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YOUNG DINERS WANT FAST FOOD RESTAURANTS TO KNOW THESE 5 THINGS

HEALTH-OBSSESSED YOUNG DINERS ARE STILL EATING FAST FOOD, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN THEY DON'T EXPECT SOME CHANGES FROM THE SEGMENT. HERE'S WHAT 13-35-YEAR-OLDS REALLY WANT FROM FAST FOOD CHAINS...

It's no secret that young consumers are health-obsessed. More than previous generations, wellness is an active pursuit for Millennials and Gen Z, who are exercising more, eating better, and spending more of their hard-earned cash on healthy living. They're using apps to track fitness data, turning to online resources for health advice, and fueling a revolution of organic, all-natural food. In fact, sales of food made or grown without pesticides and hormones increased 8% in 2016 compared to an increase of 0.6% in overall food sales in the U.S., and according to [recent Ypulse research](#), four in 10 13-35-year-olds say they eat only organic and all-natural food. Additionally, six in 10 Millennials and Gen Z say that overall, they have a healthy diet.

In response to these healthy tendencies, the fast food industry has been understandably anxious. Many predicted that foodie-centric Millennials would turn their backs on the McDonalds and Burger Kings of the world in favor of healthier, trendier fast casual options—as well as in favor of cooking at home. And while it's true that young consumers say they prefer fast casual (over half of 13-35-year-olds tell Ypulse they would rather eat at Chipotle than McDonalds) the fast food industry has actually fared well among these health-loving generations. Less than one in 10 young diners say they never eat at fast food restaurants, and four in 10 say they eat at them often or even very often. The U.S. fast food industry grew from \$206 billion to \$209 billion between 2016 and 2017, according to Statista, and it's expected to grow another 6% by 2020. [According to the New York Post](#), sales of the Big Three—McDonald's, Burger King, and Wendy's—are growing faster than the GDP.

In the meantime, it hasn't been all smooth sailing for the once-praised fast casual chains that were predicted to take over the industry. Chipotle has struggled to bounce back after its 2015 E. coli crisis, and chains including Noodles & Company, Potbelly, Zoe's Kitchen, El Pollo Loco, and Habit Restaurants all have lost more than half of their value since their IPOs a few years ago, [according to USA Today](#).

While Millennials and Gen Z are clearly still eating burgers and fries, that doesn't mean their ideas about fast food aren't shifting—or that fast food brands shouldn't be revising their strategies to meet the preferences of 13-35-year-olds. Here are five stats that show how young diners think about fast food today:



1. Nearly nine in 10 young consumers like the healthy options.

Turns out the inkling that Millennials and Gen Z want more than high-calorie, meat-heavy, and greasy fast food fare is right—the vast majority say they like that the old classics are adding lighter options to their menus. In fact, the attempts by fast food chains to go healthy have been largely successful. Earlier this year, McDonald’s began a small-market test for a vegan burger that could hit international grills if it performs well and, [according to Business Insider](#), it’s going well. Last year Wendy’s tested a black bean veggie burger and is “[look\[ing\] for opportunities for it](#)” on a larger scale, and Taco Bell [rolled out a certified vegetarian menu](#) in 2015 that has diet-conscious 13-35-year-olds frequenting the chain. But...



2. Half of young diners want fast food restaurants to stay the same.

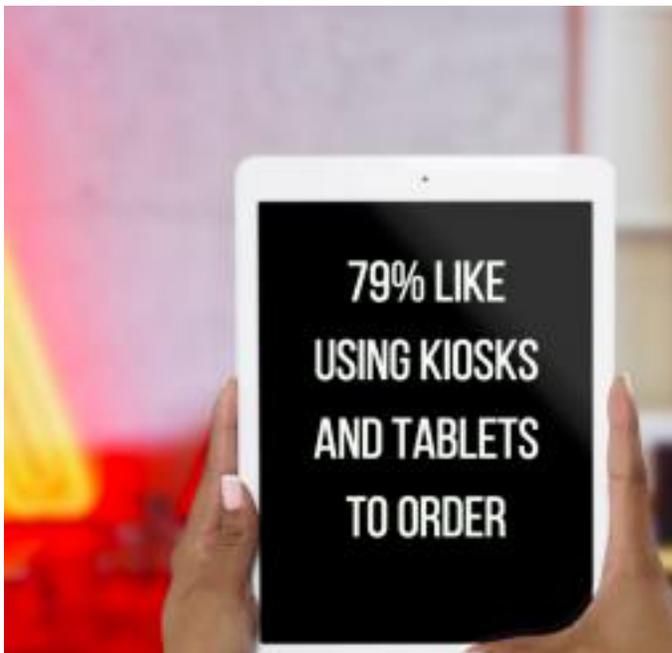
Though a huge number of young consumers are up for the healthy options, when it comes to

shaking things up on the menu, it's essentially a 50/50 shot that quinoa salads and vegan burgers will reel them in. There are two ways to read this: The first is that, while 13-35-year-olds may be healthier than previous generations, they too want to indulge every now and then. And what better way to get your fix than some greasy fries and a Coke? On the other hand, this could also mean that Millennials and Gen Z are looking for classic fast food options, but they want those options themselves to be made with healthier ingredients and less additives (meaning quiet healthification is key). Which could be why....



3. Three-quarters of young consumers want higher-end items.

While one of the main attractions of fast food for young consumers is the price point, these generations do appreciate the fusion of foodie culture and quick service restaurants. In fact, 88% of 13-35-year-olds tell Ypulse they appreciate when high-end chefs have budget versions of their restaurants, and 60% like when fast food restaurants add new, Instagram-worthy menu items—just like the ones they find at the upscale restaurants. This has led chains like Chipotle, McDonald's, and Jack in the Box to add [fancy menu items](#) to their lists of classics, upping the quality, novelty, and price in hopes of luring young diners. Jack in the Box now serves ribeye burgers, Chipotle has partnered with Top Chef winner Richard Blais to up their game, and McDonald's launched their Signature Crafted Recipes menu, which includes a sriracha burger and the pico guacamole buttermilk crispy chicken sandwich.



4. The majority of young consumers like using tech to order their food.

Limited service restaurants of all stripes are trying to figure out how to pull in young diners with tech, and fast food is no different. With digital menus, table-side tablets, and apps for ordering ahead, chains like [Taco Bell and KFC](#) are attempting to keep up with the digital-first mindset of Millennials and Gen Z. And, according to our research, it's the right move—the vast majority of young consumers say they like using digital means to order their food instead of talking to a human at the counter. But be careful to learn [a lesson from Shake Shack](#), and don't add so much tech that you alienate some customers.



5. Half of young diners 21-and-older want a beer with their burger.

When Taco Bell rolled out its Cantina locations—which include a redesigned space and tapas-style menu—one of the big new additions to their strategy for pulling in Millennial diners was

alcohol. While it's true that Millennials 21-and-over like their craft cocktails alongside their farm-to-table fare, just under 50% of the generation thinks fast food joints should join the party. Like changing up the menu, offering alcohol could attract some young diners—but the rest may not care either way.

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