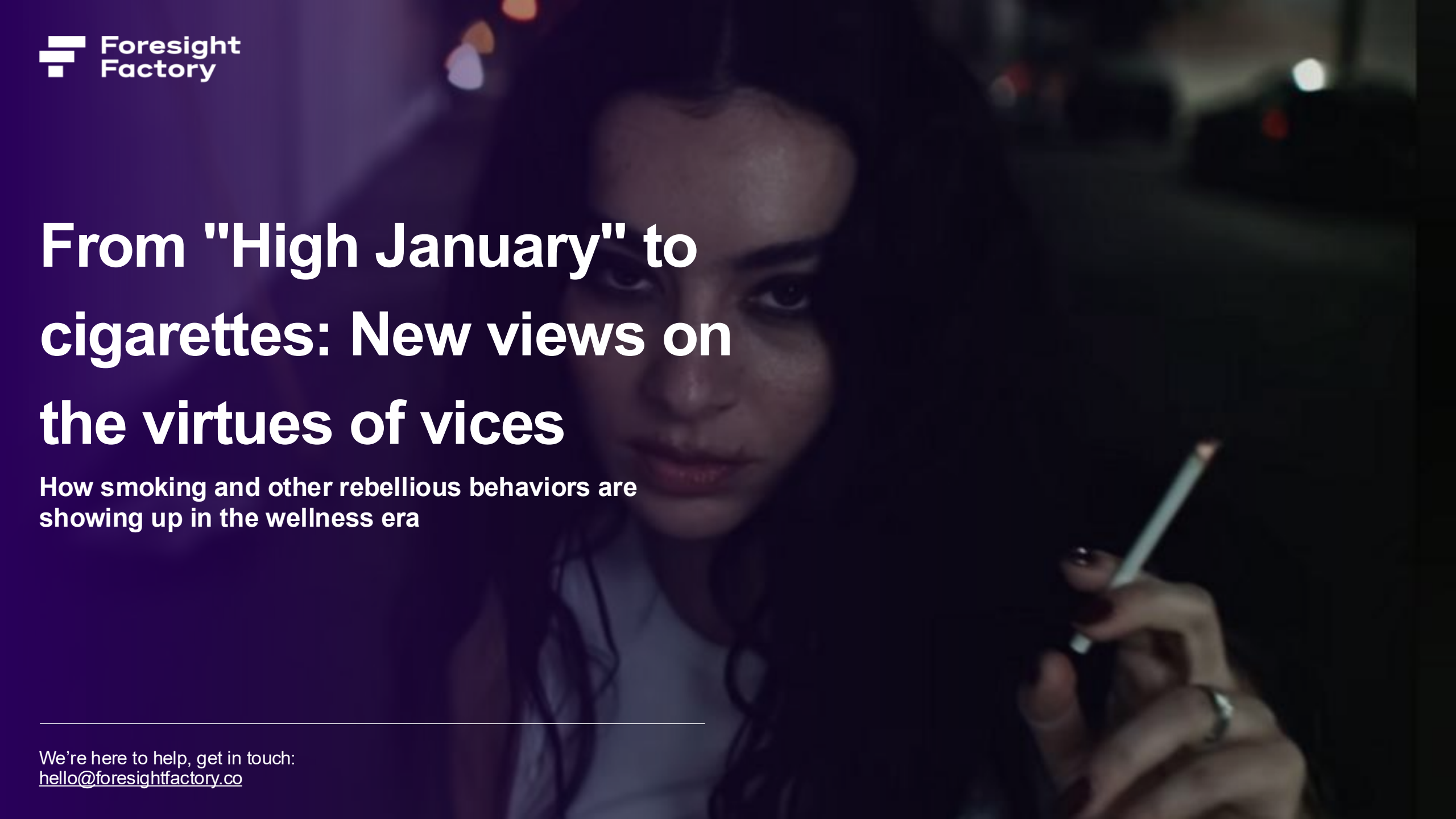
Foresight Factory

From "High January" to cigarettes: New views on the virtues of vices

How smoking and other rebellious behaviors are showing up in the wellness era



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Smoking is experiencing a renaissance

