

The Rise in Gen Z's Analog Media Obsession:

Types of physical media have come and gone for decades, but what do you do when the next best thing is not actually physical at all? For most of the 2010's and all the 2020's the Internet and subscription services have dominated how we watch and consume different forms of media. But as time goes on, we are seeing a spike in people collecting and using physical media instead of using apps and subscriptions. Specifically, Gen Z has increasingly shown an appeal to physical media, but why?

Gen Z has been immersed into the Internet and the world of constant scrolling for most of, if not all, their lives. Now as time goes on, Gen Z has hit a sort of "Digital Fatigue", due to the excessive screen time and constantly being connected to the Internet no matter where they go. This has caused a large shift to purchasing physical media like vinyl records, DVDs, physical copies of books or magazines, digital or film cameras, wired headphones, the list can go on. Although nostalgia plays a large part in the resurfacing of physical media, other reasons can be applied as Gen Z shifts away from the digital world.

Media companies such as Netflix, Amazon, Apple Music, Hulu, Spotify, are expensive these days and can be hard to afford. The reason why switching to physical media is so appealing to Gen Z is, why not own the media yourself, instead of paying a monthly subscription for the digital media to be owned by a large company. When you own the media, you can watch and listen to the media whenever you want. The complete ownership of the media is what is really appealing to Gen Z, since nothing is completely owned when using streaming services. Not only that, even when you are paying for subscriptions through streaming services, some of your favorite movies or television shows are not often permanent and can be removed off the platform.

Not only is physical media permanent, but the media also has a collectability appeal to it. Trends like, "physical media summer", thrifting physical media, and trips to physical media stores with friends, have been on the rise. Other trends include Gen Z parents or people planning to have children collecting DVDs to give their child a "device-free childhood", different from Gen Z's childhood to adulthood drowning in never ending content. With the affordability of buying physical media second hand often buying physical media at one time can be more affordable than paying for a monthly or yearly subscription.

Often, trends do come back around, but is physical media going to become just a trend? Or is it going to be solidified into culture. Time will tell, but for now people are grasping for media that they can control and the familiarity of physical media.