

# Then is Now

## A Study on Modern Nostalgia



# Foreword

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90s and Y2K fashion is back. A four-film series on The Beatles is in production. Justin Bieber performed his Coachella set to his music video catalog from the 2010s. Vinyl sales continue to grow year-over-year, while iPod and compact digital cameras also experience a resurgence. What's old is new again.

Nostalgia is undoubtedly pervasive in the current cultural zeitgeist, but it's not just relics getting a new life or rediscovering classic hits. Nostalgia is also shaping and influencing what's new. In 2025, for example, Sabrina Carpenter released some of the most-viewed music video premieres on Vevo – all of which were direct homages to movies, such as *Thelma & Louise* and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*.

To examine this phenomenon, Vevo surveyed more than 1,800 consumers across the US, the UK, and Australia to understand how different generations experience and engage with nostalgia. Additionally, Vevo conducted a deep-dive on music video viewership of its library to identify and match patterns and surges that coincide with major pop culture occurrences.

Our study found that nostalgic sentiment is particularly high among younger, digitally native

consumers, such as Gen Z, who are nostalgic for times before they were born or formed any recollection – often times that predate social media, algorithms and the proliferation of screens.

Streaming and connectivity are major drivers of this trend. Today's media landscape is fragmented, and the resulting growth of "niche" fandoms ultimately creates a yearning for collective, shared experiences. Simultaneously, the streaming ecosystem helps sustain the relevance and monetization of nostalgic content, making it easily accessible for both re-engaging existing fans and introducing newer audiences.

This report explores nostalgia's influence on not only content creation, but also broader pop culture and consumerism: the differing perception among generations; the influence on music discovery and engagement; and the benefits for brands leveraging nostalgia.

Nostalgia isn't simply about looking back. It's a powerful force that shapes behavior today. When leveraged thoughtfully, nostalgia can do more than spark memories; it can drive relevance, engagement, and action.



**JP Evangelista**

EVP, Content,  
Programming  
& Marketing

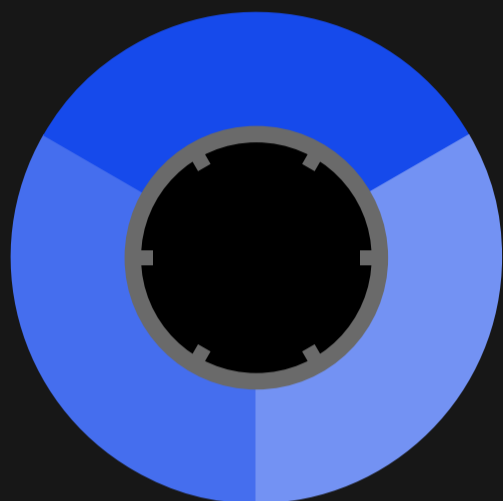
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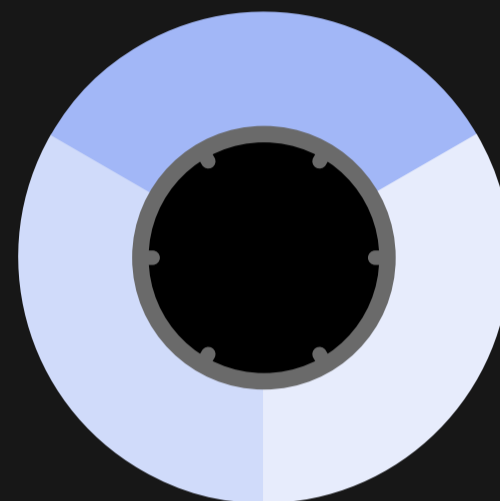
# Methodology

1,800 Survey Responses



- Gen Z Respondents: 600
- Millennial Respondents: 600
- Gen X Respondents: 600

3 Markets



- US Respondents: 600
- UK Respondents: 600
- Aus Respondents: 600

Fielded January 2026, General Population Consumers

# Defining Generations

## Gen X

Formative Era  
1970s-1980s

Ages  
46-61

## Millennials

Formative Era  
1990s

Ages  
30-45

## Gen Z

Formative Era  
2000s

Ages  
14-29

1970

1980

1990

2000

2010



Kylie Minogue  
The Loco-Motion (1987)

# Defining Nostalgia

How do audiences feel about content from the past and how these attitudes manifest in various behaviors across generations?

# Nostalgia Evokes Personal Memories & Creates Collective Memory

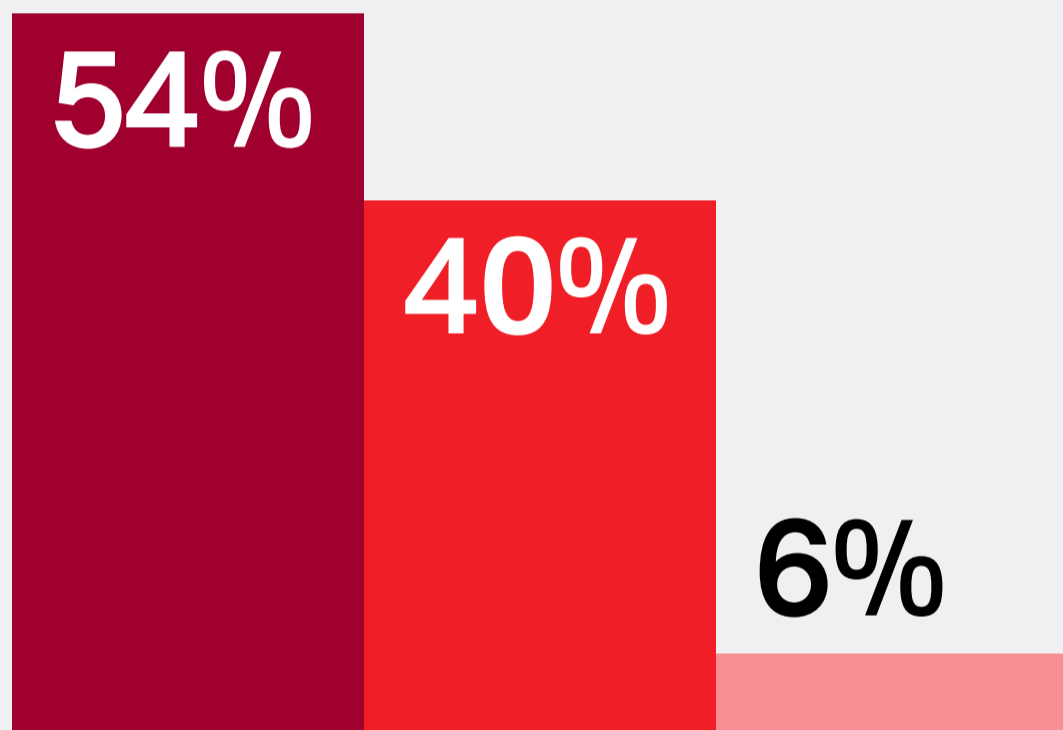


- Both a personal and collective feeling
- A personal feeling tied to my own memories
- A collective feeling shared as a generation

**60%**

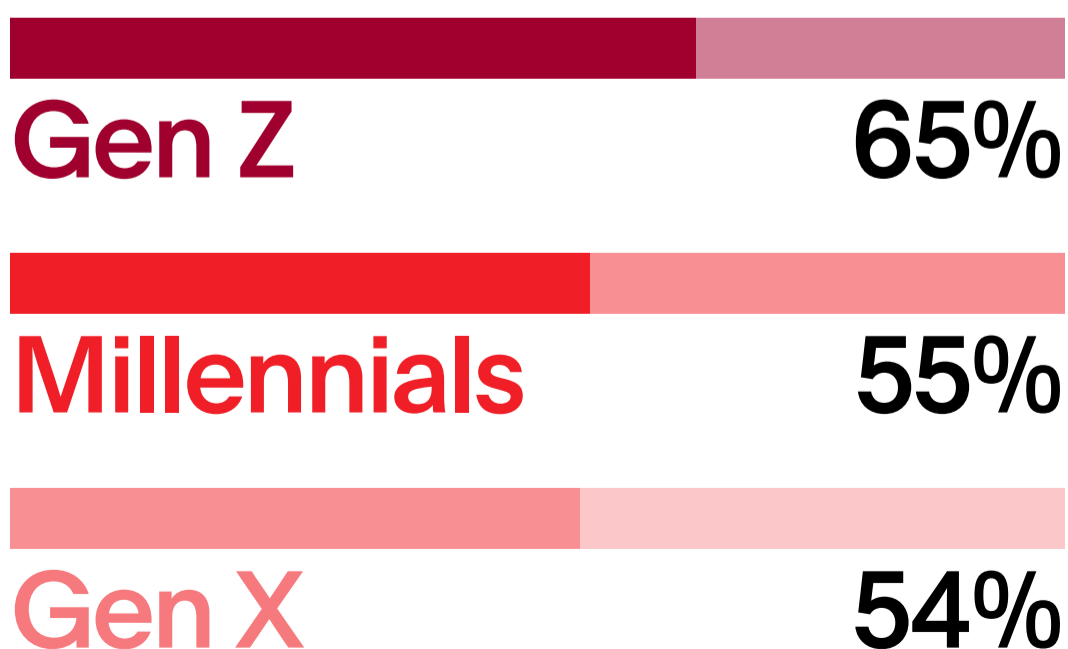
identify with the concept of Shared Nostalgia

Shared nostalgia, from 90s revivals and reboots to cross-generational moments, create collective memories that bring people together.



