Scrolling Backwards: How Gen Z fell in love with a past that we haven't lived through.

Brick Lane takes listening off the algorithm.

Written for DAZED



Photography Credits: Husna Ali Pirbhai

From sold-out 90s/2000s club nights and Y2K fashion pop-ups to 80's-inspired diners and Netflix shows; us Gen Zs are committed to rewinding the clocks and chasing the distinct aesthetics and vibes of eras we haven't experienced. In a city shaped by heavy economic pressure and digital fatigue, we begin to question the reason for such revivals. Perhaps, nostalgia (or better yet, Anemoia) has become both escape and identity for the generation who lost 2 formative years to a pandemic.

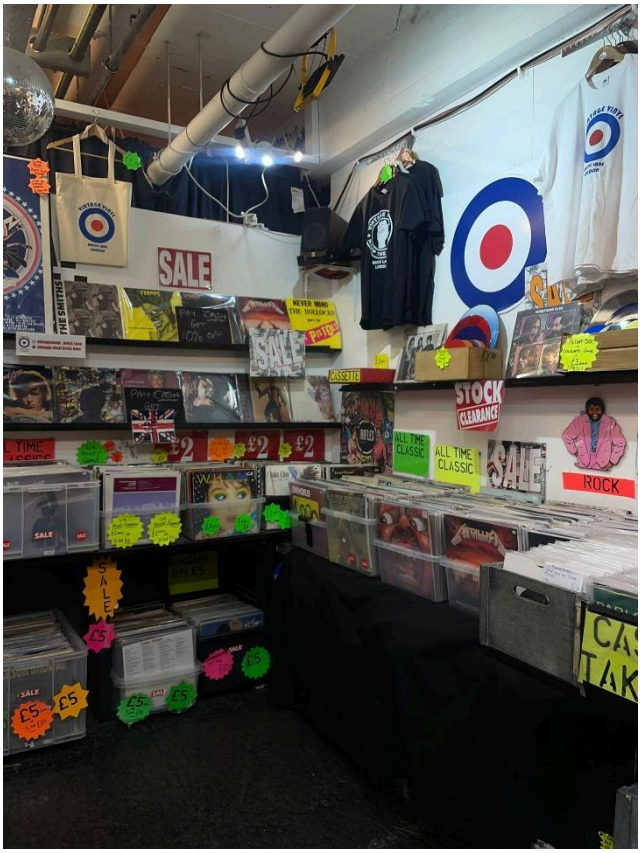
TikTok, used by 80% of Gen Zs, catalyses such revivals through its recycling of trends and sounds which embody such eras. Recent examples being the "doing my makeup in the year my mum was born", "Tumblr and lofi core" aesthetic TikToks and even "Brit-core" TikToks, romanticising British nostalgia. However, we cannot credit TikTok alone for such a phenomenon. Many British Gen Zs have taken it upon themselves to revive the technology and formats of an integral element within Pop Culture; music.

Record players, physical albums, vinyl and earphones have all become fashionable again. Music is not only a fun pastime, but it also acts as a portal to past worlds reimagined.

Brick Lane is well-known for its abundance of record stores and almost exists as a physical rejection of digital culture. It has become a popular tourist destination, archiving art from different eras and different places. Its timelessness is what keeps it from becoming outdated; drawing in a large youth population who wish to explore elements of the past. Most Brick

Lane record stores house older genres such as Jazz, 90s hip-hop and techno-pop; sounds which have recently become trendy to consume and be well-versed in.

In true 80s fashion, many Brick Lane shops sell rare eclectic collections, vinyl and even double as venues for live music. Independent record stores here see a diverse demographic of customers, with a large portion being Gen Zs. Students, young creatives and kids who grew up with Spotify now desire to *feel* music and really own it, rather than scroll past it.



Inside one of Brick Lane's independent record shops, the great vinyl revival is impossible to miss.

Paul Marsham has run the store, Vintage Vinyl, for several years and notes age-related patterns in vinyl consumption over the years.

"Vinyl has a timelessness about them. In fact, I haven't ever noticed a shortage in customers throughout the years. I have many younger customers who are interested in physical versions of music and have an interest in nostalgia and how things looked and felt many years ago. It is something very different to what they're used to, and I think that's what draws them in. The physical, touching, feeling element of Vinyl and CDs must be quite attractive".

These shops unapologetically celebrate music as an artform. Unlike streaming platforms, there is no autoplay or shuffle option. Listening becomes a commitment and begins way before the vinyl in paced onto the gramophone. Vinyl exploring every genre are carefully organised within large crates, evoking true authenticity and providing experiences and IRL dopamine hits, something we aren't always accustomed to in our day-to-day.

"I think a lot of younger people see what their parents grew up with and want to explore that for themselves. There's something for everyone too, it's not just older music, we have lots of newer music here too. We aren't in great times, and this kind of music has a way of distracting you from your problems".

