



CULTURAL

CODES

2026



> INTRODUCTION

WHAT ARE THE CULTURAL CODES AND WHY DO WE DO THEM



Having a strong understanding of people and what matters to them is fundamental to any brand hoping to connect meaningfully. the7stars cultural codes uncover the main trends shaping how we feel, behave, and consume. Not flash-in-the-pan fads, but the shifts that underpin broad sentiment and behaviour.

In 2022, we identified nine Cultural Codes. These were a series of signals which we could track to help us respond to the ever-evolving cultural landscape in Britain, and they reflect the need for brands to monitor and participate in these long-term trends in order to connect meaningfully with people.

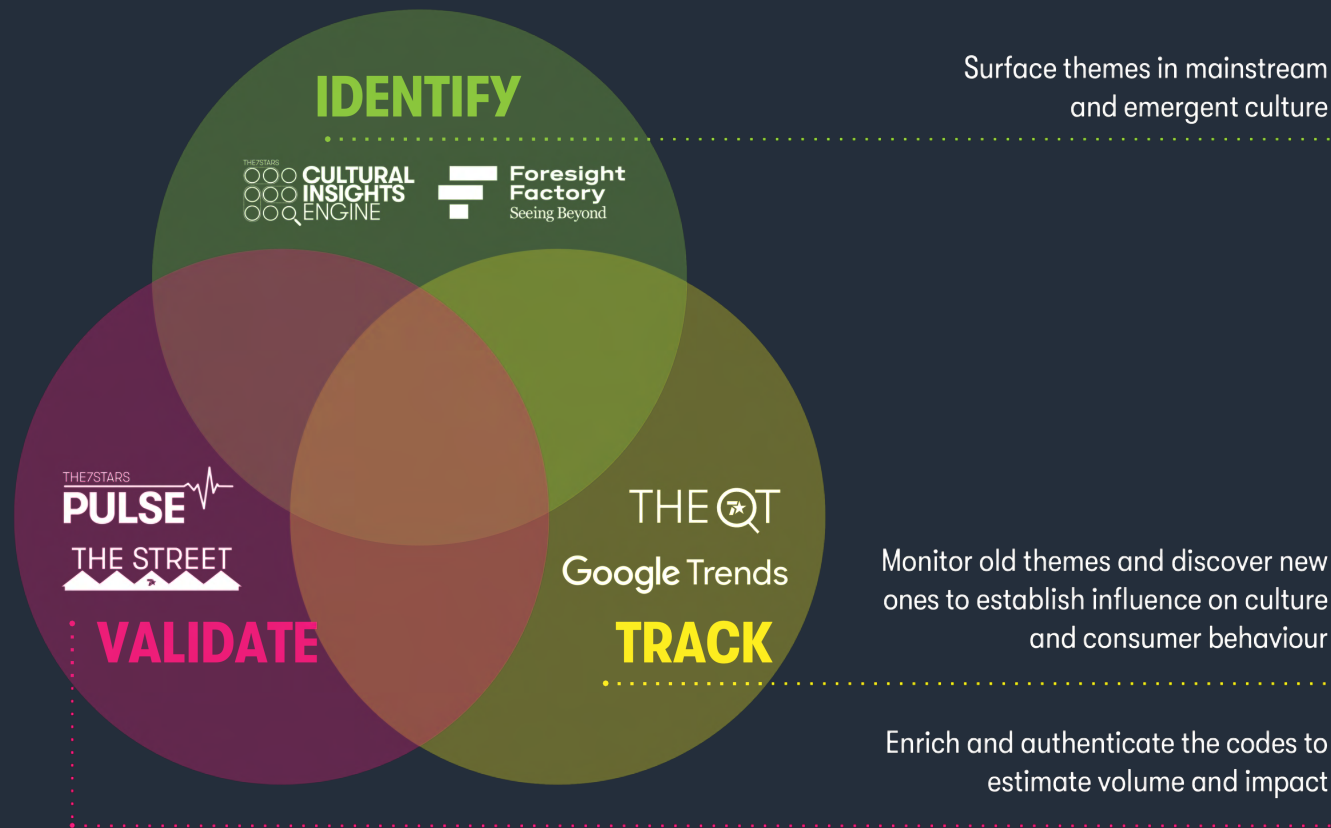
Over time, some of these codes have faded in influence or developed. Our third edition of the Cultural Codes in 2026 identifies the eight codes at the heart of UK culture for the year.

This was based on a wide range of quantitative and qualitative research, tracking and bespoke surveys, using our suite of insight tools and industry research. We have surfaced themes in mainstream and emergent culture and tracked their influence over time.

And following on from this, our Cultural Insight Engine, powered by social listening, will help monitor our cultural codes through conversations taking place online. This gives us a people-first lens on the UK's cultural landscape and keeps track of what really matters to consumers, meaning that we can stay on top of our codes as they continue to evolve.

We focus in on the impact amongst 18-34s, not because their behaviour is any more important than other groups of society, but because they tend to be at the pointy end of emerging trends and an indicator of things to come.

> WHAT IS THE CULTURAL CODES FRAMEWORK?



Since we first released the Cultural Codes three years ago, we have been using our wide range of insight tools to track and monitor changes in the UK's cultural landscape.

- the7stars Quarterly Tracker
- the7stars Pulse Community
- the7stars Street Community
- Cultural Insights Engine

In addition to our suite of insight tools, we've also tapped into industry research including Google Trends, Foresight Factory and many more!