## Nostalgia Is Now Borrowed, Not Remembered

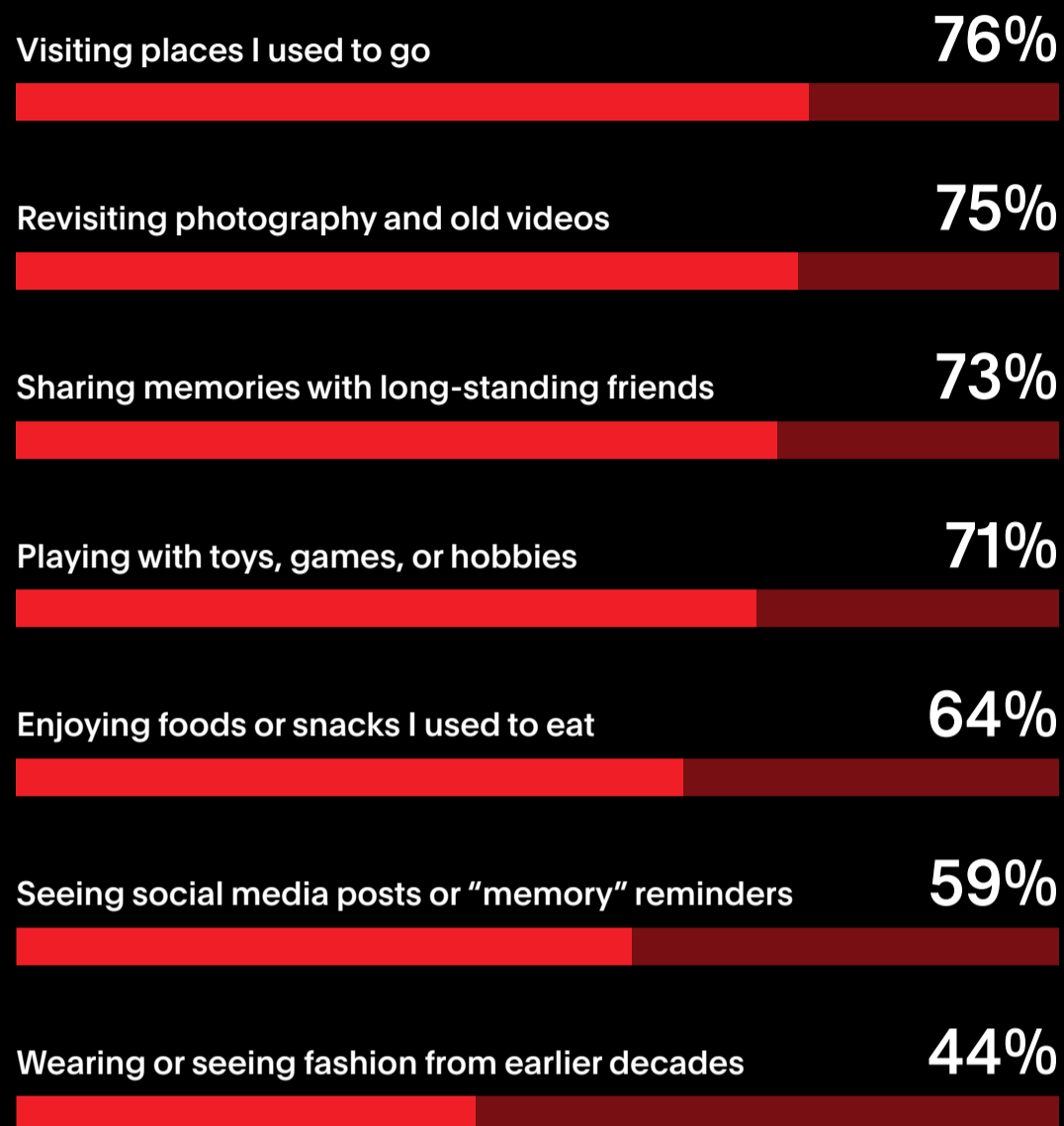
Gen Z is leading the rise of “borrowed nostalgia” at a significantly higher rate than Millennials and Gen X, with two-thirds of Gen Z reporting nostalgic emotional attachment to eras they never lived. These digitally native consumers yearn for collective, shared experiences that existed before content was available immediately on demand. With streaming collapsing generational barriers, younger audiences have easy access to timeless content, allowing them to discover and form deep emotional connections with cultural moments from decades before they were born.



Q: Have you ever felt nostalgic for content, styles, or cultural moments from before you were born or were too young to remember?

# Nostalgia Isn't Limited to Personal Memories

Content triggers feelings of nostalgia just as much as personal memories and experiences.



# Nostalgia is an Everyday Experience



Nostalgia makes emotional experiences feel deeper and more meaningful.

88% agree

Nostalgia can be just as powerful as discovering something new.

79% agree

Feeling nostalgic has a strong influence on the media and content I choose to watch.

64% agree

I enjoy learning the stories behind iconic moments, trends, and eras from the past.

71% agree

My cultural or family history shapes what I feel nostalgic for.

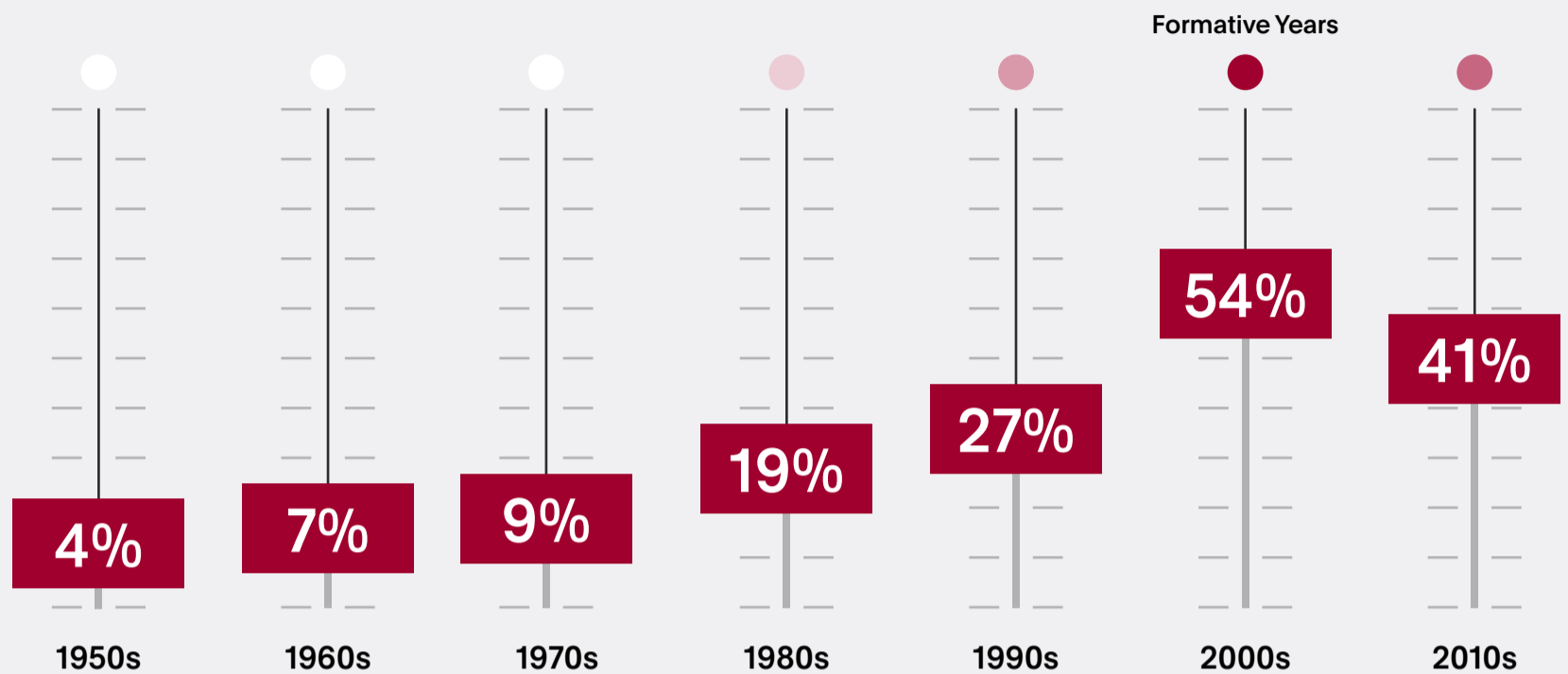
60% agree

Gen Z respondents who agree with each statement.