Despite having been demonized for decades, smoking has become more prominent in recent months across media, branding and pop culture. Gen Z icons of the 2020s including **Dua Lipa**, **Sabrina Carpenter** and **Timothée Chalamet** have all been photographed with cigarettes in hand, with Carpenter even depicted wearing a corset made of **Marlboro** packets for **Interview Magazine's** September 2025 issue.

Most recently, smoking plays a starring role in the music video for producer **A. G. Cook's** new track **Residue**. Released at the end of January, the video stars **Charli XCX** stomping through a dark warehouse, cigarette in hand, and it ends with **Kylie Jenner** putting a cigarette to her mouth and blowing the smoke at the camera. A promo for the much-hyped upcoming film **The Moment**, starring the same duo, racked up more than 300,000 views and 25,000 likes on **YouTube** within days of its release.

This, along with a number of other signals, indicates that the cigarette has become a deliberate aesthetic choice for this generation's biggest cultural tastemakers.

And it's not just celebrities taking part. Publications from the Wall Street Journal to Bloomberg have reported on an increase in young people smoking cigarettes, documenting what appears to be a growing cultural fascination with an act that previous generations worked hard to stigmatize.

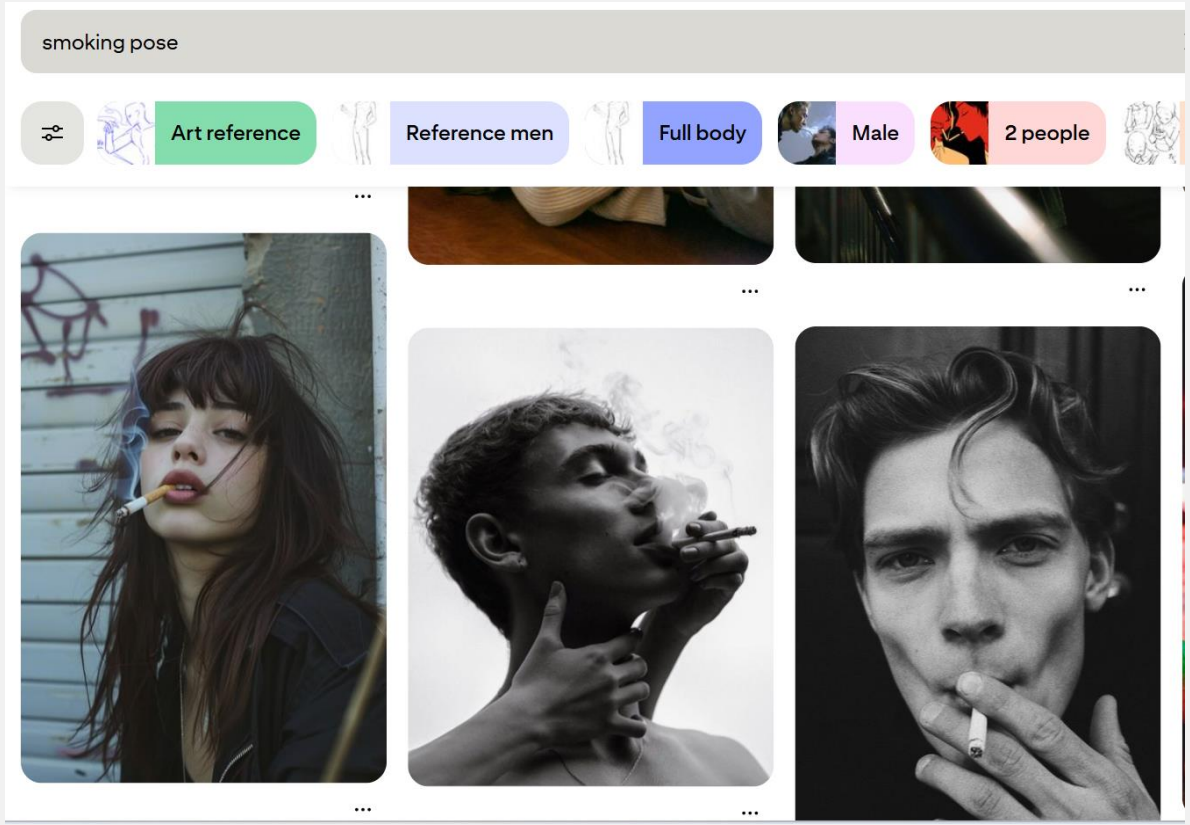
The data tells a more complex story. Long-term trends show that smoking is declining overall, with the World Health Organization reporting that 1 in 5 adults worldwide consumed tobacco in 2022, compared to 1 in 3 in 2000. And yet, the cultural pull of the cigarette continues to exert influence on young people, even as actual consumption rates may be falling at a global level.