> OUR CULTURAL CODES IN 2026



HOW WE HAVE EVOLVED OUR CODES SINCE 2024

SOCIAL RECLAIMERS

Consistent code – A prioritisation of reconnection with others and ourselves

NOUVEAU NOSTALGIA

Consistent code – Idolising and looking to the past for inspiration

ZENTHUSIASTS

Consistent code – Health as foundational to identity creation

UNAPOLOGETIC SELF

New code evolved from previous code Ephemeral Experimentation - A growing desire for self-expression

NEO COLLECTIVISM

Evolved from past code Collectivism – more multi-faceted group identities

HYPER VISIBLE

New code evolved from past code Edit, Copy, Create – The normalisation of constant online content creation

RESTRAIN RELEASE

New code – Control punctuated by moments of permission

CASUAL DEFIANCE

New code – Wanting systemic change but prioritising self-love and care



SOCIAL RECLAIMERS



> SOCIAL RECLAIMERS



Finding time to connect with each other, and ourselves, is demanding intentional control over our attention.

Tech has inevitably made elements of life easier over time; navigating unknown places, finding information and staying connected across the globe has been transformed. But, as the pull of the digital world, and often associated negative sentiment intensifies, more people

are turning to digital detoxing, seeking quality experiences anchored in human connection. Instead of spending hundreds on the latest iPhone, consumers are choosing to spend their disposable income on experiences. Whether it's live events, cultural pursuits or travel, people are leaning into moments that bring them together and leave a lasting impression.

We've moved from JOMO (the joy of missing out) to the joy of experiencing real life moments that mean something. Seemingly, the more pervasive AI becomes, and the more of our lives we spend online, the more valuable our real-world experiences become. Perhaps people have become so dissatisfied with digital life that they are willing to pay more to escape it?

62%

OF ADULTS SAY THEY "HATE" HOW MUCH TIME THEY SPEND ON THEIR PHONES.

SOURCE: BBC

32%

OF 18-34S SAY THAT IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH IS ONE OF THE MAIN DRIVERS OF DIGITAL DETOXING

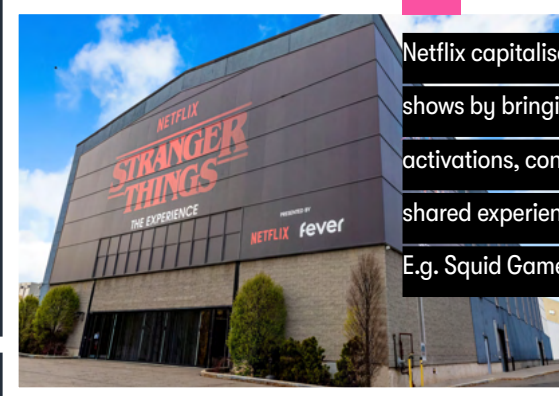
SOURCE: THE7STARS PULSE, N=500 RESPONDENTS

48%

OF 18-24-YEAR-OLDS SAID THEY HAD SOCIALISED MORE WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY TO TAKE A BREAK FROM DAILY LIFE LAST YEAR.

SOURCE: THE7STARS QT

> REAL WORLD EXAMPLES



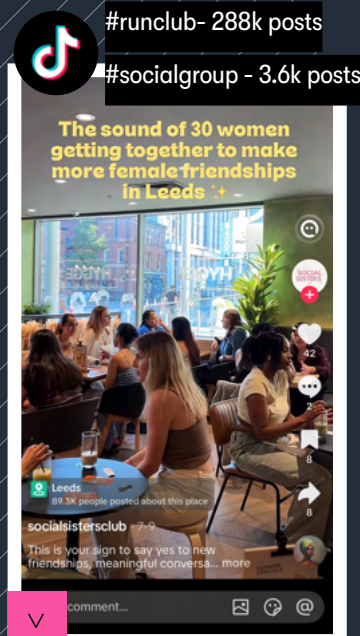
Netflix capitalised on the success of their most popular shows by bringing them to life in immersive physical activations, converting passive screening to active, shared experiences, building community and culture. E.g. Squid Games, Stranger Things.



UK Unplugging Day – 4th Sunday in June encouraging us to disconnect from our devices and reconnect with our family, friends, loved ones and communities in real life.



KitKat Phone Break – a playful 2025 campaign that encouraged young audiences to swap their smartphones for a break with a KitKat.



Social groups designed to facilitate meeting others have been growing in popularity.

SOCIAL RECLAIMERS

> IMPLICATIONS FOR BRANDS

PRODUCTS AS EXPERIENCES

RE-PACKAGE PRODUCTS AS EXPERIENCES AND HIGHLIGHT THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR HUMAN CONNECTION, WITH A VALUE EXCHANGE THAT FEELS 'WORTH BEING OFFLINE FOR', TO BUILD SUSTAINABLE LONG TERM BRAND LOVE.

ENCOURAGE A BREAK FROM TECH

ENSURE DIGITAL ACTIVITY FEELS INTENTIONAL AND FINITE, REDUCING FREQUENCY OF THE SAME MESSAGE AND USING 'PAUSE FRIENDLY' FORMATS THAT ENCOURAGE A BREAK FROM TECH.

KEEP THINGS LIGHT AND POSITIVE

BRANDS NOT ACTIVELY IN THE WELLNESS AND HEALTH SPACES SHOULD AVOID COMING ACROSS AS TOO 'WORTHY' OR PREACHY. KEEP THINGS LIGHT AND POSITIVE, RECOGNISING THAT ALMOST ALL OF OUR BROAD AUDIENCES ARE LIKELY TO BE HEAVY DIGITAL USERS IN GENERAL.

THIS CODE WOULD BE MOST PERTINENT TO BRANDS IN THE **ENTERTAINMENT, FOOD & DRINK** AND **RETAIL** CATEGORY



NOUVEAU
NOSTALGIA

> NOUVEAU
NOSTALGIA



**A society that shuns the present
and idolises the past, together.**

The nostalgia trend shows no signs
of slowing. Longing for the past isn't
new, but it feels especially pervasive
right now. So, what's driving it?