# The Nostalgic "Sweet Spot" Maps to Formative Teen Years

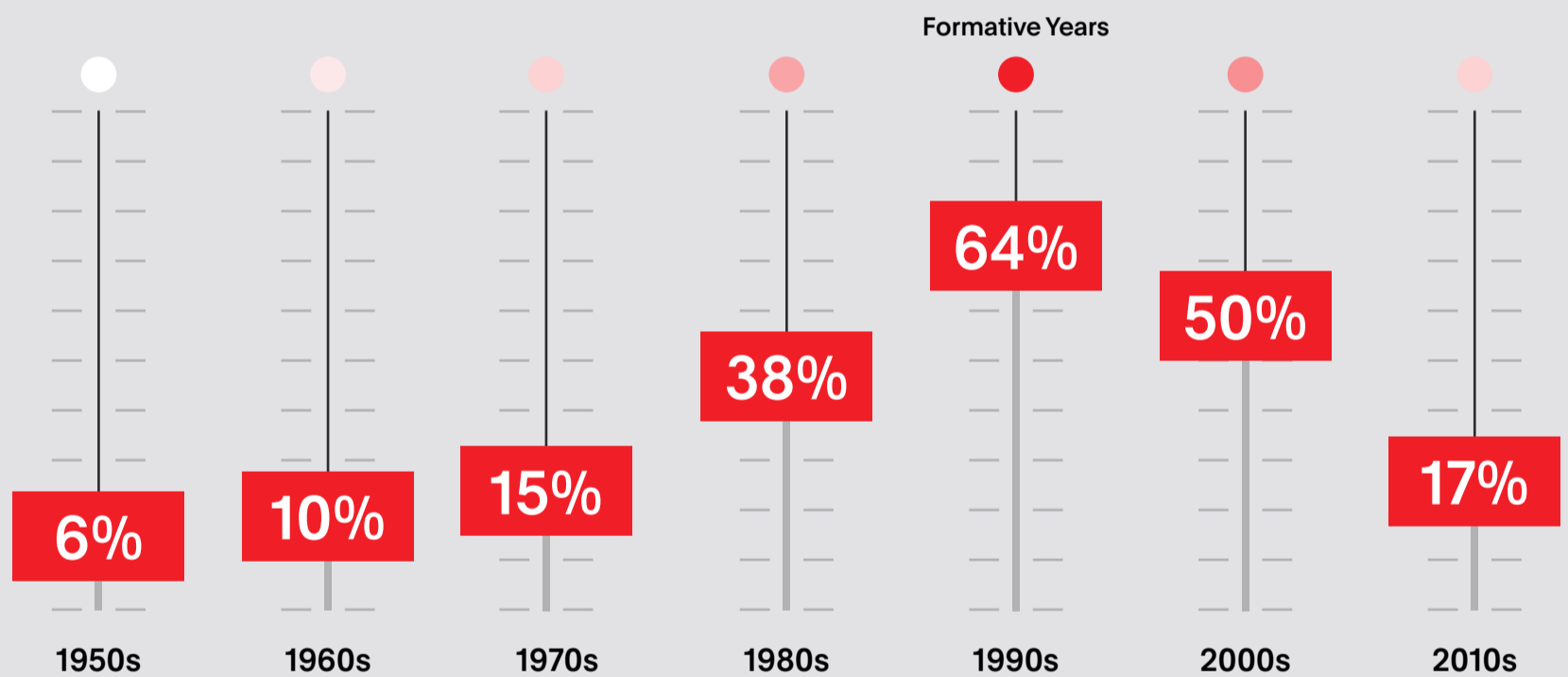
## Gen Z

Gen Z is already romanticizing the 2010s. Nostalgia cycles may be accelerating among digital-native generations.



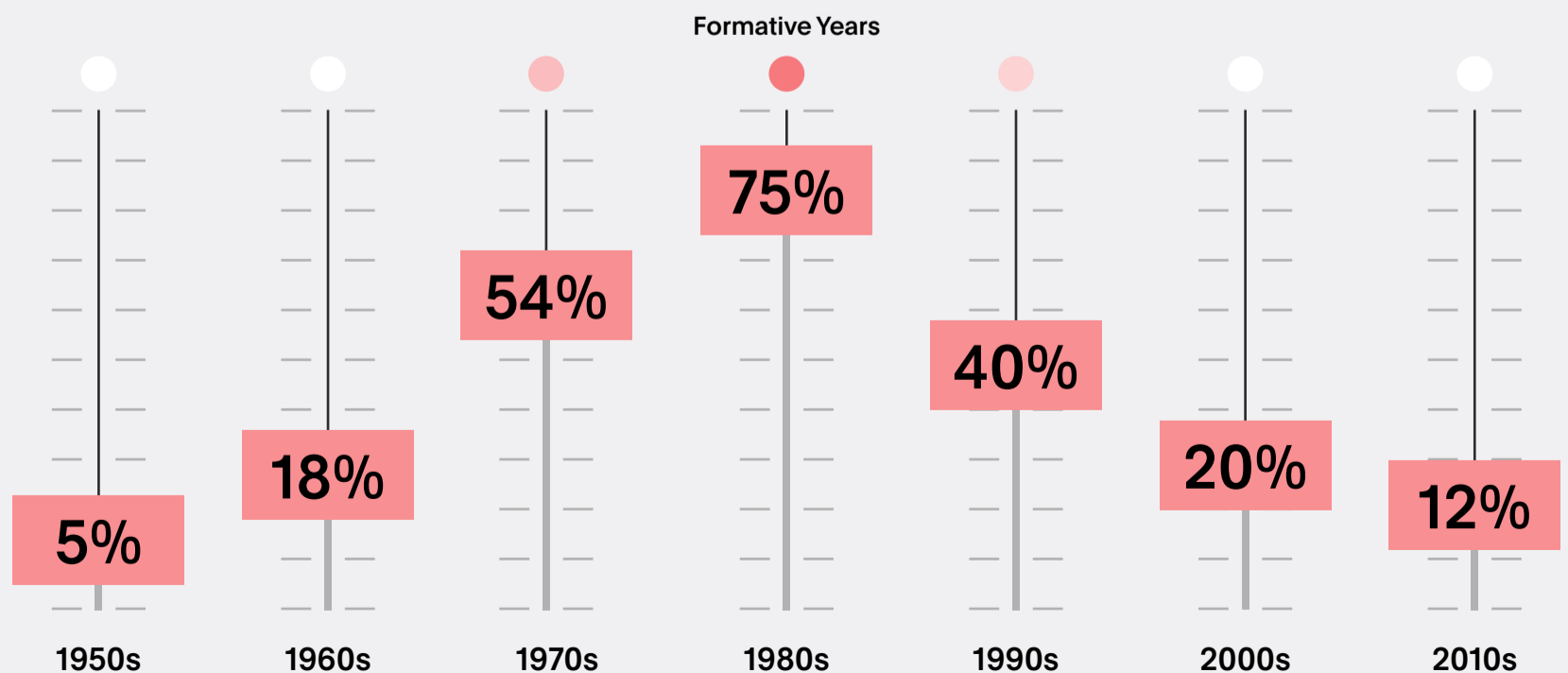
## Millennials

Millennials are the bridge generation for nostalgia, referencing both the analog and streaming ages.



## Gen X

The 80s are the clear golden era for Gen X. The nostalgic associations are the most concentrated of any generation.



Q: Which decades do you most associate with nostalgia? (Select all that apply)

# Nostalgia Permeates Pop Culture, From Fashion, Film and TV...

## Project Hail Mary

Amazon MGM Studios, March 2026

A pivotal karaoke scene serves as an emotional anthem for the film.

## Love Story

Hulu, February 2026

A show about two American icons, scored by the 90s music that shaped them.

## The Beatles Anthology

Disney+, Nov 2025

A 60-year-old catalog surging on the back of the documentary release.



### Harry Styles

Sign of the Times (2017)

# +547%

The music video saw 6.5x the average views since the film release.



### Sade

No Ordinary Love (1992)

# +52%

viewership growth for the music video following the show's premiere.



### The Beatles Catalog

# +62%

boost in viewership after fans rewatched the Beatles music video catalog following the documentary release.

## ...and New Music Releases



### Sabrina Carpenter

Manchild (2025)

The music video creative is a "mini road movie" heavily inspired by 1970s film classics like Badlands and Thelma & Louise.

# #1

Premiere on Vevo for 2025 in the US, UK and Australia

### FLO

Leak It (2026)

Donning Spice Girls-inspired outfits, FLO reps the 90s to their fanbase, which skews nearly 2x younger than the average viewership on Vevo.

# 2x

younger audience than average

### Zara Larsson

Y2K Era

Zara has tripled her music video viewership since January 2025, riding a wave of nostalgia from the virality of her 2015 hit "Lush Life" to the Y2K album aesthetic and a UK/US collab steeped in borrowed nostalgia.

# 3x

Her daily view baseline from January 2025



Dr. Dre ft. Snoop Dogg  
Still D.R.E. (1999)



Backstreet Boys  
I Want It That Way (1999)



Aqua  
Barbie Girl (1997)



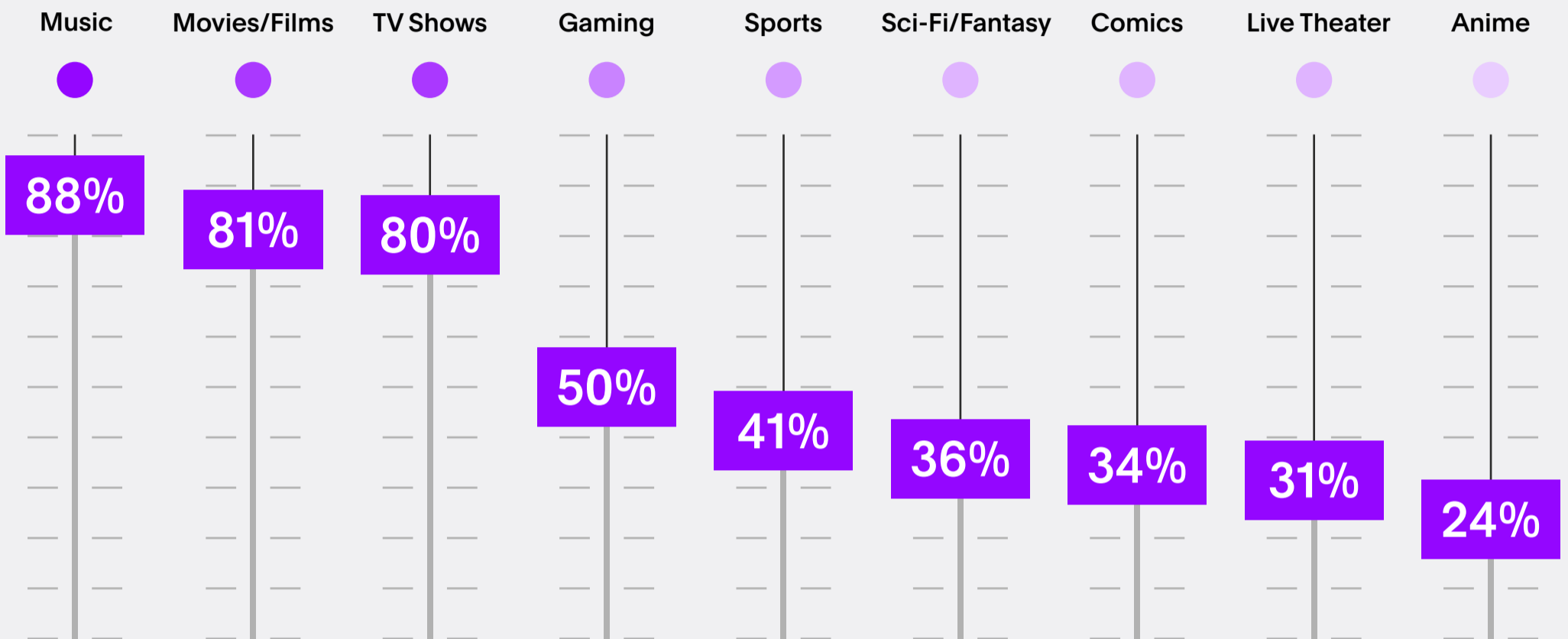
Shania Twain  
That Don't Impress Me Much (1998)

