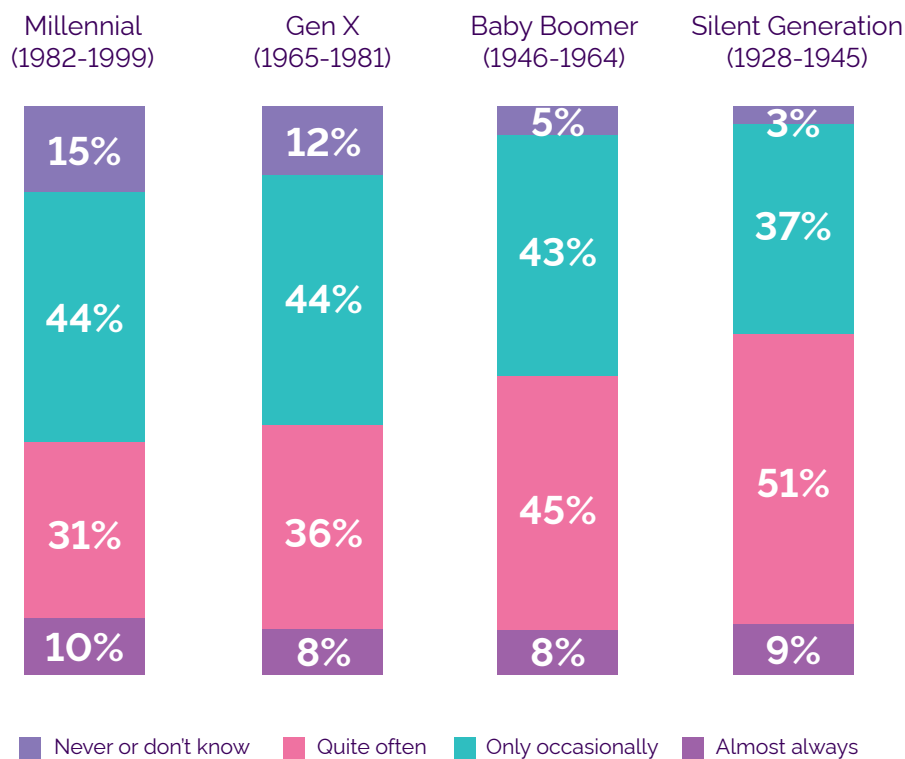
To go backwards to the past

Nostalgia has no age limit

Nostalgia is often associated with advancing age. But while people are more likely to reminisce as they get older, younger generations are highly likely to spend at least some time thinking fondly of the past. In fact, millennials are the generation most likely to 'almost always' do so.



Think fondly of the past - Frequency



One in ten millennials 'almost always' reminisce: a group that's misty-eyed and reflective in spite of its relative youth.

These misty-eyed millennials are significantly more likely to agree with statements like "Life was simpler in the past" – even when 'the past' is an era they never experienced.

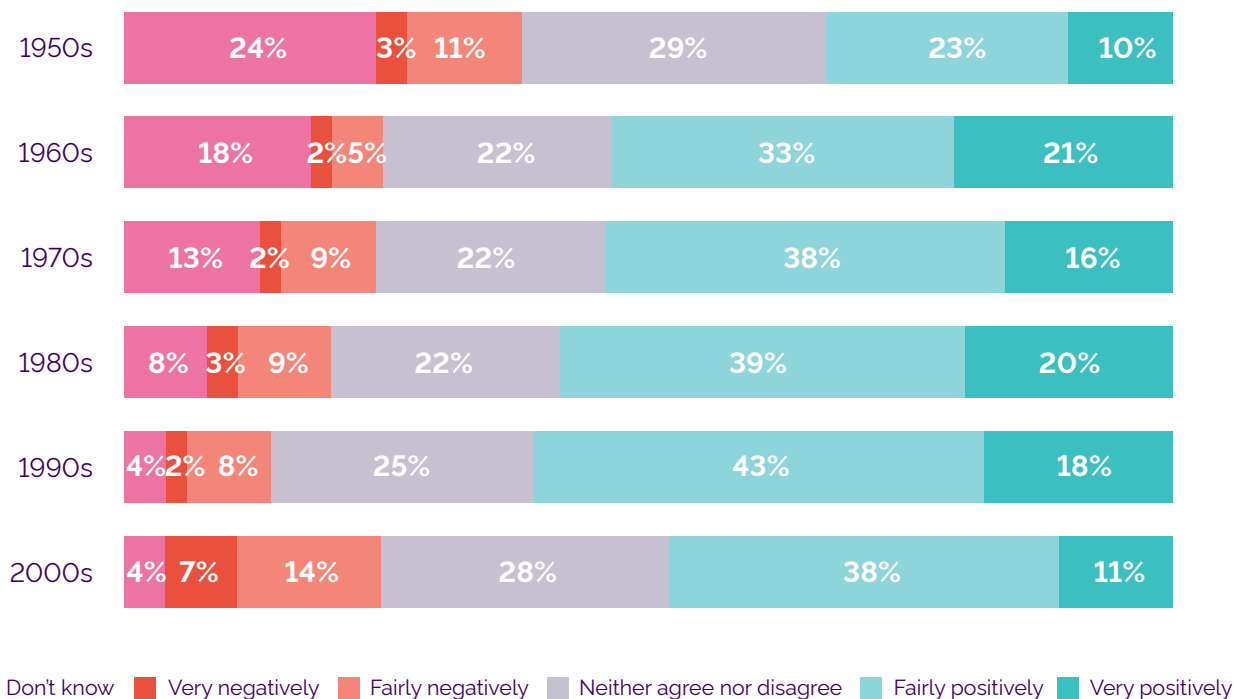
02 | When were the good old days, exactly?