Times of relative uncertainty fuel our
desire for stability and trust. Today's
mix of household budget pressures,
political volatility and the rapid pace

of AI change creates exactly that
backdrop. Even the rate of change
plays a role: We've always looked
back fondly on the past, yet 2016
feels unusually distant from 2026,
accelerated by considerable cultural,
technological and societal change

At the same time social media has
amplified the trend. We can share
in nostalgia at the tap of a screen,

and the more personalised our feeds
and For You Pages become, the
more we seek shared experience to
counterbalance the echo chamber.

Social media also enables remixing
of icons from the past with modern
sensibilities, today's nostalgia is not
just backward looking after all, but
fuel for constant reinvention
and creativity.

78%

SAY THEY SOMETIMES OR REGULARLY SEEK OUT
CONTENT THAT MAKES THEM NOSTALGIC.

SOURCE: THE7STARS PULSE, N=500 RESPONDENTS

50%

OF BRITS SAID THEY ARE SEEKING MORE
NOSTALGIA-BASED EXPERIENCES THIS YEAR.

SOURCE: MASTERCARD RESEARCH

45%

OF UK 18–34S PREFER REWATCHING OLD
SHOWS OVER DISCOVERING NEW ONES.

SOURCE: EE RESEARCH

> REAL WORLD BRAND EXAMPLES



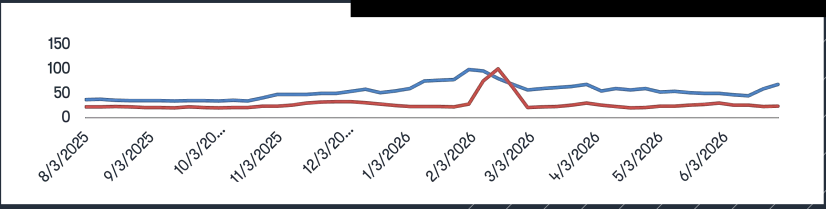
✓
Social Trends: In January 2026, TikTok searches for '2016' increased by over 450%



✓
Brands bringing back characters and fluent devices; PG Tips and Monkey, ASDA's pocket tap, Adidas retro football collections.



✓
Popularity of retro gaming tech- according to a UK survey, 24% of Gen Z now own a retro games console (fastcompany)



SOURCES: ADIDAS.CO.UK , GOOGLE TRENDS

WEB SEARCHES FOR '2016' AND 'RETRO'



NOUVEAU NOSTALGIA

> IMPLICATIONS FOR BRANDS

MAKE IT EXCITING

IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT EASE AND CONVENIENCE! NOUVEAU NOSTALGIA SHOWS US HOW PEOPLE HAPPILY OVERLOOK EXTRA EFFORT OR FRICTION IN THE NAME OF EMOTIONAL CONNECTION. CONSIDER HOW YOUR BRAND CAN AID THAT EXPERIENCE FIRST AND FOREMOST.

SEAMLESS INTEGRATION

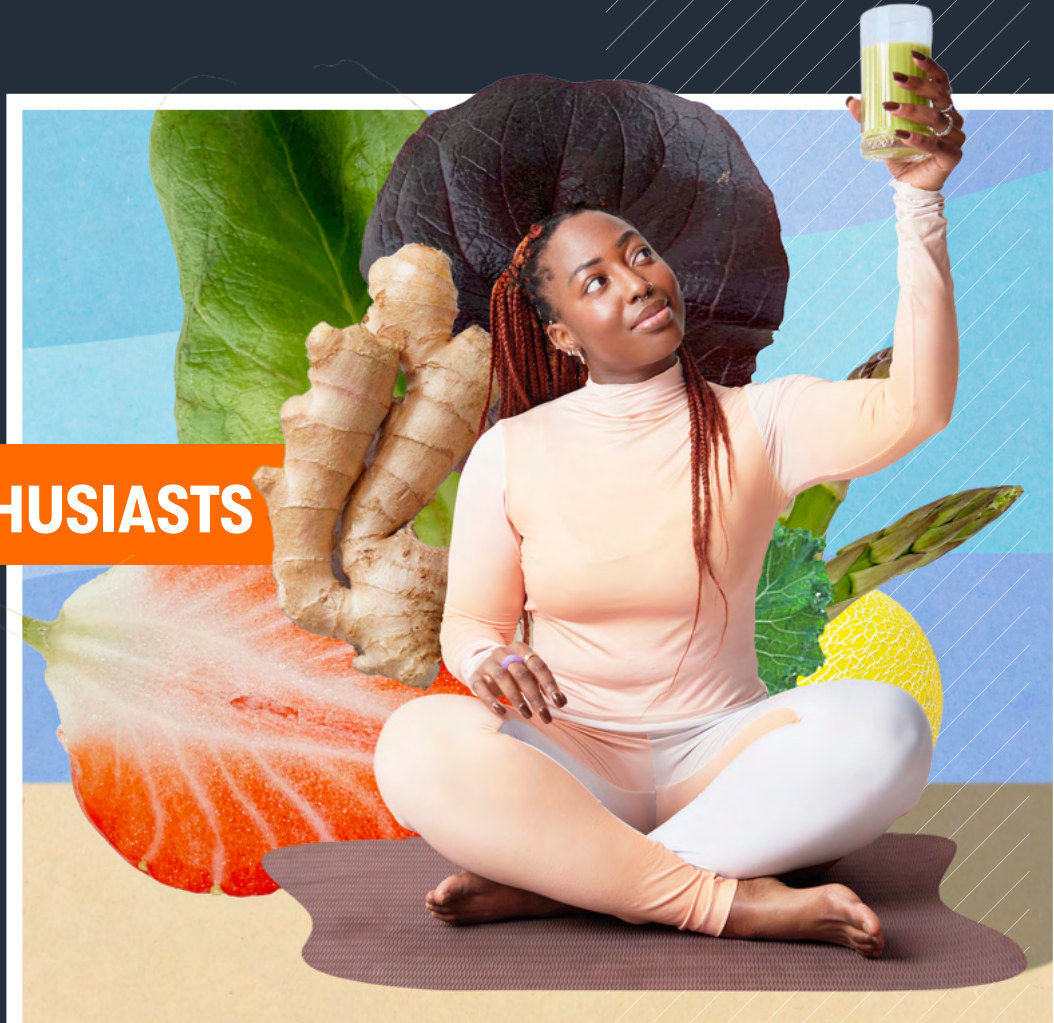
BRANDS WITH THE LUXURY OF HERITAGE CAN LOOK TO THE ARCHIVES FOR RETRO INSPIRATION. HOWEVER, PUSH THIS FURTHER BY ALLOWING PEOPLE TO REMIX AND REINVENT.

