

90s and 2000s nostalgia is shaping consumer choices

From the return of low-rise jeans to the reboots of classic TV shows like *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air* and *Full House*, the 90s and 2000s are clearly making a comeback. Driven by a complex mix of global anxieties such as the cost-of-living crisis and ongoing wars, millennials and Gen Zs are seeking comfort in a time when they were young and carefree.



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This phenomenon, known as the nostalgia effect, triggers a powerful desire to recapture positive memories through associated products and experiences.

Supporting this, Jonathan Spencer, brand and campaigns manager at [OneDayOnly.co.za](#), cites research indicating that nearly half of Gen Zs and over a third of millennials report frequent stress and anxiety.

"Furthermore, almost a quarter of both groups prioritise reminiscing over future planning. This aligns with the established role of nostalgia as a comforting force during uncertain times."

As these generations become the driving force behind the next economic and cultural shifts, brands have a strategic opportunity to cater to their nostalgic preferences. This trend, evident since 2021 and showing no signs of slowing down, presents a valuable marketing opportunity.

“It is for this reason that we have embraced the nostalgia effect through incorporating old-school 90’s, early 2000’s MTV & musical references to transport shoppers back in time but with a modern twist,” he explains.

Spencer elaborates on why brands should jump on the nostalgia effect trend:

- **Buy, buy, buy (-ing into the past):** This fondness for the past translates into buying decisions. Research has found that shoppers are 52% more likely to make a purchase that makes them feel nostalgic, with many looking for products, trends, or experiences that characterised their younger years. Think Tamagotchis and flip phones.
- **More than just a trip down memory lane:** Nostalgia fosters deep emotional connections with these items. They hold significant meaning, leading to increased spending driven by sentimentality. Studies even suggest that nostalgia can stimulate economies during recessions.
- **You’ve got a friend in me:** Consumers also tend to remain loyal to products and brands that evoke positive memories, creating a bond that transcends simple transactions.

Take Mrs Balls Chutney, for instance. Despite being developed in the early 1900s, it is still one of the most popular chutney brands in the country, with its heritage element being a contributing factor. Many a South African has fond memories of boboties and braaibroodjies being accompanied by Mrs Balls. It makes sense then that it is stocked in speciality stores around the world – from Singapore to Scotland – catering to South African expats’ longings for a taste of home.

- **Back to the future is here to stay:** While millennials and Gen Zs might seem fixated on the past, they’re also using nostalgia as a springboard for the future. Studies show that nostalgic memories can inspire hope and openness to new ideas and experiences. In fact, a significant portion (72%) of participants in a study reported that nostalgic memories motivated them during challenging times, and 60% said these memories offered guidance when faced with uncertainty.

“It’s crucial to note that this generation isn’t simply reliving the past through rose-tinted glasses. They’re applying a contemporary lens, acknowledging the shortcomings of the 90s and 2000s while seeking to merge the best aspects of those times with the present to shape a brighter future.

Therefore, the key is for marketers to approach nostalgia authentically and light-heartedly, offering consumers a welcome escape from the complexities of the modern world,” Spencer points out.

“Nostalgia also fosters a sense of familiarity and emotional connection between brands and their customers,” he continues. “This bond is crucial for building brand loyalty and driving sales, especially during economic uncertainties. It seems that we all need a little nostalgia to get us through dark days and create better ones in future.”

“A little nostalgia can go a long way. By understanding the power of this emotional connection, brands can develop effective

strategies to engage with consumers and navigate the ever-changing marketplace,” Spencer concludes.

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