02 | When were the good old days, exactly?



For the following question, even if you were not alive at the time, please think about the decades listed below...Which ONE, if any, of the following BEST describes how positively or negatively you feel about the following decades?



Although there is no definitive 'golden age' for nostalgists, preferences for specific periods do exist.

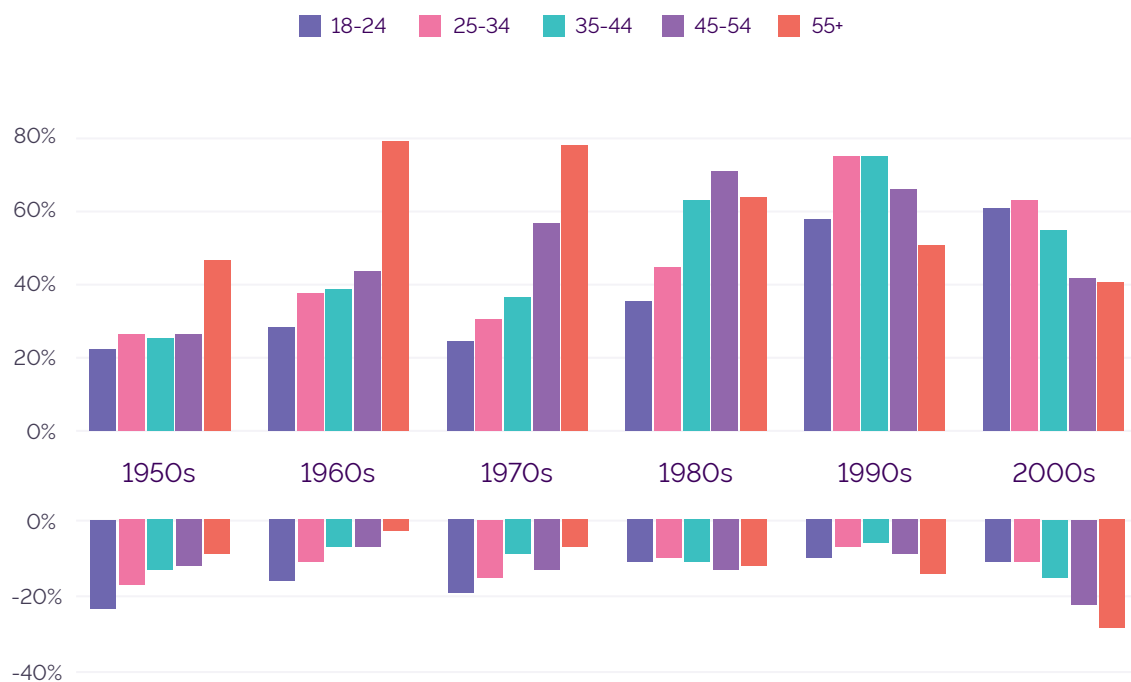
Our favourite decade is a close-run thing: the 1990s is the decade most likely to be remembered fondly, with 61% of Brits taking a positive view.

59% hold the same perception of the 1980s, with the 1960s and 1970s level-pegging on 54%.

The decade looked upon least favourably is the 2000s. A fifth (20%) perceive it fairly or very negatively. Are the 2000s simply too recent to be viewed with fondness or have financial crises, wars, and natural disasters left scars across the decade?



Nostalgia across the decades: positive (top) and negative (bottom) perceptions



As you might expect, when it comes to generational perspectives of 'the good old days', differences emerge.

The 1990s, for example, are favoured by the millennial cohort, and yet this decade is among the least popular for those aged 55 or older.

The 55+ have the highest scores for any period by any age – 78% view the 1960s positively. In fact, only 3% express a negative perception, making this group a safe target for nostalgic marketing based on the swinging sixties.