PROVE IT

NOSTALGIA CAN COME FROM ALL CORNERS OF CULTURE. LISTEN TO WHAT'S RESONATING AND BUILD PARTNERSHIPS WITH BRANDS AND VOICES THAT ARE DOING IT WELL.

THIS CODE WOULD BE MOST PERTINENT TO BRANDS IN THE FASHION, ENTERTAINMENT AND FOOD & DRINK CATEGORY

> ZENTHUSIASTS



Health isn't just something to look after, it's foundational to identity creation.

Health in the UK is changing, and being 'healthy' in 2026 seems to mean something different to everyone. Health and appearance are becoming increasingly intertwined,

with many Brits opting for more extreme measures to reach the best possible version of themselves.

With the constant onslaught of health and beauty trends and social feeds serving up contradictory messaging, young Brits feel they are being pulled in different directions and pressured

to behave a certain way. The Internet is filled with trends like 'maxxing' (maximising certain aspects of appearance, diet, etc), and the increase in popularity of weight loss drugs has divided Brits' views.

41%

OF 18-34S FEEL THAT THERE IS TOO MUCH PRESSURE TO LOOK A CERTAIN WAY.

SOURCE: THE7STARS PULSE , N=500 RESPONDENTS

46%

OF PEOPLE AGED 18-34 SAY THEY ARE MORE HEALTH-CONSCIOUS NOW THAN THEY WERE WHEN THEY WERE YOUNGER, WITH 25% FEELING MORE BEAUTY-CONSCIOUS NOW.

SOURCE: THE7STARS PULSE, N=500 RESPONDENTS

22%

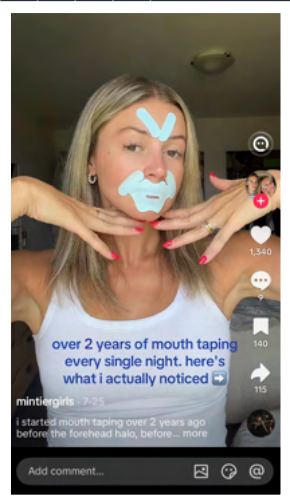
OF 18-34S CLAIM THEY WOULD BE WILLING TO TRY WEIGHT LOSS JABS.

SOURCE: THE7STARS PULSE, N=500 RESPONDENTS

> IN BRAND AND CULTURE



Last year, Neko tapped into the increasing obsession with hacking into our health. Described as a ‘full health MOT’, Neko’s £300 full body scan boomed in popularity, with a waiting list of 10,000 people, allowing people to feel that they are truly maximising their health (The Independent).



Natural Greek yoghurt brand Fage has had a 37.4% increase in volume growth this year, reflecting consumers’ changing attitudes towards healthy foods.



And countless products have been released to try and help maximise sleep. Products like mouth tape supposedly improve sleep by reducing mouth breathing.



Weight-loss drugs moved from medical treatment into cultural discourse. Social media showcased the increasing number of celebrities who underwent dramatic transformations and this exposure meant that weight-loss drugs became normalized for aesthetic purposes.



Preventative care is becoming aesthetic maintenance, with IV drips in London health clinics, high intake of supplements, and preventative ‘tweakments’ like botox.



Optimisation culture and biohacking allows people to feel they have power over their health by maximizing and self-improvement. Health becomes a project rather than something to maintain.



ZENTHUSIASTS

> IMPLICATIONS FOR BRANDS

BE TRANSPARENT

ENSURE THAT THE FOCUS OF THE PRODUCT IS NOT JUST BASED ON AESTHETIC GOALS. BE TRANSPARENT WITH WHAT PRODUCTS CAN ACHIEVE, TO STRIKE A BALANCE WITH REALISTIC AND SUSTAINABLE OUTCOMES, RATHER THAN PROMOTING EXTREME BEHAVIOURS.

DON'T OVERWHELM

FOCUS ON INDIVIDUALITY RATHER THAN REINFORCING IDEALIZED STANDARDS. AVOID LANGUAGE WHICH LEANS HEAVILY INTO OPTIMIZATION CULTURE AND GIVE THEM CLEAR EXPLANATIONS OF THE BENEFITS YOUR PRODUCT OFFERS INSTEAD.

NO LABELS

AVOID LABELLING PRODUCTS AS ‘CLEAN’, ‘GUILT-FREE’ ETC AND FOCUS ON THE TRUE BENEFITS OFFERED TO CONSUMERS. PROMOTE BALANCE WITH AN INDIVIDUAL-LED, NOT TREND-BASED, APPROACH.