# Music Video Is the Ultimate Nostalgia Medium

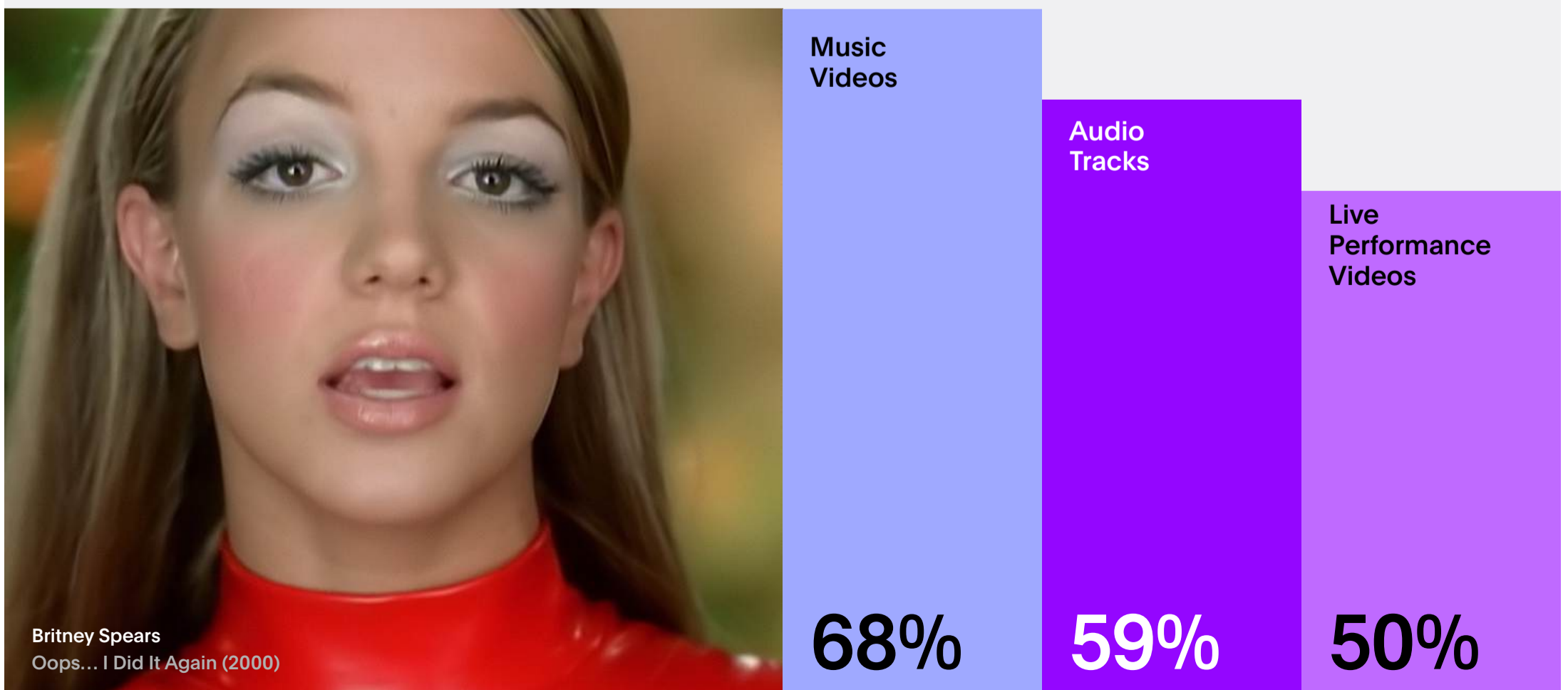
Music fosters deep emotional connections and catalog rediscovery.

# Music Is the Ultimate Driving Force of Nostalgia

We asked audiences: What feels the most nostalgic to you?



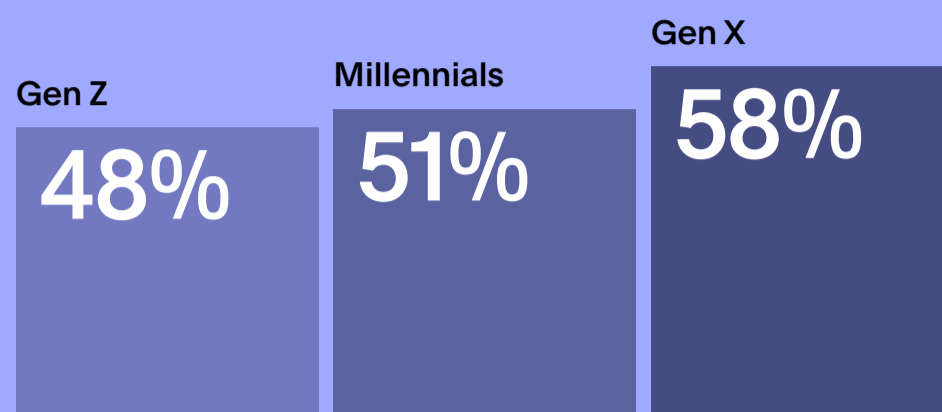
## Music Videos Drive Nostalgic Feelings More Than Any Other Format



# Nostalgia by Genre

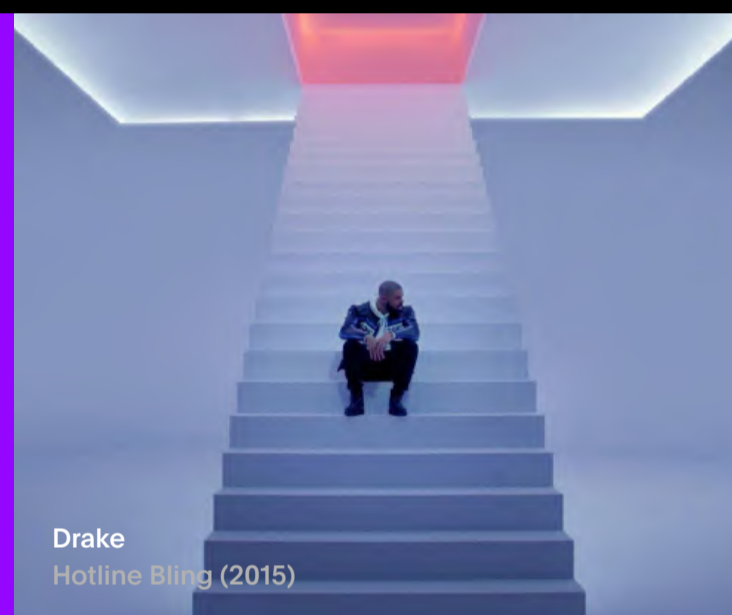
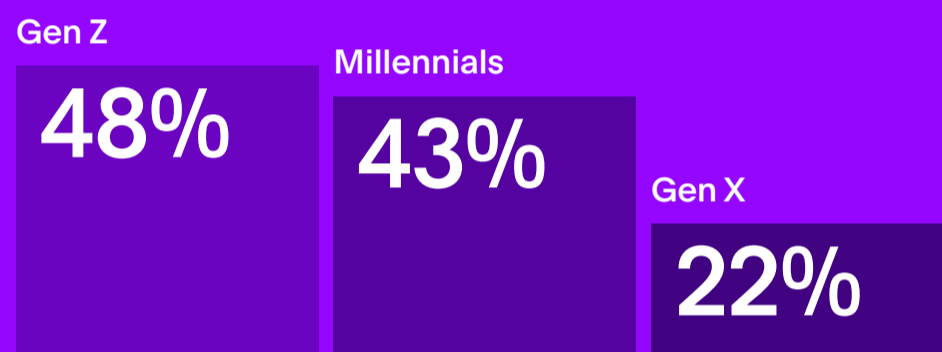
## Pop

Pop is the most universally nostalgic genre, strengthening with age.



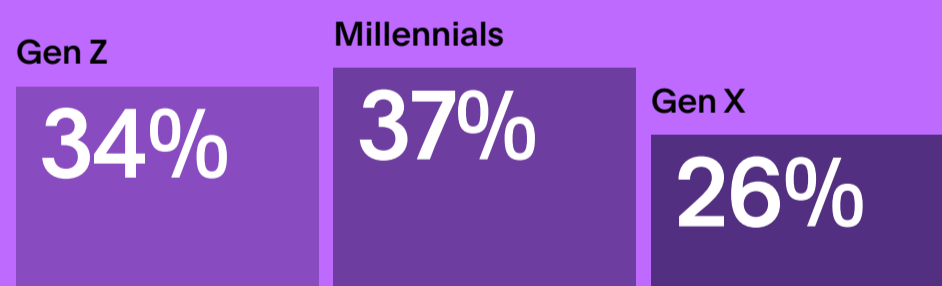
## Hip Hop

Hip Hop nostalgia skews young, with a clear generational handoff.



