

itv

POP THEORY



THE SILLY SEASON ISSUE

Boozy Bingo, Playing with your food and our obsession with all things Jelly

August is traditionally “silly season” in the world of media, so for this month's edition of Pop Theory we decided to fully embrace the weird, wonderful and delightfully silly side of mainstream pop culture. We'll be chatting through some of this year's silliest trends, from gen Z still splitting the G, to Bingo's big comeback and why we love a silly little trinket.



SPLITTING THE G AND DUMP DINNERS

Why are so many brits playing with their food?

The food we eat and how we eat it has taken on a lot of baggage during the cost of living crisis. With pinched pockets, everyday brits are putting a lot more thought into their dining choices. In our [70 years of Dining research](#) we talked about how everyday Brits are “meal maxxng”, essentially trying to get the maximum protein, taste and overall health benefits out of their daily meals. In fact mentions of “protein” rose by almost 600% post covid in ITV's food content and food as “fuel” rose by a similarly astronomical 206%.

Pair this increasing focus on food having to be justified as productive, with the long term rise of wellness culture and the recent introduction of GLP1s; dining culture has

become pretty serious... or so you would think. Every shift in culture tends to trigger an opposite reaction. In this case a rising frustration with buttoned-up, serious approach to dining is manifesting in turning our indulgent or “non-productive” food and drink consumption into moments of play.

Trends like “dump dinners” - where TikTokers dump meals straight onto the table, much to the shock of their guests - are a signal of this desire to rebel against the seriousness of mainstream food culture. On the whole Gen Z are drinking less, with one in three of drinking age reportedly being teetotal. Those that are drinking are finding permission by partaking in playful drinking challenges and trends, such as splitting the G (still very much the rage according to our recent work experience students) or “setting the table” with a Morretti. Playful caffeinated drinks like Buzzballz are also on the rise amongst Gen Z, with Buzzballz becoming the fastest growing ready to drink brand in the UK.

Even in content, indulgent food is being reframed as permissible through play. Netflix shows like *Is it Cake?* *Nailed It!* and *Snack Vs Chef* focus on the creation rather than consumption, with food being a mechanism for gameplay rather than flavour. Even *Great British Bake Off* is increasingly placing importance on appearance rather than flavour. What does this mean for advertisers? Well for more indulgent FMCG brands play is the way to bypass Brits reservations about treating themselves. Engaging in playful challenges, visuals and gameplay helps customers resist the pressures to always be “sensible” in their dining choices.



DANCERS, DJ'S & COPIOUS VK'S

What Bingo's gloriously silly comeback says about the nations appetite for risk



Bingo is bigger than ever, it's now starting to infiltrate surprising pockets of culture. According to recent data nearly half of new bingo customers are Gen Z and millennials. Bingo is making a comeback in urban hubs, with multiple reports of new bingo halls opening up inside of the M25. In 2025, Bingo brand Buzz reported it's first year of combined admissions and revenue growth since 2007. With a 5% growth in the second half of 2025.

But this is not your Grandma's bingo. Bingo has evolved into the equivalent of an afternoon club night featuring dancers, DJs and copious VKs. Bingo event brands like Bongo's Bingo and Hijingo, the former recently announcing a residency in Brixton, are largely responsible for the rise of younger bingo goers. With founder Johnny Bongo prescribing the popularity of the Bingo themed events to its ability to provide “a dose of escapism where you can leave your worries at the door for a few hours and let loose big time”.

This growing desire for bingo speaks to a broader trend within British culture. In our What Unites the Kingdom 2026 research we identified a growing behaviour around “managed mischief”. Brits aren’t adopting an entirely hedonistic lifestyle, but they are engaging in pre-planned moments of excess, indulgence and silliness. While nightclubs and [pubs are closing](#) due to lack of demand, ticketed events like festivals and concerts are on the rise. Preplanned, daytime events like bingo play right into Brits appetites for pre-planned low stakes risk-taking.

JELLYCAT COLLECTIONS AND PLAYFUL PIMPLE PATCHES

Why can’t young adults get enough of silly stuff?

Recently, our taste in stuff is increasingly being influenced by *silly*. Think packaging, fashion items and beauty tastes; Brits are turning to playful, childlike purchases as an investment, source of excitement and form of self-expression.

According to toy industry research group Circana, almost half of UK adults (43%) have bought a toy for themselves or another adult – with that figure rising to 76% amongst Gen Z shoppers ([Circana, 2025](#)). Brits are investing thousands of pounds in personal Jellycat collections, with [some fans buying new jellycats every payday and treating themselves to a new toy as an antidote to a bad day](#). Kitschy bag charms are soaring in popularity; [Google trends shows a steady incline in interest in the accessory since 2024](#), and M&S even launched a line of bag charms last year.

Silly is also influencing the beauty industry, which is increasingly experimenting with

playful packaging, textures and colours that feel reminiscent of the shelves of Boots and Superdrug in the 2000’s. Products like Milk Makeup’s jelly textured blusher - which closely resembles a cube of strawberry flavour Hartleys - has taken [TikTok by storm](#), with beauty enthusiasts gleefully remarking that the product reminds them of a lollipop or bag of sweets. Pimple patch brand [Starface](#) has playfully revolutionised what it means to have a pimple, transforming blemishes from a pain point to something we love to wear with pride - footballer [Lauren James wore a star shaped patch to the Lionesses Euros victory parade last year](#). K-beauty is a key driver of the playful beauty movement ([21% of UK Gen Z consumers use K-beauty products](#)), popularising offerings such as hand cream packaged like a Tamagotchi, teddy bear shaped lip masks and lip balms that double as keychains.

So, what is so appealing about stuff that is silly and childlike? Gen Z are known for embracing tropes with an infantile nature; “*I’m just a girl*”, *girl dinner*, TikTok trends that whimsically contrast our parents’ achievements at our age to our current struggles and an [obsession with the development of the frontal lobe](#), which - according to TikTok psychology - doesn’t fully develop until age 25. Young adults’ transition into adulthood has been - and continues to be - blurred. Life trajectories are decreasingly linear; over 1/3 of Gen Z and Millennials still live with parents ([What Unites Generations, ITV, 2025](#)) and culturally, many of us are quick to lament the concept of adulthood.

The embrace of silly stuff appears wrapped up in a conundrum surrounding what it means to occupy a space that straddles childhood and adulthood. Many young adults have been denied the opportunity to take on heavy responsibility and agency typically associated with ‘adulthood’, but are instead able to thrill-seek and express themselves through purchases that speak to that child-like, impulse driven feeling of buying something *for the sheer sake of wanting it*. For those wanting to tap into the silliness economy, remember to speak to audiences’ inner child.