Inside Vintage Vinyl

@ vintagevinyl_brick lane

Photography Credits: Husna Ali Pirbhai





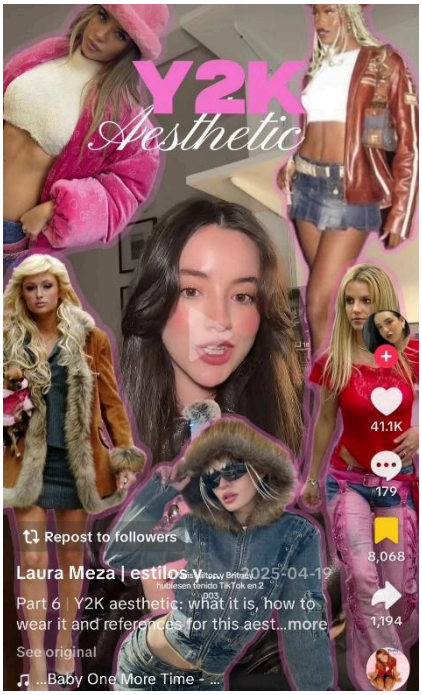
For culture writer Sarah Manavis, a columnist at *The Observer*, the renewed and recycled obsession with past eras and aesthetics is a way of combating what gets lost when experiences and filtered down through screens.

“While our online lives are still part of our ‘real’ lives, online ‘experiences’ will never touch what it feels like to live out in the physical world. To spend time with loved ones in person, to visit a new place, to engage our senses actively rather than through passive, mindless consumption”.

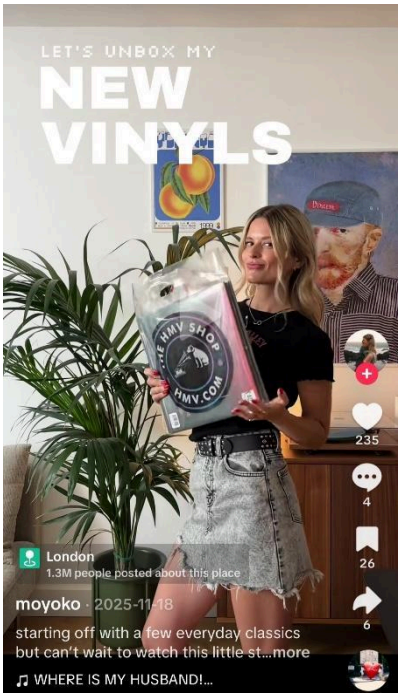
In a time where true connection and meaning seems to feel lost and out of reach, tactile formats of art and music can help us to romanticise life in a world full of uncertainty and darkness.

She also addresses the irony of social media’s part flattening nostalgia into aesthetics; creating the argument that perhaps it may be nothing more than a temporary fad. “Rather than thinking back on what we experienced emotionally during a certain period or even scrolling through our own private photo collection or messages to reconnect with those feelings, it's much easier and less emotionally demanding to reflect on past eras via romanticised clips online”.

A grainy TikTok of someone placing a needle on a record can rack up millions of views. Painting CDs for room décor and the trend of teenagers becoming “cool again” by playing instruments in their garage, all contribute to this rampant romanticisation. However, it does seem to go beyond that and while platforms may amplify aesthetics, the appeal ultimately lies beyond the screen and can only truly be embraced when stepping foot into the outside world. There is just something about ownership and exploring what you like in real-time that feels grounding and defiant in a world controlled by the internet.







Brick Lane's creative ecosystem does a lot to cultivate this desire. Surrounded by DIY spaces independent businesses and art schools, the area attracts a predominantly young adult demographic from the ages of 20-39, contrasting that of surrounding areas. Many young people use Brick Lane as a canvas to express themselves and utilise its tools when creating pieces of their own. It exists almost as an open-air gallery, showcasing dynamic artwork such as large murals, graffiti and posters.

Photography Credits: @hookedblog

Usamah Moolla, a recently graduated art student often finds himself flicking through the vinyl albums at Brick Lane record shops and describes listening as a "conscious habit".

"When I put a record on, I actually get to listen to it," he says. "I like to listen to the songs whilst creating art. I like that I can't skip a song and must instead listen to the tracks in the way that they were curated and meant to be listened to. The authenticity of it all reminds me of why I chose to make art in the first place".

Brick Lane belongs to the creatives, the innovators and the curious. Conversations can spark over shared finds, human interaction thrives, and music becomes more than just sounds trapped in devices; it becomes an experience that can bring people together.

As digital culture resuscitates, Gen Z have tapped into the foreign nostalgia of past decades and chosen to claim them as their own. It delves deeper than our desire for presence and ownership, for something real during times of instability and social pressures. It is also about romanticising the world we live in once more and finding enjoyment in the smallest and simplest of pleasures. In the click of a vinyl and the hum of a CD, we're finding something



the algorithm that raised us can't offer: presence.

Listen to our podcast to hear more!

By Husna Ali Pirbhai
(1168 words)

Contact Information:

Paul Marsham:

Phone Number - 07535001575

Instagram – vintagevinyl_brick lane

Facebook – vintage vinyl brick lane

Sarah Manavis:

Email – sarahmanavis@gmail.com

Usamah Moolla:

Phone Number - +44 7940 578803

Email – usamahmoolla@hotmail.com