

itv

POP THEORY



THE BLAND ISSUE

Reheated nachos, pub gardens and not-so-desperate housewives

Welcome to Pop Theory, your monthly guide to the wonderfully brazen and at times bizarre world of British pop culture. Don't worry we won't be covering the latest celebrity break ups or gossip (unless you're into that!). Instead we'll be deep diving into viewing trends, consumer behaviours and shifting social attitudes - essentially exploring the theory behind pop (geddit)!

So to kick off our first public issue of Pop Theory off we thought we'd explore everything 'bland', beige and beautifully 'basic' to answer the question - Are we all getting a little bit "boring"?

REHEATING LEFTOVER NACHOS

Do UK audiences care about originality?

Sabrina Carpenter, Benson Boone and even key innovator Lady Gaga alongside many other noted artists and designers have been accused of 'reheating nachos'. Now, I'm sure you're thinking *what does this have to do with old nachos?* As [Vulture succinctly described it](#), the internet parlance of reheating nachos means '*someone is doing the exact same thing as someone else. They have not invented a new style of nachos, rather they have reheated some nachos of yore.*' In the case of Sabrina Carpenter, her overt visual homages to Betty Boop, Madonna and Marilyn Monroe (including wearing head to toe recreations of iconic looks) are seen as a sign of her industry constructed persona.



In the creative industries and online circles - unoriginality is a cardinal sin - to be labelled a copycat is to be excommunicated from the church of creativity. But what we want to focus on is whether this sentiment is felt by audiences engaging with that work. Do audiences really care that one show is a carbon copy of another? Or whether one song heavily samples another? And even if so does this impact their likelihood to engage with that content?

Our survey says... *insert Family Fortune negative klaxon noise*. Take *The Traitors* - a format derived from parlor games of wink murder, Mafia and Werewolf - that has reignited the reality competition genre. In its wake ITV has greenlit multiple seasons of *Fortune Hotel*, a game similarly centred on contestants' ability to obscure the truth. The main difference being that rather than hiding their Traitor status, they are hiding the fact their suitcase contains £250,000. Netflix's *Million Dollar Secret* is heavily derivative of both - borrowing the hidden cash concept from *Fortune Hotel* and the eerie atmosphere from the *Traitors*. All three shows have not suffered despite the clear similarities between them. *Fortune Hotel* generated 18x more viewers than the sub genre average and *Million Dollar Secret* debuted at no.3 in Netflix's UK top 10.



This desire for more of the same isn't just contained to the reality competition sub-genre. Returning classic formats like *Wheel of Fortune*, *Deal or No Deal* or even *Big Brother* have had some of their highest viewing figures in years on ITV. In our [What Unite Fans research](#) we found that rather than demanding

originality, fans have an insatiable appetite for 'more' of the same. 1/10 fans listen to podcasts about their favourite shows, 1/3 regularly rewatch content, 1/10 watch recaps and explainers of content they've just watched. Take Matt, one of our respondents who simply couldn't get enough of *Love Island* despite watching the social media teasers, the full episode and then highlights of that episode on YouTube!

*"When Love Island comes on, I watch it every day, watch the YouTube highlights and the teasers for tomorrow's episode. Sometimes I go on the reddit forums. It's a complete addiction. I ain't excited when I see another series approaching... I think 's**t 'there goes all my spare time again' and I'm only half-joking."*

Matt, 28, Glasgow (What Unites Fans 2024)

For brands 'reheating the nachos of yore' might not be the crime against creativity that we think it is. System 1's examination of [ad creative wear out in 2023](#) showed that the effects of wear out or ads going 'stale' are grossly over exaggerated. Originality is key in creating brands and building distinctive mental salience, but it's not the be all and end all when it comes to audiences.

HOMEMAKER OR HOT MESS?

Why tradwives and chaos girls are the internet's new odd couple - and what media can learn from both

If your For You Page flips from soft-lit shots of perfectly presented colour-coded pantries, to frenzied monologues about dating burnout, you're not alone. Social media's latest gender identity mash-up is serving two contradictory aesthetics: the rise of the 'tradwife' and the reign of 'messy core'. On the one hand you're faced with homemaking content styled like a Cath Kidston fever dream; everything's beige and tidy and perfect. Videos are carefully shot from a ring lit tripod in an immaculate kitchen or bedroom.

On the other hand you have women embracing delightful chaos. Unfiltered, unbothered, and proudly *not* 'wife material' (often filmed while walking down the street, hungover).

While #tradwife content presents domesticity as the ultimate feminine aspiration, messy core girls are breaking the mold. They're imperfect on purpose, celebrating autonomy, friendship, and *not* folding the laundry. This isn't just a quirky internet split. It's a cultural tug-of-war about modern femininity.

Women today are navigating multiple expectations: to be powerful but polite, hot but humble, nurturing but not needy. Young women are navigating the pressure to "have it all" while also resisting societal expectations. Tradwife content might offer escapism in a chaotic world, but it's not without controversy. Critics have pointed to its roots in conservative backlash against feminist progress. Meanwhile, messy core reflects a counter-movement that champions vulnerability, realism, and freedom from the "perfect woman" narrative. We're watching femininity split-screen: part nostalgia, part rebellion.

