

## Nostalgia, ready-to-drink, calorie consciousness dominate beverage trends: report

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*Experts tie nostalgia's new wave to larger desires for comfort and escapism, contrasting pandemic-era fear and loss. Image credit: WGSN/Pexels*

By AMIRAH KEATON

Global trend forecaster WGSN is pointing listening audiences towards new trends in drinking culture, outlining insights of note for the luxury beverage sector.

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During an episode of "Create Tomorrow, The WGSN Podcast," expert voices revealed that consumers are seeking nostalgia, but with a twist, as many are looking for evolutionary versions of their treasured treats. WGSN's director of food and drink, Jen Creevy, head of food and drink, Claire Lancaster, and insight strategist, Brielle Saggese, joined host and executive editorial director, Bethan Ryder, to discuss where the beverage sector is heading.

For this report, WGSN tapped extensive social listening metrics to extract conclusions. The company's global, cross-industry data and expertise is powered by a proprietary algorithm based on a five-stage methodology: observe, synthesize, forecast, focus and reevaluation.

### Familiar Favorites

WGSN's experts detail how the pandemic's nostalgia wave has influenced the drinks market.

Experts tie the demand for familiarity to a larger psychological desire for happiness, relaxation and fun, seemingly to combat the fear, loss and boredom originally experienced during, and in the aftermath of, COVID-19. Now, the ongoing Ukraine conflict, widespread cost-of-living crises and other global uncertainties render comfort and escapism vital across consumer generations, and especially in regard to adult beverages.

As consumers are increasingly yearning for trends and tokens of the past, WGSN found that one notable nuance was added into the mix.

Consumers are now looking for new updates to old drinks, such as climate-friendly packaging, healthier formulations and Instagrammable experiential formats to be found amid today's most attractive over-the-top dining experiences.

Ms. Lancaster exemplifies this with reports from mixologists across New York who have answered the call by

bringing back childhood classics.



*The pandemic's nostalgia wave has fueled the rise of the Dirty Shirley. Image credit: Delish*

The novel "Dirty Shirley" cocktail typically includes vodka, lemon-lime soda and grenadine, which lends a bright red color and, in a further nod to the childhood classic "Shirley Temple," is topped with a maraschino cherry.

Demand for the "Dirty Shirley" is being driven by millennials as well as late Gen Zers, who are now of legal drinking age in both the U.S. and other international jurisdictions, both of whom are conspicuously closer to early-year mocktail memories than their older counterparts. Videos using the hashtag #DirtyShirley have amassed nearly 11 million TikTok views, underscoring its popularity.

At the precipice of nostalgia's risen recipes sits one popular 90s cocktail. Searches for "What is an Espresso Martini?" were up 300 percent in 2021 alone.

Alternatively, the company's social listening and data insights tools have also discovered a mindful drinking movement sweeping younger demographics. Many millennials and Gen Zers are embracing sober-curious lifestyles and centering their spirits consumption around intentional social gatherings and moments of connection.



*Supermodel Bella Hadid is the cofounder of Kin Euphorics, a fast-growing nonalcoholic adaptogenic drink company. Image credit: Vogue/Stevie Dance*

"For Gen Z specifically, we're seeing them become really interested in non-alcoholic drinks that can still help them functionally unwind in some way," says Ms. Lancaster, amid the audio recording.

WGSN notes that the positive correlation between the use of "non-alcoholic" and "mood-boosting" social listening flags suggests a desire to avoid alcohol's multitudinous side effects.

"This speaks to rising levels of stress and anxiety they're looking to swap out the effects of alcohol for anxiety relief drinks," she says.

"Even amid these historic levels of stress and anxiety people are looking to cut back on their alcohol because of their concerns about its negative mood-related impacts," muses Ms. Saggese, mentioning "hang-xiety," or anxiety-exacerbated hangovers, as a primary culprit.

Natural formulations featuring ingredients like CBD and mushroom derivatives, as well as adaptogenic botanicals like ashwagandha and magnesium, can be found in oft canned and cost-efficient ready-to-drink beverages. The

portable pick was 2021's fastest-growing spirits category.

#### Mindful millennials

Also included on the non-alcoholic end are increasingly calorie-conscious millennials, who seek options lower in sugar or higher in protein, and are mimicking the no-frills habits of their boomer predecessors to get them.

WGSN notes that against a background of specialty lattes and milk alternatives, basic, black Folgers coffee enters en vogue territory once again. Paring down promotional efforts for food and beverage offerings to highlight their nutritional value could help to win millennials over.

Luxury marketers should aptly apply learnings like these, as the continued success of the sector is largely reliant on the generation: as [Forbes](#) reports, millennials will make up 50 percent of luxury sales by 2025 ([see story](#)).

Overall, WGSN's reports of a return to the past stand in alignment with trends in other categories.

From French crystal maker Baccarat's Pokmon collection, to Kering-owned Balenciaga collaborating with beloved television show "The Simpsons" and Toyota Corp.'s Lexus inserting itself into the Marvel Universe, the vast appeal to younger audiences with a focus on older millennials and Gen Z is palpable ([see story](#)).

Luxury leaders should continue actively seeking out opportunities for revisiting concepts from the collective's heyday.