All age groups are more positively nostalgic about the decades in which they grew up – which suggests an association between childhood/adolescence and positive experiences. This association with positive nostalgia looks particularly strong during the second decade of life in each bracket.

03 | Signs of the times – What defines a decade?



03 | Signs of the times – What defines a decade?


We know that many Brits spend at least some of their time feeling nostalgic. But what creates those positive associations with our past – and what should marketers look for as they seek to recreate them?

When asked if there was anything iconic that connects them with a decade, 23% of respondents cite 'music'. The sounds of a particular time can be an important factor for those who are legitimately nostalgic (those who were at least four or older at the end of a decade) and those who are 'fauxstalgic'.

Music is the most consistent conductor of nostalgia for marketers - with specific bands standing out in each period. This strong connection is probably thanks to music's ubiquity in popular culture and the way it changes to suit each era. While fashion, technology and TV join the chorus across the decades, music holds nostalgia's melody.

"Nostalgia is a powerful theme in modern music – both lyrically and stylistically – and one used to engage and appeal to a broad mainstream audience. Even those fauxstalgic consumers, who didn't live through a particular era, can find something evocative and meaningful in its tunes. Music can be the emotional connective tissue between generations: those who lived in a specific time and place, and those who wish they did."

Catie Dear, Entertainment Client Lead, the7Stars

	2000s	1990s	1980s	1970s	1960s	1950s
% of GB positive view	49%	61%	59%	54%	54%	33%
% of positive (above) with Fauxstalgia (under 4 at end of decade)	0%	6%	15%	24%	38%	58%

1950s

In the 1950s, the difference between nostalgia and fauxstalgia is especially pronounced. Fauxstalgists tend to identify most strongly with the symbols and the imagery of an era – and so do nostalgists. But the key difference here is that the latter have some recollection (however dim) of the era as it actually was.

So fauxstalgists are more likely to think about music and fashion when they think about the 1950s: rock 'n' roll, for example, is a stronger association with this group (9% vs 6%). But those who remember the 1950s also demonstrate stronger associations with childhood, growing up, and life in general: they understand the era on a level beyond mere iconography – even if they still look at it with rose-tinted glasses.

FAUXSTALGIA	Word
1.	Music
2.	Rock&Roll
3.	Clothes
4.	Fashion
5.	War

Alive in decade	Word
1.	Music
2.	TV
3.	Toys
4.	Rock&Roll
5.	Clothes



1960s

Rank	Word
1.	Music
2.	Beatles
3.	Mini-skirt
4.	Clothes
5.	Fashion

The 1960s conjures the strongest associations with music, amounting to 38% of all mentions. It shouldn't come as any surprise that The Beatles made it to the top five – and in fact, the band make up a fifth of all mentions for this period, with The Rolling Stones making it into sixth place with 5% of mentions.

Fashion for the first time makes a serious impact, taking up the third, fourth and fifth spots respectively, with the all-important mini skirt winning out.

Yet where the decade really stands out compared to other periods is in its associations with cultural and social movements. Hippies, flower power and freedom all make the top ten, with mods and rockers appearing further down the list.



1970s

Rank	Word
1.	Music
2.	Clothes
3.	TV
4.	Flares
5.	Rock

Music makes up more than a quarter (28%) of mentions in the 1970s. From a marketing perspective, it's the clashing cultural cues of glam rock, punk, Abba and disco which most push Brits' nostalgia buttons.

But fashion enjoys its best showing yet in the 1970s, with 'clothes' making it into second place, 'flares' reaching fourth and platform shoes – and with 'bell bottoms' and 'hair' receiving honourable mentions.



1980s

Rank	Word
1.	Music
2.	TV
3.	Clothes
4.	Fashion
5.	Pop

Music continues its strong and unbreakable relationship with nostalgia well into the 1980s. Duran Duran, New Romantics, Queen, rock music and Band Aid all receive specific nods too.

As a visually striking and artistically driven cultural period, the 1980s conjures images of very specific fashions, hairstyles and looks. Hair, shoulder pads, and leg warmers all feature in the list – love them or loathe them.

The 1980s also sees technology make its first real dent, with Sony Walkman, computers and videos featuring alongside other cultural and social references.



1990s

Rank	Word
1.	Music
2.	Spice Girls
3.	Brit-pop
4.	TV
5.	Oasis

The fragmentation of musical tastes continues into the 1990s, where overall mentions of music are lower than in the 80s (21% vs 28%) but The Spice Girls make a very strong showing – and Oasis, who famously lost the Battle of Britpop, at least win out over Blur in the nation's long-term memory.

TV shows in general make the top five in each of the most recent three decades, but it's here (and in the 1980s) where they're most keenly felt – amounting to 5% of all mentions. Friends is the highest-placed programme of all.

