



**The 2016 COMEBACK** is officially in full swing!  
Image via Tiktok



**THE VIRAL UNICORN FRAPPUCCINO** has made its return in 2026.  
Image via Roses and Wine

## The Rise of the 2016 Aesthetic

Lina Marie Coppola  
Page Editor

As the new year emerged, social media experienced a wave of nostalgia for the simpler times in life. 2016 began to be labeled as the last ‘good year’ before hyper-curated feeds and major global events reshaped internet culture. The trend gained traction on social media as users began referring to 2026 as the new 2016, marked by a resurgence in nostalgic fashion, music, and internet culture.

Fashion designers have embraced the return of 2016-inspired trends while interpreting them through a modern approach. Stylist Oriona Robb notes that trends work when they display who you are now and not who you were in the past. As these trends re-emerge with different fabrics and tailoring, it’ll reflect a time when fashion was “communal and human,” according to Aza Fashions. Vogue echoes this, emphasizing that 2026 trends are not about copying past aesthetics but about “taking inspiration from the past while considering the needs of the present.”

Artists popular in 2016, such as Zara Larson, Drake, and The Chainsmokers, come back to dominate the streaming charts. This surge in popularity occurred through streaming platforms and social media such as TikTok and Instagram, with people reposting old concert clips, remixing songs, and making playlists labeled “2016 throwbacks.”

The revival of 2016 aesthetics in 2026 brought a shift to digital culture. As users apply 2016-styled filters, recreate challenges like the bottle flip, and share throwback photos as well as memes, members create a collective digital experience where users are bringing the era back into existence.

“The internet in 2016 was the vibe,” Sofia Caurant (27’) said. This shows how the era is remembered less for accurate recreation and more for

the feeling of ease and authenticity associated with it.

Filters, fonts, editing styles, and poses reappear in the media. These communicate mood, values, and cultural awareness.

“I just think it is the best. I think it’s just perfect. I think it brings more color into life with all the seriousness going on in the world. I think we need this 2016 throwback,” Niki Francis (28’) said. Her response shows how the community aims to use nostalgia as an emotional relief that offers escapism during a time defined by uncertainty and digital exhaustion.

The 10-year rule says that pop culture is a fashion theory that trends re-emerge roughly a decade after they peak. Styles aren’t distant enough to be vintage, but they are familiar and nostalgic. Users will essentially start to recreate the vibe, then alter it to today using new captions and other alterations.

Media analysts say that socials may have played a part in the revival of 2016 vibes because they’re known for curating feeds and pushing older sounds, outfits, and memes back into circulation. And in comparison to 2025’s notorious fashion sense of neutrals and beiges, the algorithm enhanced 2016’s feeling of experimental and fun. Gen Z isn’t discovering these trends naturally; it’s the algorithms that are reteaching them, and identity is shaped by the feed, not what is current.

2016 is more than vintage fashion and recycled playlists, as it reflects how Gen Z can use nostalgia as a coping mechanism and style. Allowing young people to revisit a shared playlist, personalization, and a sense of belonging, as well as a little fun. It’s not reflecting identity; it’s shaping it.