THIS CODE WOULD BE MOST PERTINENT TO BRANDS IN THE HEALTH & WELLBEING, RETAIL AND BEAUTY CATEGORY



UNAPOLOGETIC
SELF

> UNAPOLOGETIC SELF



A growing desire for full self-expression, held back by the realities of social acceptance.

We are in the midst of a cultural shift where identity is expanding, deepening, and becoming more openly discussed. People increasingly believe they should be able to show up as their full selves across gender identity, beliefs, neurodiversity, background, and emotional experience.

While the ideal is unapologetic self-expression, the reality still sees people navigating a tension between who they are and what feels safe or acceptable to show.

What it looks like:

Expanding identity: More people see multiple aspects to themselves: profession, ethnicity, mental health, background

Emotional openness: A growing expectation that difficult topics (mental health, identity, struggle) should be discussed more openly.

Selective authenticity: People seek out spaces (digital and physical) where they can fully express themselves but adapt in others.

Ongoing self-editing: Despite progress, most people are still modulating how they behave to fit in.

THE7STARS QT SHOWS MORE FACTORS THAN EVER ARE BEING ABSORBED INTO PEOPLE'S SENSE OF SELF:

STRONG IDENTIFICATION WITH SOCIAL CLASS: +17PTS (2016–2026)

PROFESSION/INDUSTRY: +17PTS

ETHNICITY: +14PTS

SOURCE: THE7STARS QUARTERLY TRACKER

75%

OF 18–24S AGREE WE SHOULD TALK MORE
OPENLY ABOUT DIFFICULT SUBJECTS.

SOURCE: FORESIGHT FACTORY

20%

ONLY 20% OF 18–24S SAY THEY DON'T ALTER
THEMSELVES TO PLEASE OTHERS.

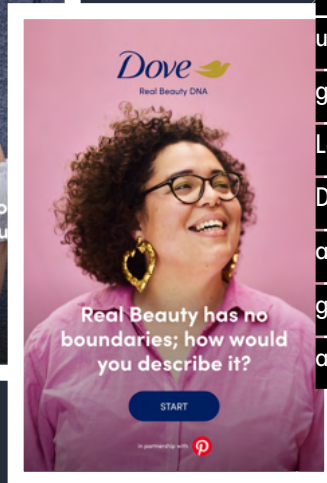
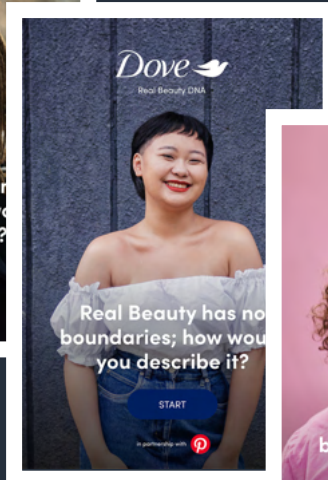
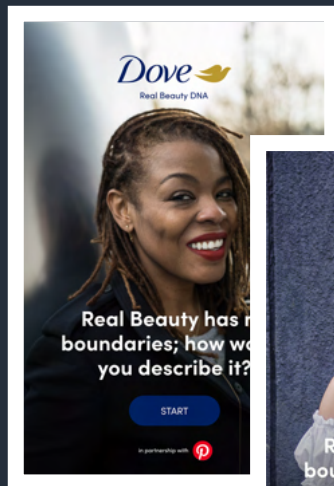
SOURCE: FORESIGHT FACTORY



Maltesers' "look on the light side", depicts various women in a range of situations in modern and historical settings. Demonstrating that the brand understands those real moments when women connect and find joy in navigating life's everyday frustrations.



Dove's "Real Beauty DNA" is a partnership with Pinterest to combat the rise of unrealistic, biased beauty standards generated by Artificial Intelligence (AI). Launched for the 20th anniversary of the Dove Real Beauty pledge, this campaign aims to protect the self-esteem of the next generation by ensuring AI tools reflect authentic, diverse, and real bodies.



UNAPOLOGETIC SELF

> IMPLICATIONS FOR BRANDS

PERSONAL SPACE FOR SELF-EXPRESSION

THINK ABOUT HOW THE PRODUCT OR EXPERIENCE CAN BE POSITIONED AS A PERSONAL SPACE FOR SELF-EXPRESSION, CONTROL AND ESCAPE.

ENABLER OF LIFE ON YOUR OWN TERMS

THINK ABOUT FRAMING THE BRAND AS AN ENABLER OF LIFE ON PEOPLE'S OWN TERMS, SUPPORTING DIFFERENT PATHS WITHOUT JUDGEMENT.

PLATFORMS FOR SELF-EXPRESSION

THINK ABOUT HOW ENVIRONMENTS THAT FEEL LIKE PLATFORMS FOR SELF-EXPRESSION CAN BE CREATED, TO DRIVE INDIVIDUAL ENGAGEMENT WITH THE BRAND.

THIS CODE WOULD BE MOST PERTINENT TO BRANDS IN THE **RETAIL, FINANCE AND AUTOMOTIVE** CATEGORY



NEO
COLLECTIVISM

> NEO- COLLECTIVISM



Connection built on identity is shedding its restrictions and becoming increasingly multi-faceted.

Community is taking on new meaning, both broader in definition and more active as a form of self-expression. Compared to a decade ago, the share of Brits who strongly identify with varied aspects of their identity has

risen markedly: and this shift is being driven by younger generations.

As such expressions of identity grow, fandom is also emerging as a powerful form of community. Gone are the days of hiding enthusiasm away in “fan clubs”. Today, fandom, whether for a blockbuster film, an emerging artist or niche athleisure brand, is expressed openly and

abundantly online. At the same time, the democratisation of culture is breathing new life into traditional experiences. Think meme-ified TV dramas, the frenzy built up around festivals, or the fan chatter that propels a podcast to sell-out stadium tours.

