



ATTITUDES OF AGING:

Understanding generational influences on eating and health

From clothing, to hairstyles, to music (and even how it's listened to), generational groups have always had powerful differences. But these age-based shifts are becoming even more distinct with the rise of technology and smart devices shaping everyday lives.

These trends are especially relevant when it comes to attitudes about health and the foods and beverages we buy. They're already having a profound impact on the way consumers gather product information and make purchases. While younger generations have certainly led the way as early adopters of smart phones and social media, technology's influence is reverberating up and down the generational continuum, which is making for an interesting and quickly changing atmosphere for food and beverage brands.

Consumers in general (no matter what their age) are now much more aware of how their diet impacts their personal health, as well as their communities and the environment.

According to 2019 data from Innova Market Insights, more global consumers are thinking about their health, with 7 in 10 noting they made changes in the past year to improve their health, and more than half increasing their consumption of functional foods and drinks in the past year.¹

But in fact, the report also noted that most consumers are thinking about healthy aging at younger points. More than three in four consumers between the ages of 22 and 55 agreed that healthy aging starts with what they eat and drink. The Innova research also found that clean labels and product transparency are equally important to all age groups.²

This means that healthier, cleaner and more transparent product formulations are an important foundation for brands looking ahead. But from that baseline, the generational groups have some differences.

For example, Generation Z, the youngest consumers who are just reaching adulthood, are most focused on physical activity to improve their health and wellbeing. Millennials, who are maturing and starting families, seem to be more preoccupied with achieving a balance between both mental and physical health. Gen X, the oldest of whom are reaching their 50's, are most likely to work toward improving their mental health. Finally, Baby Boomers, now reaching their 70's, are, not too surprisingly, concentrating on aging healthfully.³

To better understand the attitudinal nuances between generational groups, the subtleties of communicating with each demographic, and the opportunities they present in food and beverage products, here's a snapshot of each cohort:

Getting to know Gen Z

Born between 1997 and 2012 and now ranging from age 8 to 23, the oldest Gen Z'ers are just reaching adulthood.⁴ What we know so far is that they are the most diverse and largest generation ever, now making up 27% of the U.S. population.⁵ They are digital natives, having had access to cell phones, computers, WiFi and social media platforms from an early age.⁶

This tech savviness means they will expect brands to be digitally native as well, providing a seamless and unified experience across in-store, mobile and digital channels.⁷ Because they were born in a time of economic recession, Gen Z does tend to be pragmatic and cautious; they typically like products that offer good value, innovation and reflect real life.⁸

When it comes to their attitudes about foods, beverages and brands, the picture is only just forming. With many still in their teens, Gen Z'ers often default to eating at home and typically ask their parents to purchase foods and beverages they want.⁹

67% are seeking physical activity as a means to improve health, which means that products with protein and that fit their fast-paced and adventurous lifestyle are appealing.¹⁰

With regard to brands, so far, Gen Z differs from older generations in that they seem to care less about brands in general, and feel most positive about big brands and store brands.¹¹ They are also more likely, compared to older generations, to express interest in packaging issues.¹²

Only time will tell how Gen Z's attitudes develop into adulthood. Still, it is likely that this generation will push brands toward further authenticity and sustainable models.

Meet the Millennials

Born between 1981 and 1996, Millennials now make up 22% of the U.S population.¹³ As the oldest of the group nears 40, they are establishing families of their own, but doing so in their own way: getting married and giving birth later than previous generations.

Nearly half, or 45%, are still not living in a traditional family.¹⁴

While they are embracing holistic health, they also seek a balance of both body and mind – this may be why they have shown the highest level of concern over environmental and ethical issues.¹⁵

Given this propensity to do it their way, it is not surprising that Millennials have been at the forefront of the food and beverage revolution. Exposed to shifting norms in product consumption since they were kids, they have proven quick to embrace new ideas like alternative dairy and meats. They are also driving the enhanced role of beverages in daily consumption, with 65% saying beverages play a very important role in their health and wellness, and more than half noting they look to beverages to provide added value such as energy, nutrients or other benefits.¹⁶

Young consumers, particularly Millennials, are also especially interested in exotic new flavors, tastes and experiences from the foods they eat, propelling momentum for Asian and Latin snacks and dishes. Overall, Millennials are seeking to increase the positives in food, such as added protein and fiber, rather than reducing the negatives. They also want ease and portability of foods that fit their busy, active lifestyles.¹⁸

Understanding Gen X'ers

Gen X'ers are now at the peak of their careers, having achieved their predecessors' benchmarks, such as a higher standard of living, longer life expectancy and better access to higher education and the associated responsibilities.¹⁹ But they have also seen the ups and downs, having experienced economic turmoil. This has made Gen X more skeptical and practical, seeking security and stability in their lives, according to insights from Euromonitor International. Making up 20% of the U.S. population,²⁰ this generation may be smaller, but its buying power is significant. They are conscientious shoppers who are seeking good value.