The 90s represents the period where technological advances such as the internet and mobile phones start to show their influence, although they really start to dominate in the 2000s.



2000s

Rank	Word
1.	Music
2.	Technology
3.	Internet
4.	TV
5.	Mobile phones

The 2000s may have started with millennium-bug panic, but the decade is still characterised by innovation.

Technology, smartphones and the internet all rank in the top five things connected with the 2000s. Apple, iPhone and iPod all feature prominently, while the PlayStation also makes it into the top twenty.

Despite iPod offering an ever growing world of music, bands and artists have the weakest cultural footprint in the 2000s. Fashion cues are also more generic than seen for other decades, as aside from jeans there are no singular “looks” associated with the noughties.



04 | The nature of the nostalgist

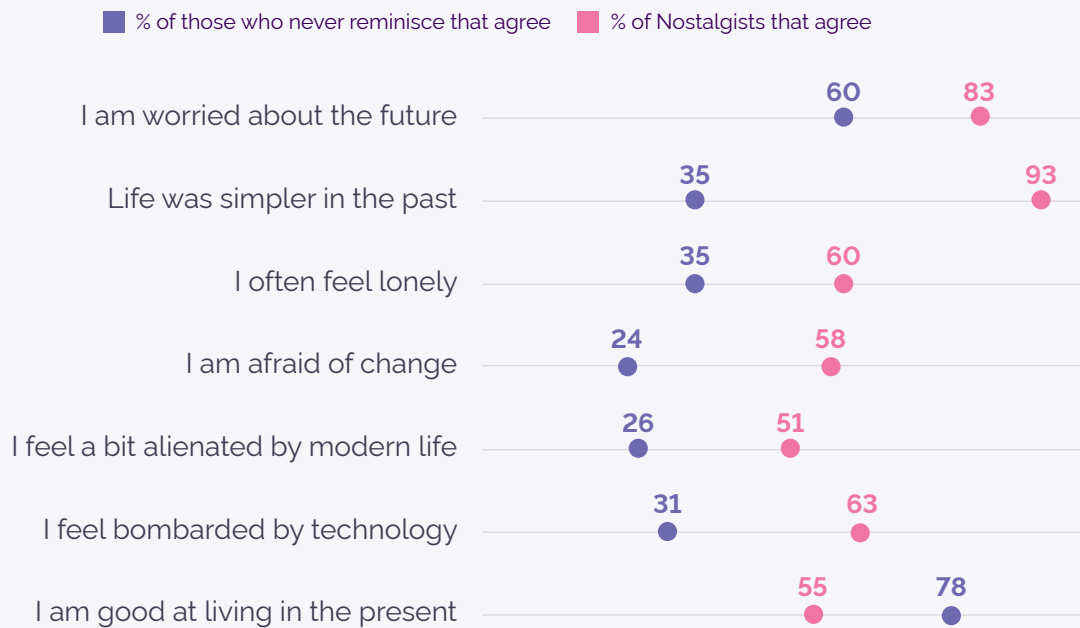


04 | The nature of the nostalgist

Many Brits enjoy looking back on the past – and the most nostalgic of us have a lot in common.



Nostalgists (those who 'almost always' think fondly of the past) are more likely to share a range of views with each other. This demographic says:



For the most nostalgic among us, fondness for the past seems coupled with a sense of unease about the present.

So what else does this group have in common?

