The decade in babies

This decade, babies took on a new life. Everyone wanted to be a baby, and particularly this year, babies dominated the meme cycle. We're obsessed with babyfication — turning everything into a baby including ourselves and beloved characters. Unlike infantilization, babyfication suggests corporate strategy, foresight about how turning users or characters into babies will spur brand visibility.

I can't pretend to understand why we're baby-crazy, except for positing that it has something to do with a complete lack of control over the world and our lives. Climate change is going to burn up the Earth; wealth inequality is rampant; and generally, many things are bad. Babies, on the other hand, are good. They're innocent and pure. They don't know how horrible the world can be; they're just babies. Babies are cute. We love babies. (We can't help it, genetically!)

Maybe recounting the top baby moments of this decade will help us come to some sort of conclusion on babyfication and what it means for 2020 and beyond. Will the reign of His Majesty, The Baby ever end?

2014: Baby Groot

[embedded content]

Is it possible Baby Groot is the trendsetter? Groot, a character from *Guardians of the Galaxy*, dies in the original movie and is re-spawned in a post-credits scene as a tiny baby tree. He then shows up in the second *Guardians of the Galaxy* as a legitimate baby.

Disney has always been baby-obsessed, which makes sense: its target demographic is children. There is, for instance, versions of Mickey Mouse as a baby, wherein Disney scaled down

the popular Mickey Mouse to baby size. The difference is that now, Disney owns more adult-oriented brands, like Marvel and *Star Wars*. (This also means more merchandising opportunities than just toys and action figures: perhaps adults want a Baby Groot for their desk.)

Baby Groot was Disney's first viral baby moment for its adult brands, and it proved that adults would not only love a baby character, but use it in memes and buy its merch.

2016: "Baby Shark"

[embedded content]

The kids couldn't stop singing "Baby Shark," and then the adults couldn't either. The internet tells me "Baby Shark" really took off around 2016, but frankly, it feels like it's existed forever. I can't remember a time before "Baby Shark." It's just part of my brain now. Like every viral trend, Ellen DeGeneres featured the song on her show in 2018, creating her own version, and introducing a group of people, most without young kids, to the song. She points out that one "Baby Shark" video has over a billion views. The "Baby Shark" generation has arrived.

2017: *Boss Baby*

Dreamworks Animation

Boss Baby doesn't have great reviews, but it *was* nominated for Best Animated Picture during the 2018 Oscars and grossed over $500 million globally in theaters. It debuted in 2017, just after Donald Trump became president of the United States, pushing *Vanity Fair* to ask whether this was a movie about Trump. A baby as a boss? A baby running our country? Could it be?

This feels like the biggest hint to the decade's proliferation of babies. The fact that a publication even asked whether this movie was actually about the US president suggests something deeper: a lack of control over politics, sure, but also maybe a surrendering to a more powerful, bigger baby.

2019: "I'm baby."

2019 is *the* year for baby content, and this time, instead of bowing down to big babies, we ourselves are the babies. "I'm baby" as a meme goes back to 2017, according to Know Your Meme. The original is grim: a young woman texted her mother about a home invasion — because if she spoke, the intruder would hear her. Her mother replied, and her phone autocorrected a text to "I'm baby. Call 911." After circulating on Tumblr, the phrase went viral on Twitter two years later. Then, it came to TikTok, too, with people showing photos of themselves as babies as part of the "I'm baby" trend. We were once all babies, and we still can be — it's more of an essence thing.

2019: Snapchat's baby filter

Image: Kim Kardashian West

Snapchat's baby filter took over the internet, even outside of Snapchat. The premise is simple: see what you looked like as a baby, but now. Your skin is smoother; you're weirdly kind of hot? Kim Kardashian West briefly loved the baby filter and posed with it on Instagram, too. Snapchat said its platform grew by 7 to 9 million users solely because of its baby and gender-swapping filters. The people want to know what they'd look like as a hot, thirst-trap baby.

2019: *Death Stranding*'s Bridge Baby

I haven't played *Death Stranding*, and I don't entirely know what a Bridge Baby, or BB, does in the game. All I know is you hear it cry constantly throughout the game, and the baby is more creepy than cute. *The Verge*'s games editor Andrew Webster says about the babies:

> *"A large chunk of Death Stranding's dense lore is dedicated to BBs — there's more than just one, as they're a fairly standard tool for travelers — and where they came from. Death Stranding's post-apocalyptic future is one nearly devoid of history. Most records have been lost or destroyed, but as you slowly rebuild a network that links together America, more details come to light. Throughout the game, Deadman, a scientist with the exact likeness of Guillermo del Toro, regularly shares newly uncovered details about the origin of these weird little babies."*

2019: Baby Yoda

Disney

Baby Yoda is everything we want in a baby: big eyes, big ears, cute little hairs, a shearling coat, and constant goo-goos and gah-gahs. Like Baby Groot before him, Baby Yoda is cultural currency for Disney that translates into actual profit. More than Baby Groot, Baby Yoda lives in meme form. We can project onto Baby Yoda: he's every mood and everything we could ever want. At the same time, we want a piece of Baby Yoda in the form of merch, which Disney delayed releasing until 2020, but will definitely sell once it's released.

2019-2020: Baby Sonic

Paramount Pictures

As the year and decade comes to a close, we have been introduced to a final baby: Baby Sonic. We can’t yet say what Baby Sonic is about, other than looking cute, but this feels like something ripped out of Disney’s playbook – taking a beloved character and making it a baby. Baby Sonic also previews another decade of babies. We love them; we can’t resist them. They aren’t going away.

https://www.theverge.com/2019/12/27/21039356/baby-yoda-groot-2010-decade-2020-snapchat-filter-sonic-film-tv