When it comes to Gen X's thoughts on health, they are strongly focused on mental health, with more than half saying they have taken steps to improve their mental and emotional function.²¹ Not surprisingly, family and socializing with friends are top priorities. Gen X'ers often look at foods and beverages from a broader perspective, showing above-average interest in products that are natural and organic; they also often try to reduce their consumption of meat, alcohol and caffeine.²²

Overall, products that are perceived as natural, minimally processed and offer guilt-free indulgence will resonate for Gen X consumers.

Boomers breaking ground

Throughout their lives, Baby Boomers have pioneered many trends – from advancing counterculture and eschewing tradition, to embracing natural and organic products. Now reaching their early seventies, many are still in the workforce.²³ Making up 23% of the U.S. population,²⁴ this generation plans to do their senior years better as well.

Aging healthfully is top-of-mind for Baby Boomers, so they are looking for products that are lower in sugar, sodium and fat, containing healthful, functional, plant-based ingredients.²⁵ These older consumers may be more conservative and less prone to exploration in their food choices, but they are dabbling with specialized or flexitarian eating approaches – at least occasionally – perhaps avoiding dairy at breakfast or going meatless at dinner.²⁶

Maintaining their activity level is important for these consumers, but cognitive health is also critical, with the latter now considered a major factor in ensuring quality of life for older adults and preserving their independence.²⁷ These shoppers are increasingly savvy about the products and ingredients that support both goals. Mature consumers will likely drive demand for products that offer both active nutrition and cognitive health.²⁸



Ultimately, while label-friendly, sustainable and healthful products offer appeal across the generational spectrum, honing in on specific generations may also lead brands to exciting and important new food and beverage opportunities.

¹ Innova Market Insights. "Health Happiness: A Holistic Approach to Healthy Aging." August 27, 2019. <https://www.innovamarketinsights.com/health-happiness-a-holistic-approach-to-healthy-aging/>

² Innova Market Insights. "Holistic Health Across Generations." September 2019.

³ Ibid. Innova. "Holistic Health."

⁴ Dimock, M. "Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Gen Z Begins". Pew Research Center. January 17, 2019. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau 2018.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Hodgsen, A. "Generation Z: The Next Wave of Consumers." Euromonitor International Blog. May 21, 2018. <https://blog.euromonitor.com/generation-z-next-wave-consumers/>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ The Hartman Group. "How Gen Z Shops for Food & Beverages." Gen Z Report 2018. <https://www.hartman-group.com/infographics/325927042/how-gen-z-shops-for-food-beverages>

¹⁰ Ibid. Innova. "Holistic Health."

¹¹ The Hartman Group. "Gen Z Attitudes Towards Brands." Gen Z Report 2018. <https://www.hartman-group.com/infographics/1245815683/gen-zs-attitudes-towards-brands>

¹² Ibid. Innova. "Holistic Health."

¹³ Ibid. U.S. Census.

¹⁴ Barroso, A; Parker, K; Bennet, J. "As Millennials Near 40, They are Approaching Family Life Differently than Previous Generations." Pew Research. May 27, 2020. <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2020/05/27/as-millennials-near-40-theyre-approaching-family-life-differently-than-previous-generations/>

¹⁵ Ibid. Innova. "Holistic Health."

¹⁶ The Hartman Group. "Consumers Look for Functional Benefits in Beverages." Modern Beverage Culture, 2018. <https://www.hartman-group.com/infographics/1251327552/consumers-look-for-functional-benefits-in-beverages>

¹⁷ Ibid. Innova. "Holistic Health."

¹⁸ Innova Market Insights. "Holistic Health Speaks to all Generations." Innova Market Insights Blog. August 27, 2019. <https://www.innovamarketinsights.com/holistic-health-speaks-to-all-generations/>

¹⁹ Ha, L. "Gen X: A Small but Mighty Generation." Euromonitor Blog. <https://blog.euromonitor.com/generation-x-a-small-but-mighty-generation/>

²⁰ Ibid. U.S. Census.

²¹ Ibid. Innova. "Holistic Health."

²² Ibid. Innova Market Insights Blog.

²³ Fry, R. "Baby Boomers are Staying in the Labor Force at Rates Not seen in Generations for their Age." Pew Research. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/24/baby-boomers-us-labor-force/>

²⁴ Ibid. U.S. Census.

²⁵ Ibid. Innova. "Holistic Health."

²⁶ The Hartman Group. "Wired Youth and Wise Elders: Consumers Young and Old are Reshaping Food Culture – and the Food Industry." September 20, 2016. <https://www.hartman-group.com/newsletters/692944828/wired-youth-and-wise-elders-consumers-young-and-old-are-reshaping-food-culture-and-the-food-industry>

²⁷ "What is a Healthy Brain? New Research Explores Perceptions of Cognitive Health Among Diverse Older Adults." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Healthy Aging. https://www.cdc.gov/aging/pdf/Perceptions_of_Cog_Hlth_factsheet.pdf

²⁸ Ibid. Innova. "Holistic Health."