38%

OF 18-34S SAY THAT THE MOST BENEFICIAL THING ABOUT COMMUNITY IS THE SENSE OF BELONGING.

SOURCE: THE7STARS PULSE

59%

OF 18-34S SAY THEY REGULARLY DISCUSS OR SHARE MEMES WITH FRIENDS AS A WAY OF COMMENTING ON CULTURE OR EVENTS. THAT'S 2.7X MORE LIKELY THAN OVER-35S.

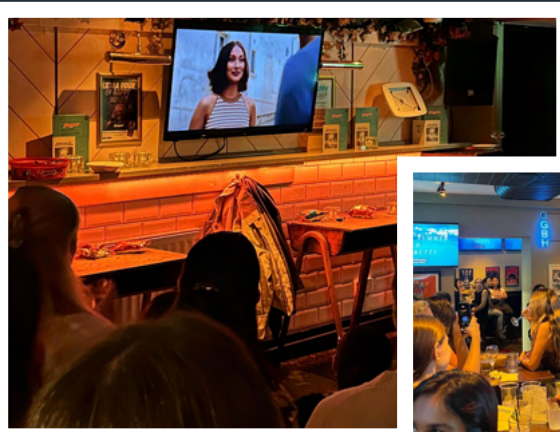
SOURCE: THE7STARS QT

53%

OF FANS SAY THEY FEEL MORE UNDERSTOOD BY FELLOW FANS AT CONCERTS THAN THEY DID BY PEOPLE CLOSE TO THEM IN THEIR EVERYDAY LIFE.

SOURCE: AEG RESEARCH

> REAL WORLD EXAMPLES



✓
Huge Amazon Prime hit the
Summer I Turned Pretty saw
fandom beyond online chatter and
into IRL watch parties in pubs and
bars.



✓
Spotify's OOH campaign
celebrated fans by honouring fan
traditions that make individual
fandoms unique.



>
KFC have made community a consistent tenet of
their marketing, nurturing cult-like status around
their chicken, and activating brand partnerships
that connect and amplify fandoms.



NEO
COLLECTIVISM

> IMPLICATIONS
FOR BRANDS

GRAVITATE
TOWARDS
AFFINITY MEDIA

CULTURE IS INCREASINGLY DEFINED BY A GROUNDSWELL OF MANY INFLUENTIAL COMMUNITIES, NOT BY A FEW BIG BROADCASTERS, PUBLISHERS, OR STUDIOS AS WAS ONCE THE CASE. BRANDS CAN BENEFIT FROM HUGE EARNED MEDIA BY FOLLOWING THE ATTENTION AS IT GRAVITATES TOWARDS POCKETS OF AFFINITY MEDIA.

BE
LIGHTEARTED

BRANDS CAN AND SHOULD FEEL EMPOWERED TO SPEAK TO COMMUNITIES IN A WAY THAT'S LIGHTEARTED. COMMUNITY IS A FORM OF ESCAPISM - YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE SERIOUS TO KEEP IT AUTHENTIC.

REFLECT
PERSONAL
VALUES

MORE THAN FLASH-IN-THE-PAN STUNTS, PEOPLE WANT BRANDS THAT REFLECT THEIR PERSONAL VALUES. MAKE SURE THAT ALL TOUCHPOINTS FROM THE GLOSSY CINEMA AD TO THE ON-SITE CHAT BOT LIVE UP TO WHAT YOUR BRAND STANDS FOR.

THIS CODE WOULD BE MOST PERTINENT TO BRANDS IN THE
FASHION, ENTERTAINMENT AND HOSPITALITY CATEGORY

> HYPER

VISIBLE



As content creation becomes second nature, the line between authenticity and performance is blurred.

In 2026, our online behaviours are so instilled into us that it is hard to distinguish what is content and what isn't. Just one look at social media

and it seems that everyone is a creator, or at least trying to emulate one, by showcasing every small detail of their lives to a mass audience.

Filming in public has become normal, personal branding is seen as a necessity, and everything is built for online visibility.

And with AI use showing no signs of slowing down, the content we see is easier to create, but isn't guaranteed to be authentic - taking content creation one step further to a point where content is completely devoid of the human touch.

31%

OF BRITS AGED 18-34 SAY THEY LOVE TO SHARE THEIR LIVES ON SOCIAL MEDIA (i.181).

SOURCE: GB TGI 2026

70%

OF 18-34S AGREE THAT THEY FEEL THE NEED TO CHECK SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS EVERYDAY COMPARED WITH JUST 53% OF ALL BRITS.

SOURCE: GB TGI 2026

37%

OF 18-34-YEAR-OLDS FIND AI-GENERATED ADVERTS JUST AS ENGAGING AS CONTENT MADE BY HUMANS (i.143).

SOURCE: GB TGI 2026



When the BBC released their ad for the 2026 Winter Olympics, many people immediately assumed that this was AI-generated. The BBC then released footage of the production process, revealing hours of painstaking stop-motion work. The story highlights how accustomed we are to seeing AI slop on our feeds, to the point where it is almost indistinguishable from true craftsmanship.



Everything is a content opportunity: spaces for socializing (run clubs, pilates classes etc) become places to create content, and group activities are intended to be 'Instagrammable'. Even 'unfiltered' content is still curated: the messy aspects of day-to-day life are constructed online and micro-vlogging culture means that private life admin tasks become mainstream and anyone can participate.

The rise in popularity of reformer pilates has prompted an increase in studios which are the epitome of luxury and 'clean girl' minimalism. These spaces are perfectly Instagrammable and provide opportunities to create 'real-life' content.

