

Old music is outselling new music for the first time in history

So much for the Adele effect. This past year, catalogue albums outsold the current ones by 4.3 million copies.

ADAM PUGSLEY - JAN 20, 2016

Despite the massive success of [Adele's album 25](#), which [sold a whopping 7.4 million copies in only six weeks](#), 2015 marked the first time in U.S. history that new releases were outsold by catalogue albums. Seems like everyone's been feeling extra nostalgic lately.

The term "catalogue" refers to albums released more than 18 months ago. According to Nielsen's annual [year end music report](#), catalogue albums outsold current releases by 4.3 million copies, something never before seen in the industry. [Just 10 years ago](#), current music sales outpaced catalogue music by over 150 million albums. Keep in mind that these stats don't include album streams, but regardless, it's a significant turning point.

CURRENT AND CATALOG SALES

(CATALOG IS DEFINED AS OVER 18 MONTHS SINCE RELEASE
IN MILLIONS)

		2015	2014	% CHG.
OVERALL ALBUMS	CURRENT	118.5	130.5	-9.2%
	CATALOG	122.8	126.5	-2.9%
DIGITAL ALBUMS	CURRENT	52.5	53.8	-2.5%
	CATALOG	50.9	52.6	-3.4%
PHYSICAL ALBUMS	CURRENT	65.8	76.3	-13.8%
	CATALOG	71.2	73.7	-2.7%
DIGITAL TRACKS	CURRENT	479.8	532.9	-10.0%
	CATALOG	484.9	569.6	-14.9%

Source: Nielson

Digital sales of current albums still maintained a slight lead, but when it came to physical releases, more people opted for the oldies. And when it comes to individual tracks, not whole albums, catalogue outsold current in digital as well.

There are a number of theories as to how this came to be.

Perhaps it's due to the so-called vinyl revival. In recent years, the sales of vinyl records have significantly increased as young music lovers are discovering the physical LP. In the first half of 2015 alone, **vinyl sales increased by 52%**. If they're building a physical collection, it stands to reason that people would want to buy a copy of their *favourite* album on vinyl and not necessarily the newest release. It seems plausible, judging by the fact that, according to the same Nielson report, **Pink Floyd's *Dark Side***

of the Moon sold 50,000 records this past year, the third highest selling album on vinyl.

TOTAL ALBUM SALES

(INCLUDES CD, CASSETTE, VINYL , & DIGITAL ALBUMS – IN MILLIONS)

	2015	2014	% CHG.
TOTAL UNITS	241.4	257.0	-6.1%
CD	125.6	140.8	-10.8%
DIGITAL	103.3	106.5	-2.9%
LP/VINYL	11.9	9.2	+29.8%

Source: Nielsen

Or, maybe it's a sign that a growing number of people are choosing to stream newly released digital albums rather than purchasing them. With the increasing popularity of platforms such as **Spotify** and **Apple Music**, consumers now have instant access to all the newest music for roughly \$10 a month. And they're not limited by shelf space or budget.

Whether or not *digital* sales of catalogue albums will end up surpassing current releases is still yet to be seen, but based on the current increase in

catalogue sales it's definitely a possibility. It seems as though artists are starting to take notice of the trend, too, judging by, for instance, **Grimes'** recent **decision to release her back-catalogue on vinyl** following her huge breakout. And the labels, too, judging by **Record Store Day's** annual parade of reissues.