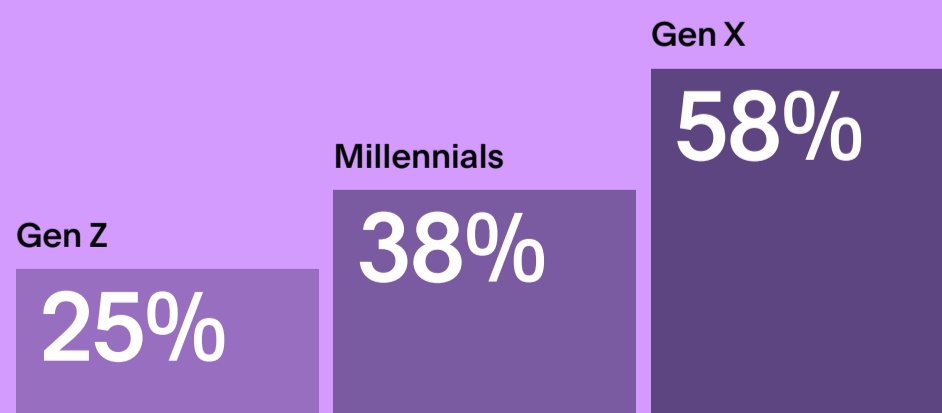
## R&B

R&B delivers steady, cross-generational nostalgia without sharp drop-offs.



## Rock

Rock nostalgia skews older, anchored by Gen X.



Q: Which music genres do you associate with nostalgia? (Select all that apply)

# Nostalgia Leads to Catalog Deep Dives

When audiences hear songs from their past, they create a strong personal connection, revisit content they love, and discover content they haven't seen.

**78%**

agree it reminds me of a specific person or moment

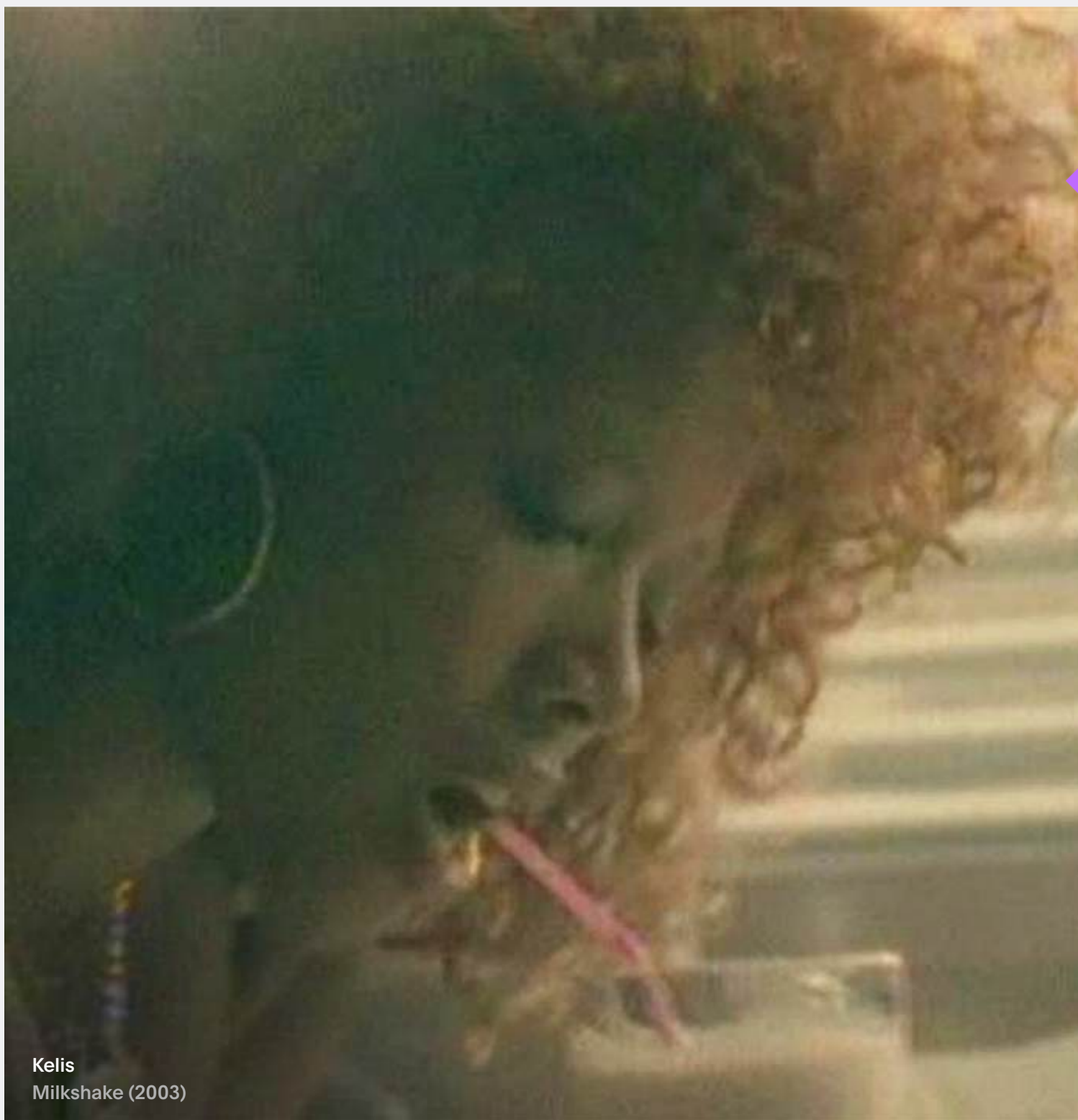
**69%**

agree I revisit older albums, artists or genres I used to love

**67%**

agree it makes me want to explore more songs from that era

## Catalog Viewership on Vevo



Kelis  
Milkshake (2003)

Gap's use of 'Milkshake' in their campaign drives music video viewership increase (2025)

**+66%**

increase in monthly video views

Justin Bieber scrolls through his video archive on Coachella's mainstage and performs with his younger self (2026)