> IMPLICATIONS FOR BRANDS

AUTHENTICITY AND TRANSPARENCY

BRANDS WHO LEAN INTO AUTHENTICITY AND TRANSPARENCY WILL HAVE THE UPPER HAND. ENGAGE CONSUMERS WITH WELL-CONSIDERED MESSAGING THAT CREATES TRUE CONNECTION AND TRULY BREAKS THE FLOW OF CONTINUOUS, BUT INCREASINGLY MEANINGLESS, SOCIAL CONTENT WHICH PEOPLE ARE ACCUSTOMED TO SEEING.

ENCOURAGE USING PRODUCTS IN REAL LIFE

ENCOURAGE REAL-LIFE, NOT CONTENT-LED, PRODUCT USAGE. CONTENT SHOULD FOCUS ON HOW PRODUCTS FIT INTO INDIVIDUAL LIFESTYLES, AND SHOULD CELEBRATE THESE MOMENTS AS WELL AS THE AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE.

HIGHLIGHT REAL MEMORIES

BRANDS SHOULD SHOWCASE SHARED EXPERIENCES WHICH EXTEND BEYOND THE CONTENT. HIGHLIGHT THE REAL MEMORIES THAT YOUR BRAND CAN HELP CONSUMERS MAKE, THAT ARE MORE VALUABLE THAN QUICKLY-GENERATED ONLINE CONTENT.

THIS CODE WOULD BE MOST PERTINENT TO BRANDS IN THE **BEAUTY, ENTERTAINMENT AND RETAIL** CATEGORY



RESTRAIN
RELEASE

> RESTRAIN, RELEASE



A culture of control punctuated by moments of permission.

Consumers are not simply cutting back, they are containing.

Day-to-day life is increasingly characterised by restraint, vigilance, and trade-offs, while spending is released in sharp, emotionally charged bursts around moments that feel meaningful, identity-affirming, or memory-making.

This is not about deprivation. It's about selective indulgence.

Everyday restraint: Grocery budgeting, trading down to discount retailers, curbing spontaneous purchases, and a growing negativity or emotional flatness around "the day-to-day".

Occasional release: Eating big at Christmas despite fitness goals, spending heavily on one or two

"can't-miss" concert tickets, or investing in a single high-quality item rather than multiple cheaper alternatives.

Fewer purchases, higher stakes: Each indulgence carries more meaning and therefore more expectation than before.

Consumers are effectively running a mental ledger: restraint buys permission for release.

7in10

18-34S ARE MORE SELECTIVE ABOUT WHAT THEY BUY, RATHER THAN TRYING TO SAVE ON EVERY PURCHASE.

SOURCE: THE7STARS QT

64%

OF 18-34S LOOK FOR THE LOWEST PRICES WHEN SHOPPING (i.109)

SOURCE: GB TGI 2026

7in10

18-34S ENJOY INVESTING IN QUALITY ITEMS THAT FEEL LIKE A TREAT.

SOURCE: GB TGI 2026



Indulgence as an event. Activity for Nuii in 2025 saw immersive OOH activations with the likes of Piccadilly Lights and Clapham Colossus positioning the brand ‘not for the everyday’.



Tesco’s ‘Helping you spend less’ acknowledges everyday restraint, but dials up the quality cues around key events like Christmas and summer hosting moments.



RESTRAIN
RELEASE

> IMPLICATIONS FOR BRANDS

REASSURANCE, INTENTIONALITY, PERMISSION

VALIDATE EVERYDAY RESTRAINT WHILE POSITIONING THE BRAND AS AN ENABLER OF CONTROLLED RELEASE. HELP PEOPLE PLAN, PRIORITISE AND FEEL CONFIDENT ABOUT THE THINGS THAT TRULY MATTER, RATHER THAN ENCOURAGING IMPULSIVE SPEND.

JUSTIFIED SPENDING

REFRAME PURCHASES AS DELIBERATE, HIGH-VALUE CHOICES WITH FEWER BUYS, CHOSEN WELL. MEDIA CAN ELEVATE MOMENTS OF RELEASE THROUGH PREMIUM, HIGH-ATTENTION PLACEMENTS THAT MAKE SPENDING FEEL JUSTIFIED, MEANINGFUL AND WORTH BREAKING RESTRAINT FOR.

EMOTIONALLY- EARNED INDULGENCE

CLEARLY SEPARATE EVERYDAY RESTRAINT FROM MOMENTS OF INDULGENCE, WITH UTILITY-LED MESSAGING FOR STAPLES AND OCCASION-LED STORYTELLING FOR TREATS. GIVE CONSUMERS CLEAR PERMISSION CUES, LEANING INTO DIFFERENT CATEGORY ENTRY POINTS TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN THE OCCASIONS.

THIS CODE WOULD BE MOST PERTINENT TO BRANDS IN THE
FINANCE, RETAIL AND FMCG CATEGORY

> CASUAL DEFIANCE



A strong tension is at play between wanting systemic change and prioritising self-love and care.

While balancing this tension is nothing new, the rate at which people want to stress less, care less and be left alone has been steadily increasing amongst younger people.

The sheer amount they've been asked to care about over the past 5 years has left them low on motivation and willing to find the fun in life.

Making themselves the centre of their own universe, young people are subtly ignoring the bigger picture. Whether it's geo-politics or national crises, macro-factors are inevitably impacting the way we live but are not generating the same levels of commitment to the cause.

Causes are malleable, and inconsistency is no longer the faux pas it once was. The overarching sentiment amongst young people is

that the world and their lives are out of their control, so there isn't much harm in dipping in and out of pressing issues.

Even activism, while still important, has changed. It has become less about changing the world and more about changing individuals, whether through releasing complex emotions of discontent and unfairness or connecting with others to boost feelings of belonging.



40%

OF YOUNG PEOPLE DON'T FEEL IN CONTROL OVER THE BIG THINGS IN THEIR OWN LIVES.