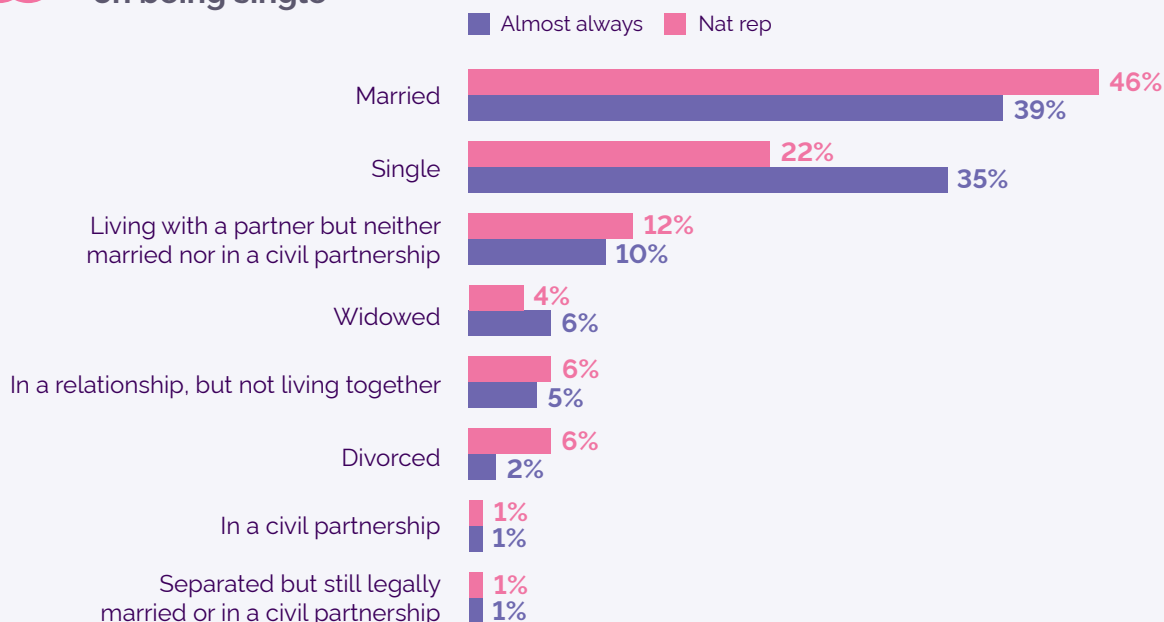


04 | The nature of the nostalgist

Reminiscence is more common amongst those currently single, with the married and coupled-up more likely to be happy to live in the now.



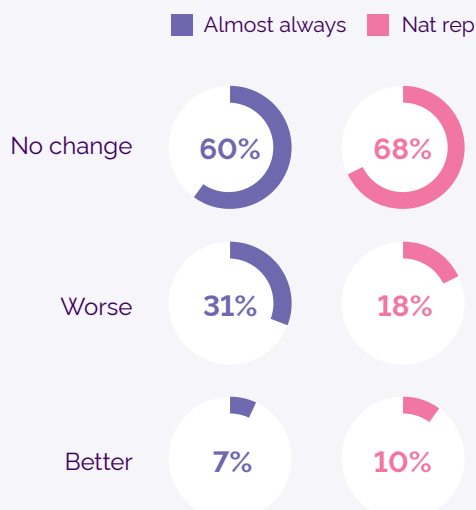
The majority of the nostalgic group are married but they over-index on being single



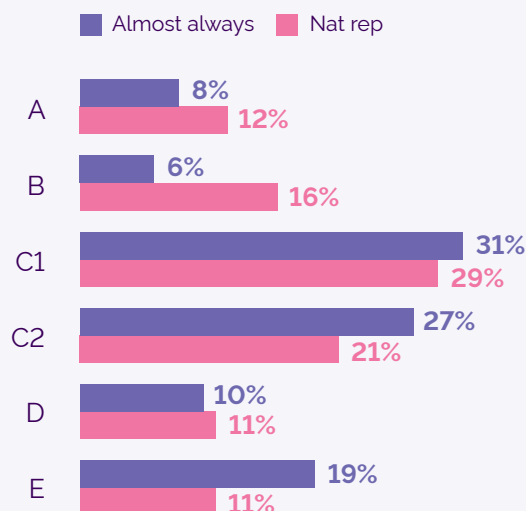
Our never-ending nostalgists are more often than not a squeezed middle; sitting within the C1C2 social grade. They're less likely than average to own their own home and are feeling worse off on their finances. This may give them more reason to look back...



Financial change since last month



Lower Social Grade



04 | The nature of the nostalgist

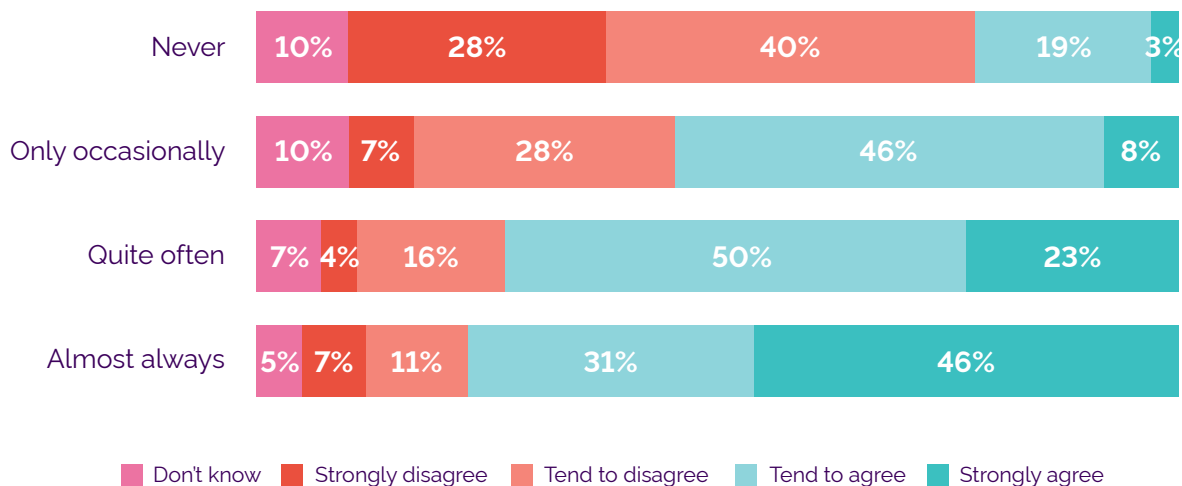
Whilst for some of us positive reminiscence is an everyday phenomenon, for others nostalgia needs to be triggered.