**+221%**

increase in views

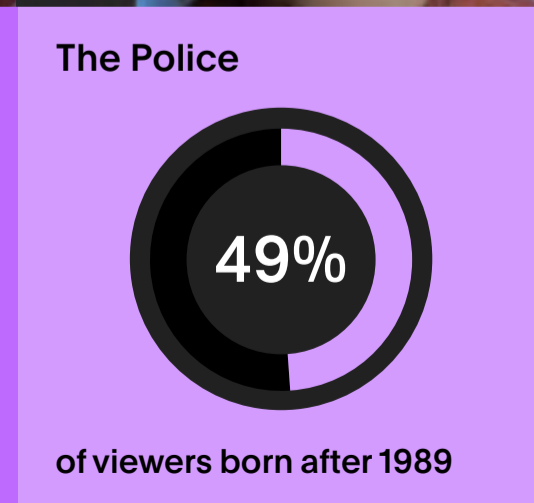
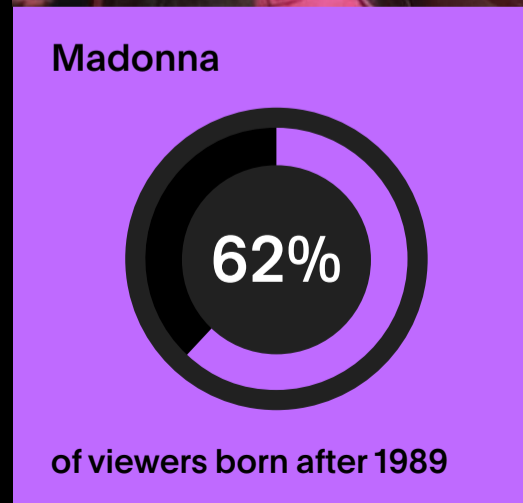
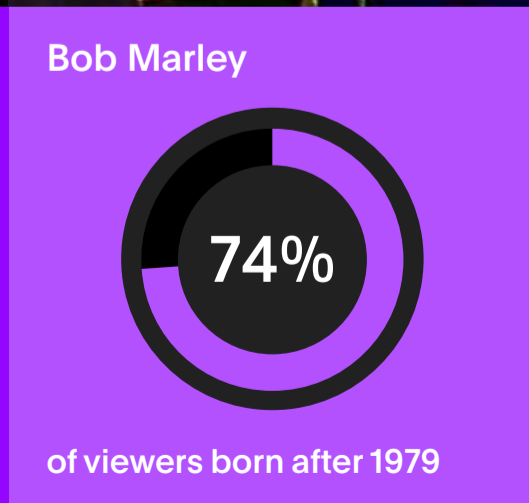
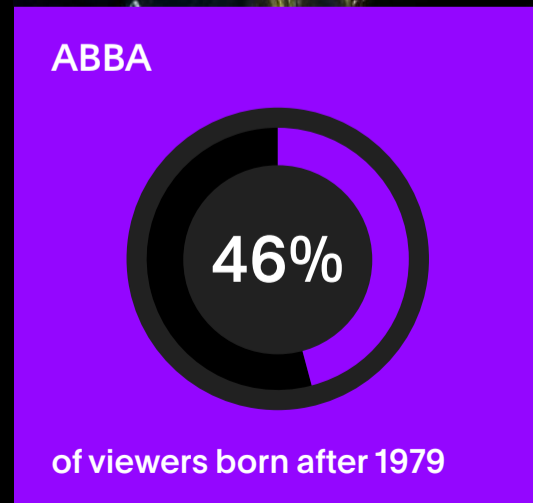
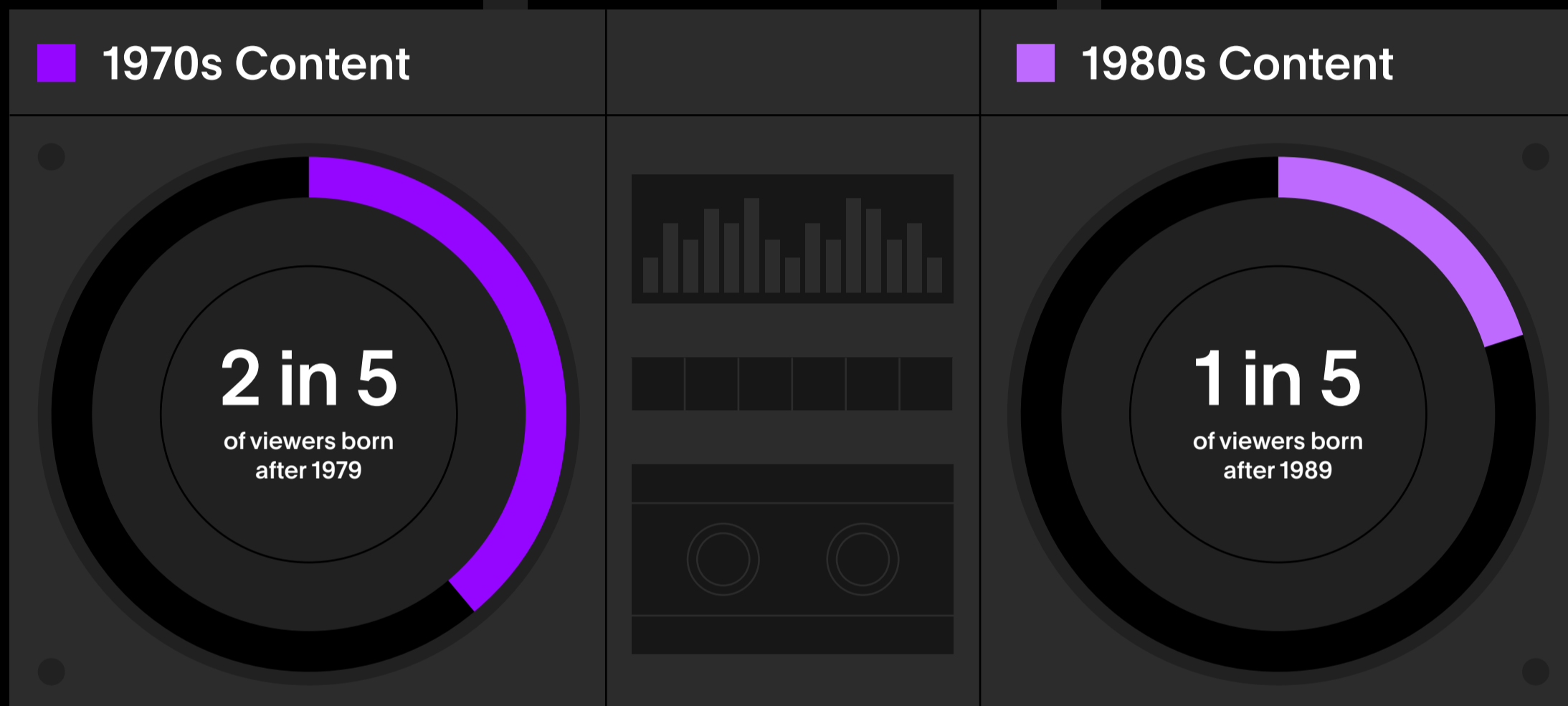
Clipse performs at the Grammys for the first time in their 20-year career (2026)

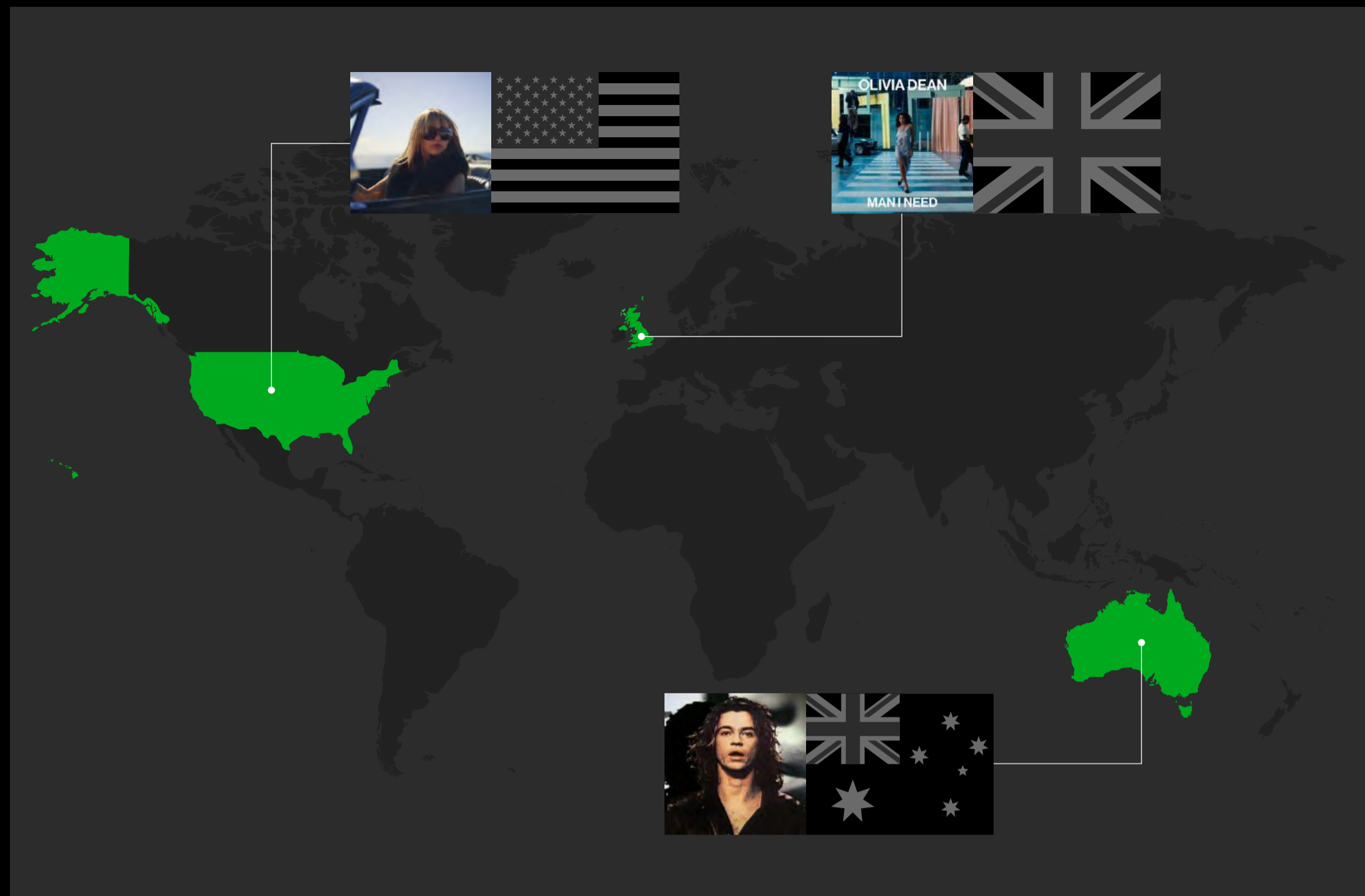
**+67%**

increase in views vs the 4 weeks prior

# Borrowed Nostalgia by Decade

Vevo viewership data shows that older content becomes even more meaningful with time, captivating young audiences. Music videos from the 70s and 80s, the most distant decades relative to the age of the youngest consumers, have a sizable share of their audience that is disproportionately young. The internet's ability to quickly provide younger generations with content from before their time lets these music videos serve as reference points of their respective decades.





# Market Insights

Australia  
United Kingdom  
United States

# Aussie Pride: The Enduring Power of Homegrown Hits



Men at Work  
Down Under (1980)

**+353%**

"Down Under" is the unofficial anthem for Australia Day. Men at Work's catalog garnered 4.5x the views on Australia Day vs. the 4 weeks prior.



INXS  
Need You Tonight / Mediate (1987)

**+792%**

INXS saw 9x the views in January, due to a combination of Australia Day and the lead singer's birthday.



AC/DC  
Heatseeker (1988)

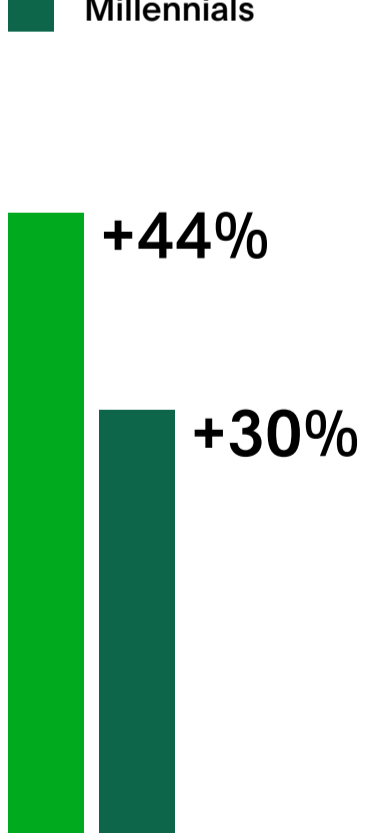
**+92%**

The band returned to tour Australia in November and December of 2025 for the first time in a decade, causing fans to revisit their catalog, doubling viewership.