We're seeing both sides on TV screens too. Love Island stars talk about being "ready to settle down" aged 21, dreaming of babies and Sunday roasts. While also refusing to settle for anything less than equal emotional labour. (Molly-Mae is the perfect case study). TOWIE gives us glossy domestic goals and messy girls' holidays. Trigger Point explores strong female leads in male-coded spaces. And then there's Corrie, where messy, complex women have always lived, loved, and struggled on screen.

This cultural dichotomy reminds us that the idea of womanhood isn't narrowing, it's multiplying. Audiences are craving characters who reflect that. They want stories that show both the performative appeal of a perfect life *and* the relief of letting it all unravel. For brands and broadcasters, there's an opportunity here: to reflect the contradictions, to tell stories that don't clean up too neatly, and to create content that's as complex (and occasionally chaotic) as the people watching it.

ITV's strength has always been its ability to reflect and shape the nation's identity. As viewers flit between glossy traditions

and honest chaos, the stories we tell about womanhood are becoming more varied, more layered, and more compelling than ever. We're in the era of duality, and these women can exist in the same media universe.



EAT, SLEEP, GYM, REPEAT

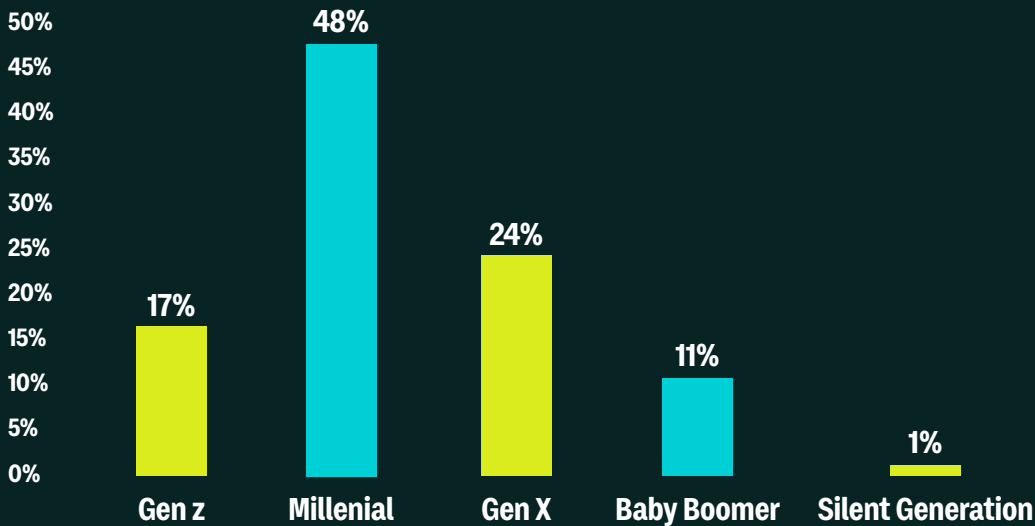
Is the gym really the new pub?

We've spoken in Pop Theories gone by about the rise of fitness culture, run clubs and gym-fluencers. But a recent podcast by [The Guardian](#) posed an interesting question - *is the gym the new 'pub' for Gen Z*. This sent us down a rabbit hole of reddit threads, trends and statistics to uncover the truth.

Let's start with the facts. Yes, younger generations are generally more likely to work out. Our yet to be published What Unites the Generations research found that 8/10 millennials and 7/10 Gen Z say that they engage regularly (at least once a month) in physical activity compared to 5/10 Gen Xers and just over 1/3 of Baby Boomers.

But according to a [fitness industry report](#) UK gym membership is dominated by Millennials and Gen Xers, not Gen Z (those born between 1997-2012). Only 17% of gym goers are Gen Z despite them making up roughly 20% of the UK population.

GENERATION



While Gen Z are in fact the [most frequent pub visitors](#) in the UK. On average, Brits visit the pub five times a month, with Gen Z going the most (six times) and over-60s the least (four times). YouGov data shows that although Gen Z are less likely to drink alcohol, their likelihood to go to the pub isn't any less than the average Brit.

Despite the headlines, it doesn't seem like the long worn tradition of going to the pub is being replaced by gym classes and running clubs. In the majority of the UK the beloved local is still a social institution, even for younger generations who are less likely to drink. This is a fact that was particularly clear in our research into mainstream British culture - [What Unites A Kingdom](#).

What unites you with your community?

"The pub - a lot of my friends meet up at the pub, it's a mutual place, easy to get to, and you can let off a lot of steam there."

Kieran, 19, Inverness

So what does this mean for us in marketing?

1. Never underestimate the pull of the pub - even for non-drinkers.
2. The gym is full of millennials, but it's not a pillar of the community
3. Gen Z aren't as 'boring' and fitness obsessed as the media would like to have us think!