As the chart shows, every group of reminiscers - even the most casual - acknowledge that specific times of the year make them think more fondly of the past.

Tapping into these seasonal triggers can be the basis for powerful marketing – as many brands have found to date...



**I tend to think more fondly of the past at certain times of the year
(e.g. Christmas, Summer Holidays etc.)**



05 | Nostalgia and marketing



Coca-Cola's Christmas campaigns: pulling the festive nostalgia trigger

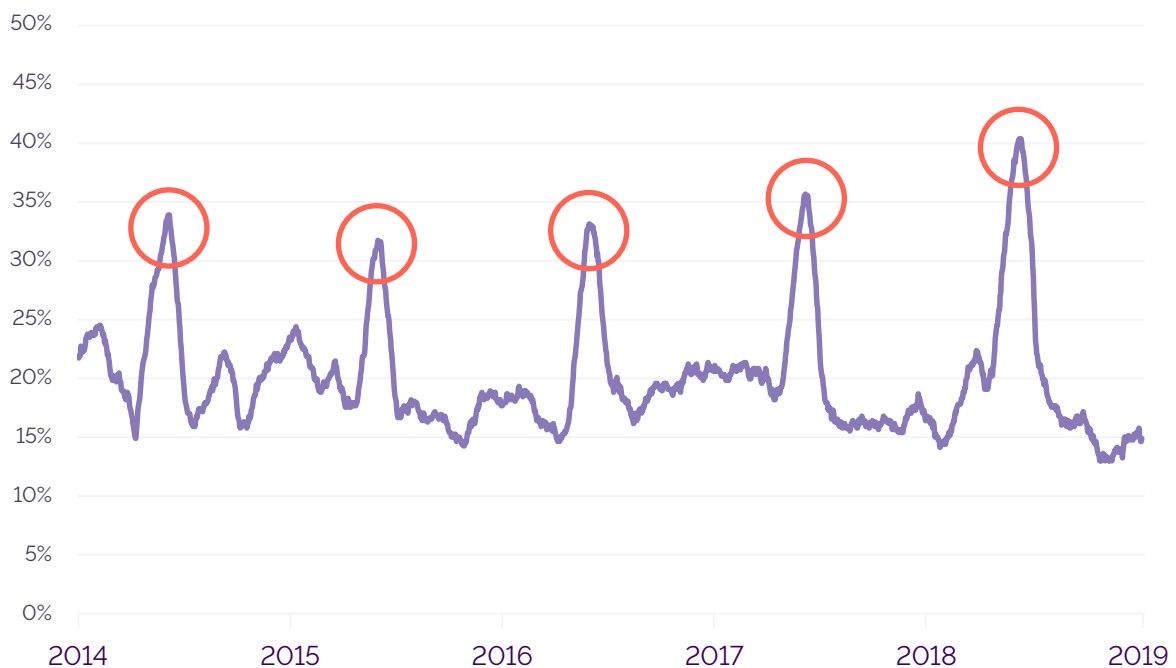
Coca-Cola regularly taps into seasonal nostalgia in its annual festive marketing: the company's 'Holidays Are Coming' trucks campaign has run since 1995 and will be familiar to many Brits.

The ads create clear peaks in awareness of the brand's advertising. Coca-Cola isn't an inherently festive brand (in fact, it's often associated with summer) but the company has become strongly associated with Christmas through decades of seasonal promotions.

Is nostalgia helping? It appears so – and it also seems that nostalgic marketing has become an annual tradition in itself.