## Australia's Indie and Electronic Artists Resonate Beyond Millennials

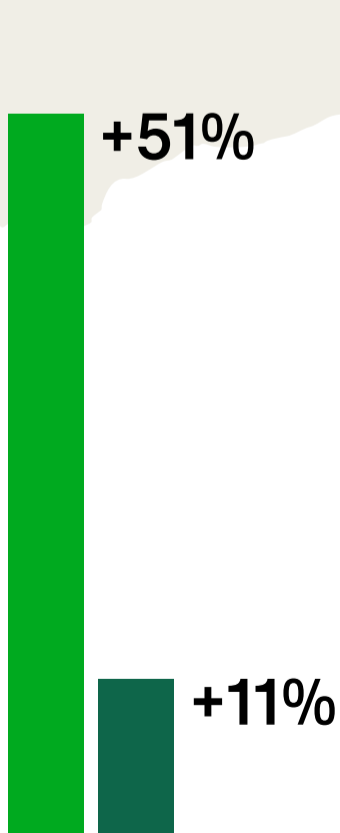
Australian identity in music is more than classic-rock patriotism. The 2010s indie-electronic wave is now entering its nostalgic window.

Gen Z  
Millennials



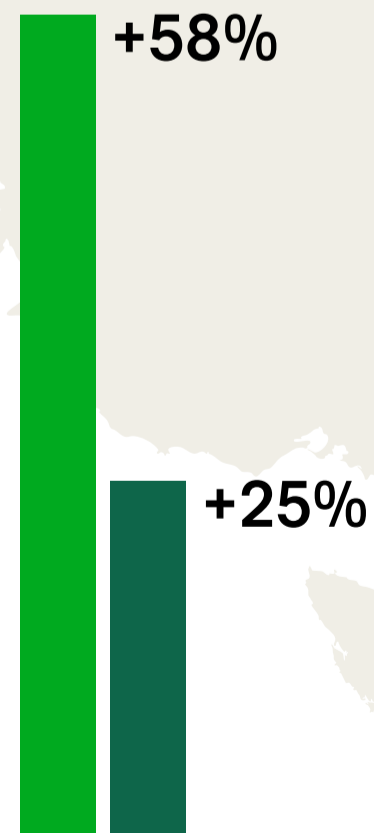
**Flume**

Mid 2010s electronic



**Troye Sivan**

YouTube native



**Tame Impala**

Psychedelic 2010s

# Borrowed Sound, British Soul

A genre born in Detroit and Memphis has become one of the UK's most enduring cultural identities and still drives viewership today. When Motown and Stax crossed the Atlantic in the early 1960s, the UK created their own Northern Soul movement. Today, that soul throughline is seen and heard across the most commercially successful UK artists of the last two decades. Adele and Amy Winehouse built global careers on the sound and aesthetic of 60s soul. Artists like Raye, Olivia Dean, and Sienna Spiro now carry that forward on Vevo.



Olivia Dean  
Man I Need (2025)  
**19x**  
lift in views in  
2026 vs. 2025



Raye  
Sober (2017)  
**+96%**  
lift in views in  
2026 vs. 2025



Sienna Spiro  
Die on this Hill (2025)  
**+665%**  
growth in views  
in 2026 vs. 2025

# Rock's Resurgence in the UK

As the early 00s become a powerful reference point for new indie rock and pop in the UK, the originals are finding a new audience with younger viewers.

**Nirvana** Peak 90s grunge



**Arctic Monkeys** Peak 00s indie scene



**Franz Ferdinand** Peak post-punk revival

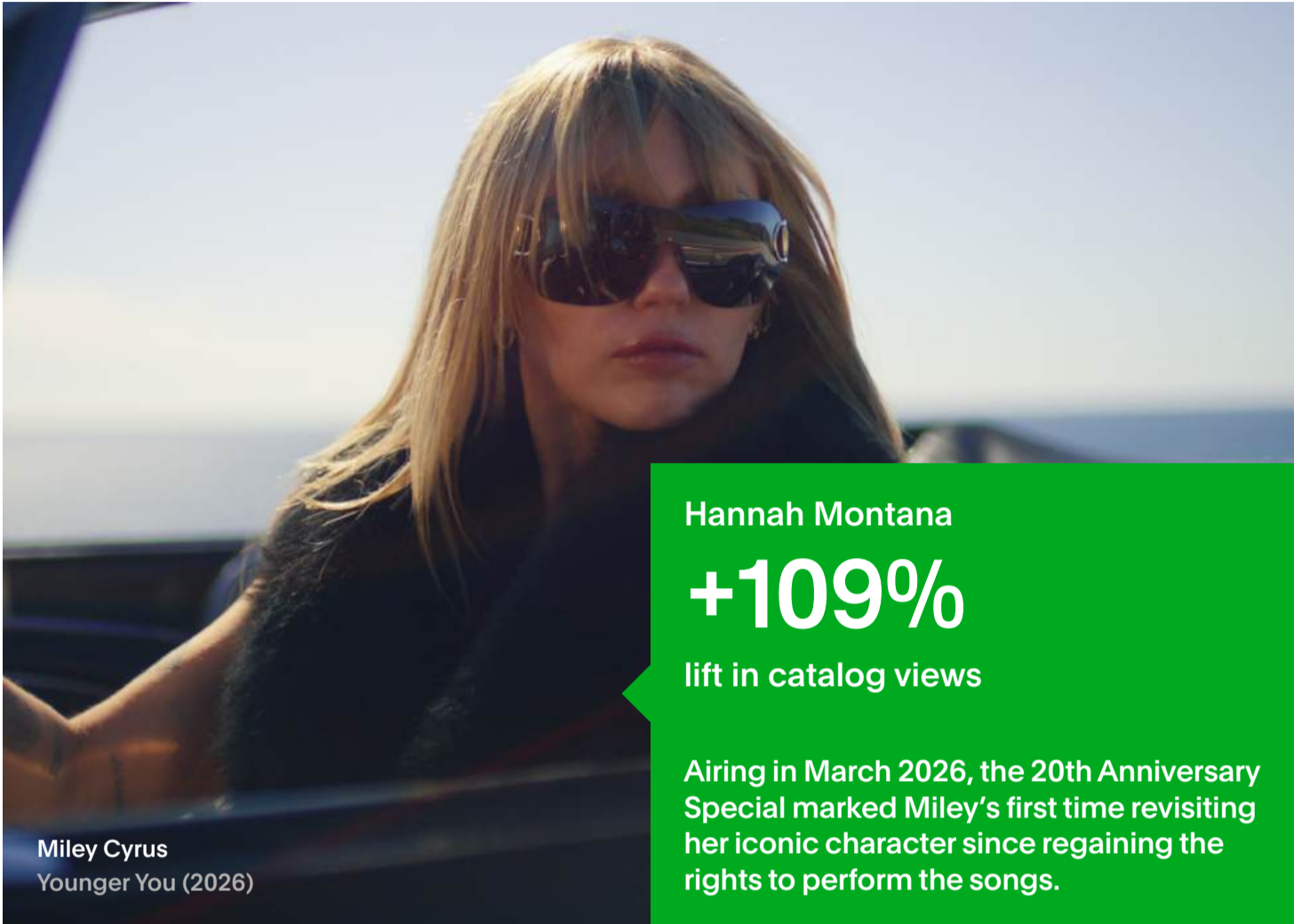


Lift in Vevo UK views

- Gen Alpha (Ages 2-13)
- Gen Z (Ages 14-29)

# Disney Stars' Tour Comebacks

The Disney Channel was a shared cultural experience for millennials in the US. Today, many of those stars' nostalgia waves are cresting and they're bringing the nostalgic context with them.



**Hilary Duff**  
**+311%**  
lift in catalog views

She's back with a new album, and the press tour is filled with memories from her teen-star days.

**Hannah Montana**  
**+109%**  
lift in catalog views

Airing in March 2026, the 20th Anniversary Special marked Miley's first time revisiting her iconic character since regaining the rights to perform the songs.

**Jonas Brothers**  
**+104%**  
lift in views

With Camp Rock 3 in production, their world tour is underway, doubling their music video viewership after their MetLife Stadium kickoff.

Miley Cyrus  
Younger You (2026)

## Documentaries Drive Surges for Latin Music Legends

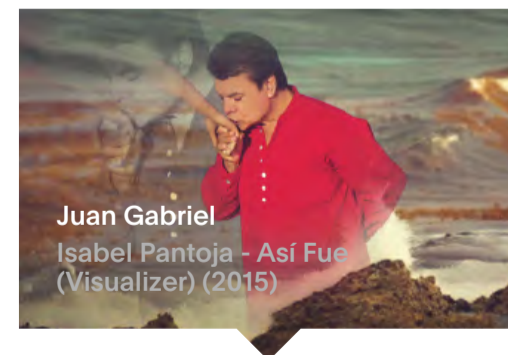
### Selena y Los Dinos



With the documentary released in November 2025, Selena's catalog surged in the US.

**+84%**

### Debo, Puedo y Quiero — Juan Gabriel



After the documentary arrived on streaming in November 2025. Viewership of Juan Gabriel's catalog increased by 2x within days of the release.

**+114%**

New daily average above pre-documentary baseline, 4 months later.