Less smoke, more mirrors: The allure of the cigarette aesthetic

What's notable is that much of this resurgence seems to be about image rather than habit. According to Style Analytics, as of November 2025, **Pinterest** searches for "smoking pose" had grown 70% year on year among 18- to 24-year-olds in the US.

Meanwhile, the **Cigfluencers Instagram** account, which documents celebrities smoking cigarettes, has amassed more than 95,000 followers. In one recent post, model **Suki Waterhouse** is seen lighting up a cigarette with model and musician **Gabbriette** and **Heated Rivalry** star **Robbie Graham-Kuntz**. “New dream cig rotation just dropped 😮💨,” reads the caption. “Smoking HOT 🥵 🚬,” commented one user. “This means a lot to me,” wrote another.

Beauty brands are also leaning into the look and language of smoking to earn cultural cachet. **M.ph** launched slender lipsticks called Lip Ciggies in 2025, while **L'Objet's** Smoking Lips fragrance and incense kit – designed to look like a human puffing on a cigarette – sold out shortly after launch.

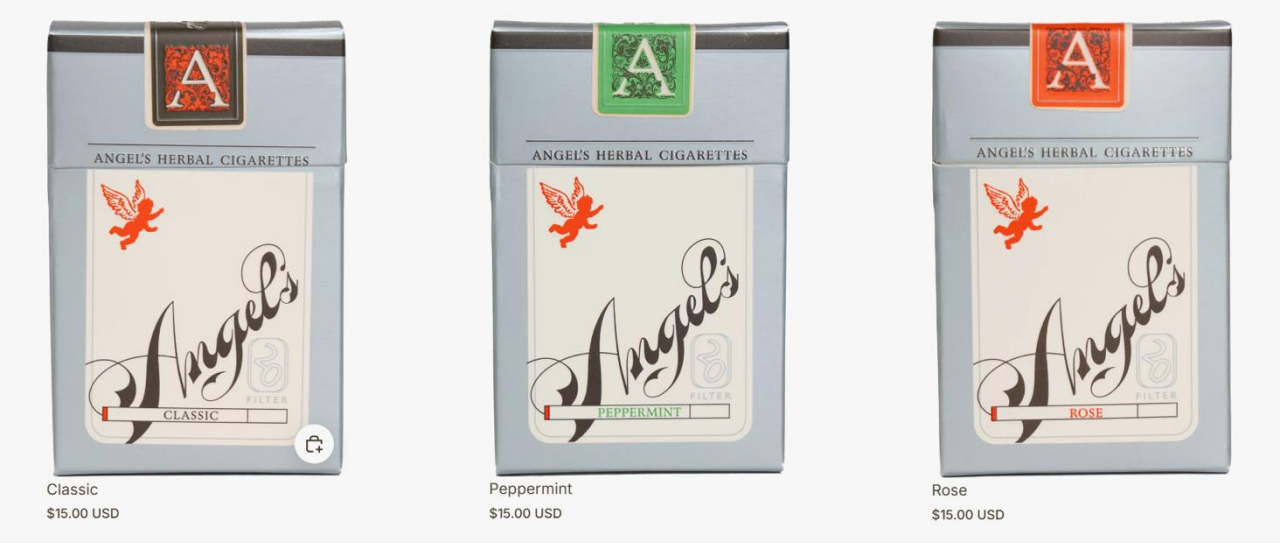


What's driving this cultural moment? For some young people, cigarettes represent something physical and ritualistic in an increasingly digital and unpredictable world. "I like the ritual of a cigarette and being able to step away from whatever is going on for a moment," one young smoker told the Wall Street Journal. Another cited "my generation’s thing with fidget toys and needing something to do with our hands." In a world of constant connectivity and productivity pressure, the cigarette break offers permission to pause and do something Tactile and Tangible.

For others, it’s about a rejection of the minimalist "clean girl" aesthetic that defined the first half of the 2020s in favor of a messier, defiant attitude to life, embodied in our Unapologetically Me trend.

Making vices compatible with wellness values

For brands, the challenge is tapping into the cultural appeal of transgressive behavior while acknowledging that consumers are more health-conscious than ever. Some are attempting to do so by reimagining traditional vices for the wellness era.



Classic
$15.00 USD

Peppermint
$15.00 USD

Rose
$15.00 USD

Angel's Cigs, launched in July 2025, are positioned as nicotine- and tobacco-free, with zero "chemical additives or flavorings". The brand is betting that consumers want the ritual and aesthetic of smoking without the health consequences, offering a way to participate in cigarette culture while maintaining wellness credentials.