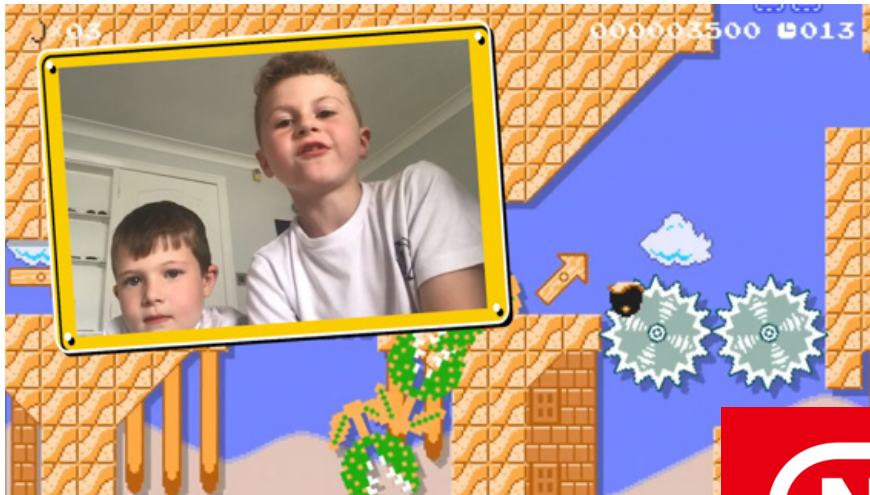


GB Coca-Cola Advertising Awareness



Nostalgia: it's not just for Christmas

Christmas might be a top nostalgic trigger – but Brits reminisce all year round. Three recent campaigns have capitalised on this.



An example can be seen in the gaming industry, where throwbacks from the past are common. Nintendo's recent launch for Super Mario Maker 2 acknowledges the gaming community's appetite for nostalgia, incorporating the nineties style of arcade gaming alongside more modern, three dimensional creative designed to engage a new generation of players.

Since 2017, Great Western Railway has featured Enid Blyton's "The Famous Five" with the aim of creating a sense of exploration through rail travel. The campaign, created by Adam&Eve/ DDB is designed to take consumers back to their childhoods and foster a sense of nostalgic adventure.

GWR | Great Western Railway

More seats.
More trains.
More adventures.

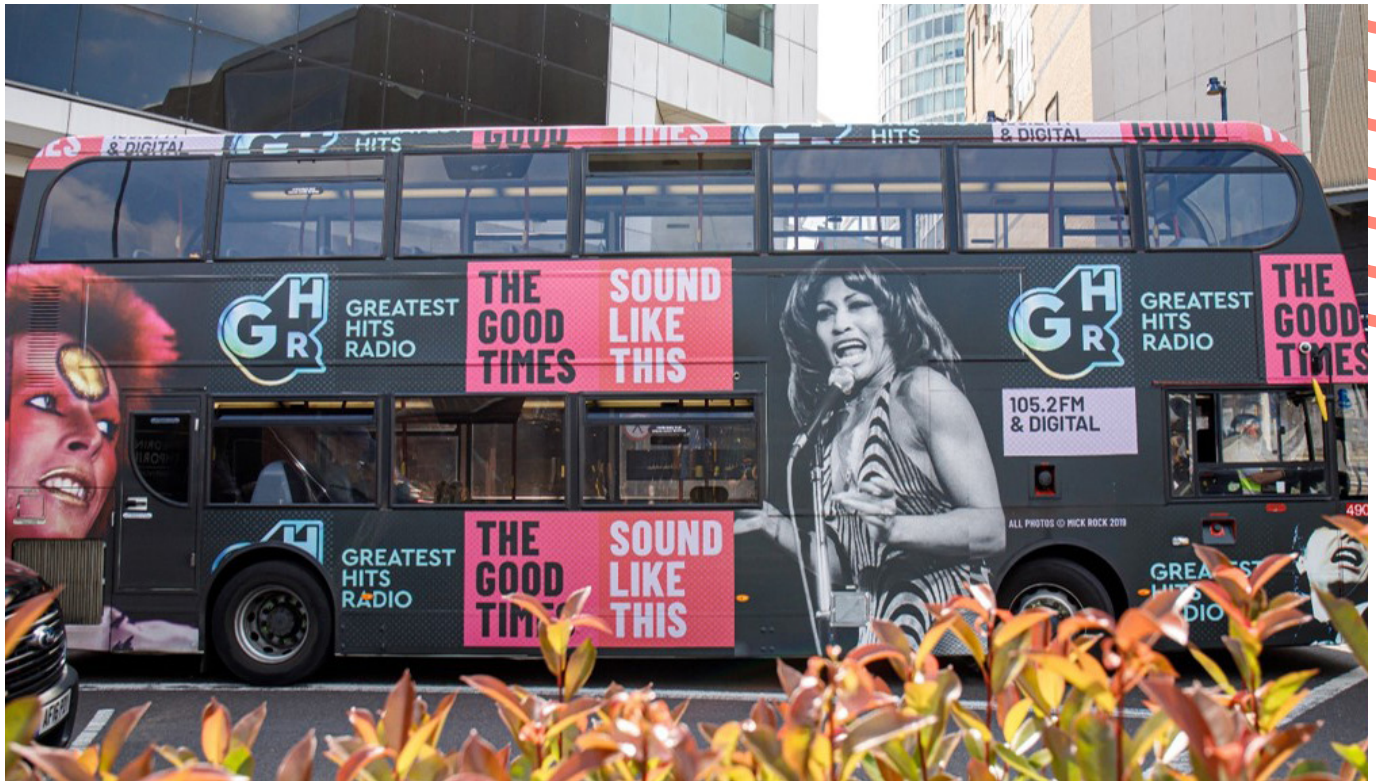
Book at GWR.com,
on our app, or at a station.