SOURCE: CHANNEL 4 GEN Z REPORT

18-24s

ARE LESS MOTIVATED TO JOIN CAUSES THAT MATTER TO THEM THAN 35-44s.

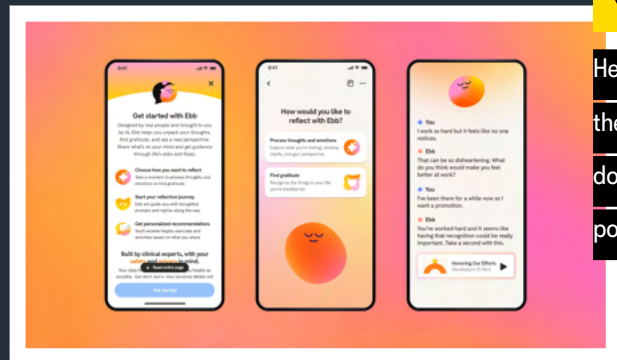
SOURCE: FORESIGHT FACTORY

17%

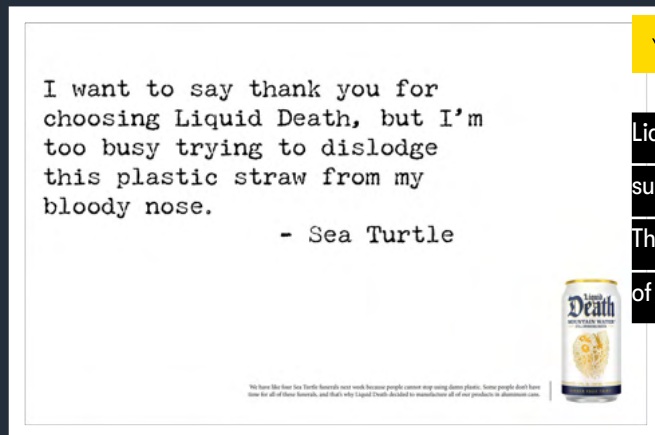
OF 18-34s AGREE THAT THEY ARE FOCUSING ON MORE THINGS THEY CAN CONTROL, AS THEY DON'T THINK THINGS IN THE UK ARE IMPROVING.

SOURCE: BUSINESS INSIDER

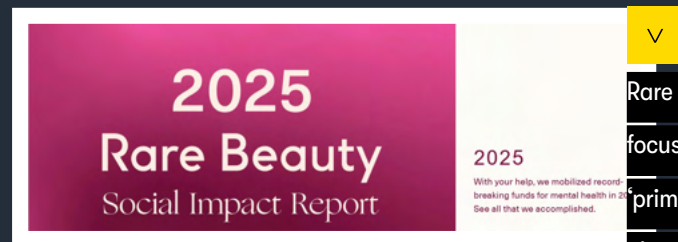
SOURCE: CHANNEL 4 (2025) 'TRENDS, TRUTH AND TRUST'



Headspace positions itself as support, calming the individual in an overwhelming world. It doesn't seek to challenge systems, but offers a positive coping mechanism.



Liquid Death water doesn't push an aggressive sustainability message, despite credentials. Their tone is chaotic and nihilistic, with a sense of 'the world is absurd, so enjoy the ride'.



Rare Beauty by Selena Gomez - a brand focusing on individual mental wellbeing as its 'primary cause' with messaging reflecting the idea that you don't need to fix the world - just feel okay in it.

> IMPLICATIONS FOR BRANDS

CONSUMER FIRST

FOCUS ON THE CONSUMER FIRST AND THE USE OF MEDIA AS AN ESCAPE BY CREATING AND DELIVERING CONTENT DESIGNED FOR EMOTIONAL RELEASE OR ESCAPISM. WHERE RELEVANT, CONSIDER CREATING DELIBERATELY JOYFUL/CALMING CONTENT THAT CAN BE DELIVERED IN HIGH STRESS CONTEXTS.

EMBED PURPOSE

LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO EMBED PURPOSE WITHIN EVERYDAY MEDIA BEHAVIOURS ENABLING CONSUMERS TO FEEL LIKE THEY'RE CONTRIBUTING WITHOUT REQUIRING TONS OF EFFORT. E.G QR CODES ON OOH WITH 'ONE TAP TO DO YOUR BIT' MESSAGING.

HONE IN

HONE IN ON MICRO-COMMUNITIES, ALIGNING WITH SPECIFIC CAUSES THAT OUR CONSUMERS DO CARE ABOUT AND ARE WILLING TO DEDICATE TIME TO. CONSIDER SUBREDDIT, NICHE TIKTOK COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL COLLECTIVES (SIMILAR TO NEO-COLLECTIVISM).

THIS CODE WOULD BE MOST PERTINENT TO BRANDS IN THE
FOOD & DRINK, RETAIL AND LEISURE CATEGORY

> HOW WE CAN WORK WITH YOU

the7stars can work with you to ensure that these codes provide an opportunity to understand your audiences on a deeper level, to allow them to truly connect with your brand.

Our Cultural Insights Engine will allow us to enhance your audiences, track their engagement with these cultural codes, and monitor their evolution over time.

If you would like to delve further into how these cultural codes can help you further understand your audiences, we would be more than happy to offer a presentation of this work, tailored to your brand's needs.

We can work with you to ensure the codes are embedded into your audiences:

- **Audience Exploration:** We offer bespoke audience exploration sessions to dive into your specific audience's passions, motivations, and how each code resonates with them in contexts relevant to your brand.
- **Culture Workshops:** We can also provide culture workshops, where specialists from our Strategy and Insights team will help to tailor your comms and positioning to grow your presence around the most pertinent codes for your audience.



CULTURAL
CODES