**+34%**



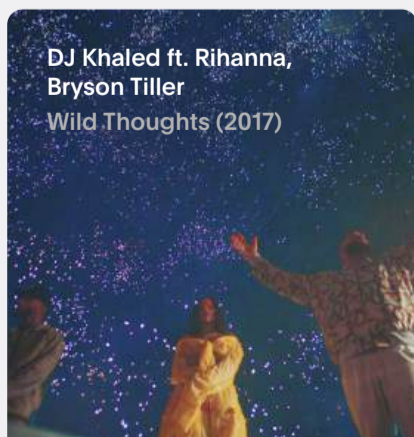
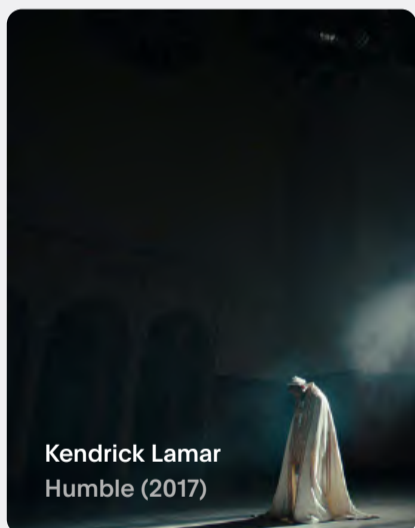
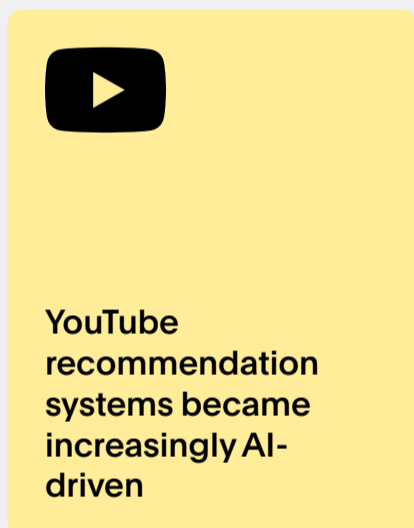
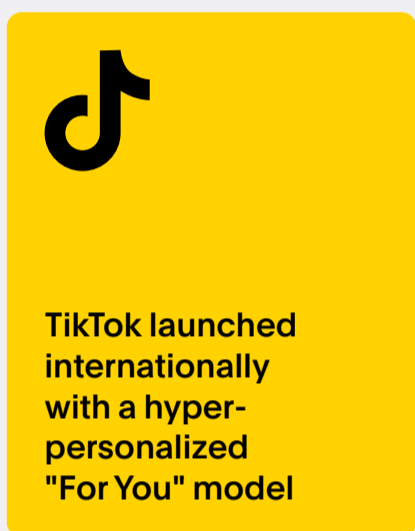
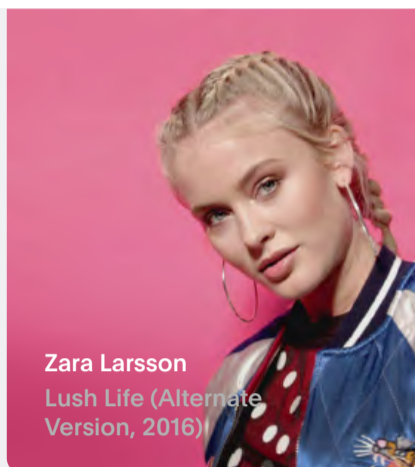
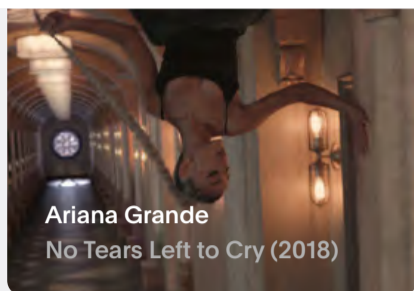
Beastie Boys  
Intergalactic' (1998)

# Brand Implications

When leveraged thoughtfully, nostalgia can drive brand relevance, engagement, and action.

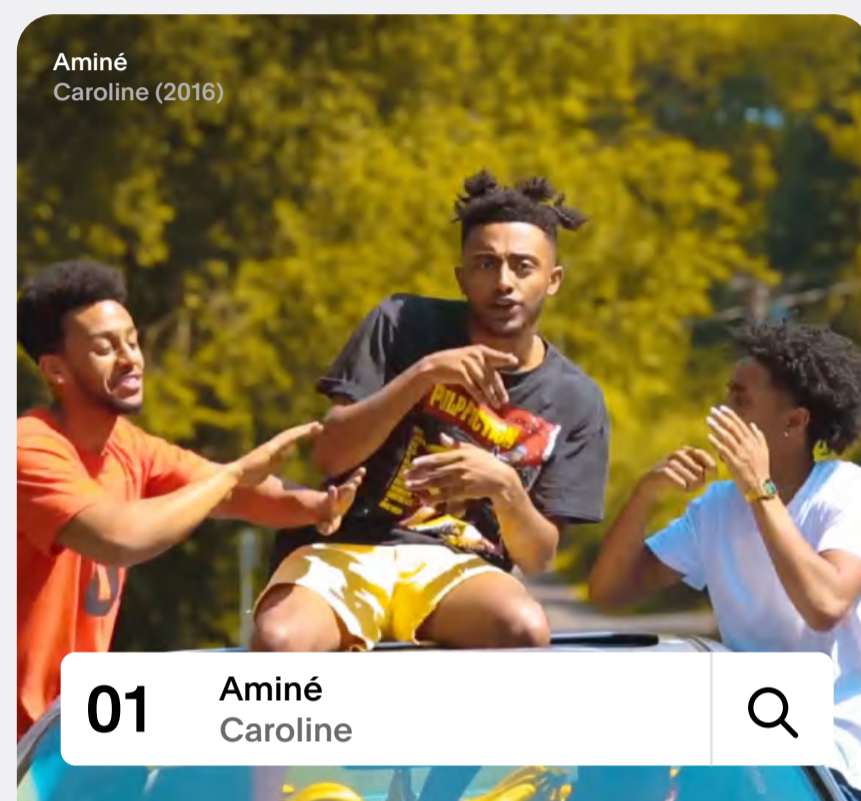
# Viral Spotlight: The 2016 Trend

Social platforms are increasingly shaping how audiences engage with nostalgia, transforming catalog content into timely cultural moments. One of the year's viral trends prompted users to revisit their favorite music videos from 2016, demonstrating how social conversations can reignite interest and engagement.



2016

Most-searched 2016 videos during viral moment



01 Aminé  
Caroline



02 Rae Sremmurd  
Black Beatles ft. Gucci Mane

03 Justin Bieber  
Beauty And A Beat ft. Nicki Minaj

04 Justin Bieber  
Sorry

05 Khalid  
Location

06 Silentó  
Watch Me (Whip/Nae Nae)

07 Calvin Harris, Rihanna  
This Is What You Came For

08 Fifth Harmony  
Work from Home ft. Ty Dolla \$ign

09 Zara Larsson  
Lush Life

10 Ariana Grande  
Into You

2017

2018

2019

# Look Back, Get Ahead



## Resonates across ages

Nostalgic advertising resonates equally across age groups.

## Lifts emotional association

Increases positive emotional association with the brand.

## Lifts purchase intent

Increases likelihood to purchase a brand.

# Investing in Nostalgia Is Complementary to a Premiere Strategy

Nostalgia builds loyalty and emotional connection. Premieres drive discovery and innovation.

## Nostalgia brand goals

Building emotional connections with customers

+22%

Re engaging customers

+17%

Connecting with long-standing customers

+11%

Reinforcing brand heritage

+10%

Increasing brand relatability

+8%

## Premieres brand goals

Introducing new products or services

+18%

Making the brand feel innovative

+15%

Encouraging trial of a new product

+12%

Creating excitement or buzz

+11%

Encouraging exploration of a brand

+7%

Percentage lifts when comparing consumer perceptions of brand opportunities for "Premieres" and "Nostalgia."

# Key Takeaways

## Key Takeaways

**01**

**Nostalgia is now borrowed**

Gen Z leads the rise of emotional attachment to eras they never lived (65%).

**02**

**Music is the ultimate lever**

88% of respondents cite music as the most nostalgic medium; music videos outpace other formats within music.

**03**

**Genres map to generations**

Pop strengthens with age; Hip Hop skews young; Rock anchors Gen X.

**04**

**Local identity fuels global pull**

From hometown artists and bands, to local sounds, and childhood celebrities, nostalgia translates to more views and audience engagement.

**05**

**Brands need strategies for both nostalgia and premieres**

Nostalgia helps build brand loyalty and deepen emotional connections, while premieres help create excitement and support launches of new products and services.

## Summary

Music and nostalgia are deeply connected because of music's ability to preserve moments long after they've passed, whether it is the feeling of a summer night, a childhood memory, or a person we haven't seen in years. We know music can transport you back, more than anything else.

Music videos make nostalgia even more impactful because they combine sound with visual memory. This dual effect on the brain leaves a powerful impression on our psyches and has a big impact on how we think. Grainy footage, VHS effects, late-night city scenes, or carefree summer imagery often create a sense of longing for moments that felt simpler or more meaningful.

Many iconic music videos have become symbols of entire eras, capturing the trends, emotions, and atmosphere of a generation. Everyday we seek the power of music videos to tap into and drive culture. Even newer artists use nostalgic visuals intentionally because they understand how strongly audiences connect emotion with memory. It's why music videos remain the most durable and culturally reflective format in music.

These same principles are applicable to brand strategy, which is why nostalgia is a vital component of the broader marketing mix. It creates positive emotional links and drives purchase intent across every generation. Using nostalgic elements in messaging or ad placement provides an effective means of achieving challenging brand-building objectives, perfectly balancing a strategy around new premieres. Our study suggests an even closer tie between nostalgia and audience engagement, and Vevo is offering brands a unique way to take advantage of this moment.

## Sources & Methods

Nostalgia Survey (2026)

N=1,800 | US, UK, AUS | General population | Fielded January 2026.

Vevo Analytics

Ad-supported viewership data on Vevo; year-over-year and baseline lift analyses.