"Few characters epitomise the spirit of adventure more than the Famous Five. Quintessentially British and among the most loved children's books (for children and adults alike), the Famous Five have an uncanny knack of finding adventures wherever they travel, so they were the perfect crew to help us discover a world of adventures on GWR's network. They helped our advertising get famous quickly, stood out from the competition and struck a chord with our customers."

Amanda Burns, Head of Marketing & Sales, Great Western Railway

05 | Nostalgia and marketing

Nostalgic marketing was used in the launch campaign for Bauer Media's new station, Greatest Hits Radio.



"Often referred to as 'the man who shot the seventies,' we chose to feature some of Mick Rock's iconic photography in our launch campaign for Greatest Hits Radio, to remind people of the great music not only produced in this decade, but also the subsequent decades of the 80s and 90s, and how it can all be found on our station. It has brought back memories of the great music produced by the likes of David Bowie, Debbie Harry, Queen and many other legendary artists, and transported many listeners back to their youth."

Nick Button, Marketing Director, Bauer Media

"Nostalgia – it's delicate, but potent... It's a twinge in your heart far more powerful than memory alone... It takes us to a place where we ache to go again."

As Don Draper noted in the acclaimed TV drama Mad Men, the past is a powerful tool for advertisers.



I enjoy advertising that reminds me of better times

(e.g. on TV, in print, online etc.)



Strongly disagree Tend to disagree Tend to agree Strongly agree

In fact, almost half of Brits (48%) agree that we enjoy advertising that evokes the past. One in five Brits who buy into nostalgic advertising also admit that advertising helps them choose what to buy. There is therefore a significant subset of the UK population for whom consumer choices could be guided by campaigns that draw on fond memories of the past.

I enjoy advertising that reminds me of better times (e.g. on TV, in print, online etc.)

Agree



Disagree



Advertising helps me choose what I buy

Agree



Disagree



Neither & don't know

21%

9%

19%

20%

31%

A significant proportion of the British public are both influenced by advertising and susceptible to nostalgic campaigns – so the question now is: How can marketers reach them?

For these consumers, it's immediately possible to see the value of targeted messaging when it's perceived as a one-to-one communication that harnesses the power of reminiscence.

This segment also disproportionately values brands which demonstrate that they understand the everyday challenges that people face.

More than half (52%) say that this is very important, compared to just over a third (36%) for the general population.

"Nostalgic marketing has the added benefit of being able to play strategically using both the message and the medium. It can be conducted at scale through targeting shared media moments that tap into collective memories. Broadcast outdoor, TV and print media are particularly strong at nodding to mass cultural cues from the past, as seen recently with Greatest Hits Radio's campaign which features iconic photographs of music legends."

Simon Harwood, Strategy, the7Stars



Summary & Key Takeaways

Nostalgia-based marketing clearly has traction with the British public.

Brands that wish to adopt the wider cultural, social or technological trends of a particular era can capitalise on a wealth of nostalgic themes that will not only engage consumers, but that can also influence purchasing decisions. With British consumers more than happy to acknowledge they enjoy reminiscing about previous times here are our recommendations to unlocking the power of nostalgia:

1. It's not about age, but mindset. It is possible to get fauxstalgic for a time you haven't lived through – so nostalgia can be an effective marketing technique for young and old audiences.
2. Nostalgic advertising can break down sceptical and uninterested consumers, but use it with caution. If considered too try-hard, twee or tangential to the brand then it may backfire.
3. Rhythm is the answer. For Brits, music is the number one cultural association across all decades – so think carefully about your soundtrack.
4. Nostalgic messaging can be done at an aggregate, mass level, or within one-to-one communications.
5. Seasonal triggers can help us remember. Christmas is the most obvious, but Brits get wistful at other times too – whether it's the Back to School period, the start of the Summer Holidays, or other key holidays and celebrations.
6. For many, looking back means looking at happier times. What can your brand do to reassure consumers that brighter days are ahead?

YouGov

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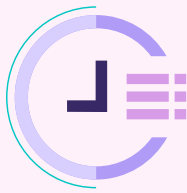
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The tools behind the research



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YouGov Custom Research engagements leverage cutting-edge research and analytic techniques with an eye for assessing the economic impact of your actions. Our industry experts deliver you crucial insights and tools to plan and make strategic and tactical decisions while maintaining a focus on tangible outcomes. We have expertise across a variety of sectors, including consumer products and retail channels, financial services, luxury goods, technology, education, public policy, and more. [Discover more](#)



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