Cannabis brands, meanwhile, seized on Dry January to promote their products as a "dry" way to take the edge off an alcohol-free month. They called it "High January", cleverly repositioning cannabis as the mindful alternative to alcohol and giving consumers permission to abstain from one vice while embracing another in the name of self-care.

And in a widely shared article titled **Why My 2026 Resolution is to Start Drinking Again**, **GQ** writer **Dean Stattmann** notes how giving up alcohol in the name of wellness resulted in weakened relationships and a decline in spontaneity, ultimately negatively impacting his mental health.

This reframing speaks to a broader shift in how consumers think about vice and virtue. Rather than the binary thinking of good vs. bad, or healthy vs. unhealthy, today's consumers are more interested in intentionality and finding their own balance. And, of course, looking cool while doing so.

How to act

Branding

Consider how your brand can acknowledge and serve the growing appetite for "cleaner" indulgence. Our trend Moderation Mantra outlines the consumer desire to live healthily by embracing self-discipline and balanced indulgence. In that vein, consumers want products that let them participate in culturally resonant rituals and aesthetics without compromising their health values. Angel's Cigs demonstrate one approach, but this opportunity extends beyond smoking. Could your brand offer versions of traditionally indulgent products that are reformulated or evolved for the wellness era – without losing their aesthetic appeal?

Customer Experience

Give consumers permission to live in the moment and safely pursue indulgence and hedonism. The resurgence of cigarettes reflects a sense that narratives around wellness and self-restraint may not resonate against a backdrop of anxiety and instability. Brands should create experiences and narratives that connect with consumers' Now or Never mindset, celebrating immediacy and in-the-moment pleasure.

Marcoms

Don't be afraid to lean into the rebellion aesthetic, even if you're selling something wholesome. The smoking renaissance shows that consumers are drawn to the visual language and cultural signifiers of transgression, sometimes more than the transgression itself. Consider how your brand communications can tap into the iconography of rebellion or escape while remaining aligned with consumer values around health and mindfulness.

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Let’s talk

Contact us today at hello@foresightfactory.co for any questions or further guidance.

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