

## **Fake Meat and an Informed Generation on Higher Education**

As wired generations, Millennials (those born between 1981 and 1994, now about 25 to 38 years of age) and Generation Z (those born between 1995 and 2005, now about 14 to 24 years of age) are likely to influence the next presidential election, the way higher education operates, how our cities are designed and what our food systems will look like.

Millennials are the largest cohort with approximately 73 million, outnumbering the 72 million Boomers<sup>i</sup> (Boomers peaked at 78 million). Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964, now about 55 to 73 years of age) are also becoming less influential in our economy, as approximately 10,000 will retire daily<sup>ii</sup>. In addition, approximately 5,000 boomers will die each day<sup>iii</sup>. At the same time, Boomers will become less powerful in the new economy as the numbers suggest a major shift with the mortality rate for Millennials being lower than that of Boomers and the number of Generation Z'ers turning 18 is estimated to be between 11,000 and 12,000 a day<sup>iv</sup>. We are quickly entering a younger adult's economy.

Millennials and Generation Z are the most informed and educated cohorts in the U.S. While their experiences are different, they access, process and use information better than their older cohort groups. Food is just one example. Boomers and Generation X'ers (born between 1965 and 1980, now about 39 to 54 years of age) grew up in a time where calories were not counted and food product ingredients were based on trusting the FDA and food manufacturers. Millennials and Generation Z are less trusting of government and do their research. While younger generations are more informed on food issues and nutrition, many do remain obese, as screen time has overtaken physical activity for many.

Regardless, younger generations are fueling a market for healthier choices, as well as creating demand for more innovations in food science. Some facts around the food industry include:

- Despite the global meat market being \$90 billion, it may not be capable of feeding the world come mid-century due to population growth. The global population is estimated to be 9.7 billion compared to 7.5 billion today<sup>v</sup>.
- As a result, plant-based meat consumption has increased dramatically over recent years. Google Trends reports that the substitute meat market is expected to grow by 8.4% annually to reach a global value of \$5.2 billion by 2020<sup>vi</sup>. Almost every major food chain has adopted or is exploring more plant-based meat substitutes. Burger King has launched its Impossible Whopper. At the time of this article, Subway is testing plant-based meatballs in 900 of its stores.
- Data from an Impossible Foods generational survey shows that this growth is likely to accelerate due to Millennials and Generation Z. One way this is happening is by Millennials becoming parents. 72% of Millennials with children are eating plant-based meat more often compared to 60% of Millennials without kids eating plant-based meat more often<sup>vii</sup>.

- Generation Z takes things even farther than their predecessors. They are significantly less likely to agree that “meat is a part of the American Identity.” Only 61% of Generation Z agreed with this statement versus 72% of Millennials and 76% of Boomers<sup>viii</sup>. Further, Barclays research found that Generation Z eats 57% more tofu and 550% more non-dairy milk than Millennials<sup>ix</sup>. 79% of Generation Z also want to go meatless at least once or twice per week<sup>x</sup>.
- While these items may be more expensive, Generation Z is willing to spend the money. 41% of Generation Z is willing to pay more for foods they perceive as healthier compared to 32% of Millennials. Combining this fact with 78% of Generation Z saying they spend most of their discretionary income on food and the reality that they will make up 40% of U.S. consumers by 2020 means that we are only at the beginning stages of Generation Z’s food market influence<sup>xixii</sup>.

Outside of the obvious in terms of new opportunities in food science and agriculture, what are other implications for higher education?

- Millennials and Generation Z are more informed than other cohorts. Despite the flood of fake news, these generations consume information better and faster than others. They also identify fake information better<sup>xiii</sup>. For higher education, **being more aware about the target market and the customer and centering relevant messages and transparency around the young adult will be critical in gaining enrollments** (or in the case of food service, patrons). The old paradigm of hiding tuition and fees 2-3 pages deep can no longer continue.
- **Using proper ingredients and following a recipe should yield a successful outcome.** They understand the cost of food and ingredients and often pay more as a result<sup>xiv</sup>. With tuition at record levels, they want assurances that they will get a positive return on investment. They understand that good ingredients in food has a positive impact on longevity, health and daily performance. They will expect the same with higher education or they will seek alternatives.
- **Where’s the beef? If higher education, as we know it, doesn’t meet their needs, they will seek other alternatives.** Younger adults understand that meat may not sustain global needs. Some also see animal cruelty in the process and bypass meat as a result. Others see a better outcome with alternatives, such as plant-based proteins found in veggie burgers. Adult learners may bypass the degree in search of alternative credentials, such as certificates, badges and other substitutes.
- **Like food, Millennials and Generation Z raw materials are important and they will read the label on education.** Younger adults will research ingredients for health and safety concerns. They also watch calories, sodium and carbohydrates among other metrics. The corollary to higher education is that they may question whether a certain

course has value in the credential. With the course being one of many ingredients toward a degree or other credential, too many bad ingredients is likely to result in shopping for a substitute or with a competitor.

- **Customization is important to young adults.** Despite the food scares of Chipotle, young adults continue to dine there. They do so because the ingredients are good and food is made to the customer's preferences. Higher education has started to improve how it responds to customers in the form of offering online programs and meeting flexibility needs; creating more specialties, such as a healthcare focused MBA or a graduate degree in analytics; and by incorporating past experiences for credit.
- **Is the chef or cook important?** In some venues, knowing who the chef is may be important. Like online classes, home delivery of prepared meals does not require a chef, but needs a strong reputation or brand, as well as a content expert at some point. In the new economy, the role of faculty will be important in many cases, but not all.
- **Evaluations and reviews can make or break the establishment.** In a world being fueled by data, food service, meal delivery services and eateries live and die by positive reviews. While higher education institutions have been largely immune to external review services outside of private, national college rankings, a more data-driven future will impact most industries, including higher education.
- **Social media can also proliferate a bad user experience, as well as promote a positive one.** Fair or unfair, a dissatisfied diner has the power in today's economy to destroy or paralyze a restaurant. Safety nets or protocols need to be put in place to either improve the experience, address the problem or minimize its damage, fair or unfair. Being proactive and having a plan in place to address scenarios and contingencies is critical.
- **Customer service can be a deal-breaker.** While many restaurateurs and hospitality professionals acknowledge that the front of the house is just as important as the back of the house, many institutions of higher education fail to greet and welcome their potential students correctly. Having a fully-functional customer relationship management (CRM) system and defined, yet flexible processes in place, is essential at optimizing conversion from lead to inquiry to applicant to student. Having a digital agent, real-time advisor/recruiter or artificial intelligence (AI) system to immediately respond could also improve the experience and enrollment conversion.

Generation Z and Millennials will reshape the world. They will redefine the global economy. They will redefine higher education to better meet the needs of the new economy. They understand that "you are what you eat." As a result, higher education will have to pay better

attention to raw materials, quality, handling and preparation, packaging, pricing and the return on investment among other factors.

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<sup>i</sup> Searling, L., "The Big Number: Millennials to overtake boomers in 2019 as largest U.S. population group," The Washington Post, January 17, 2019.

<sup>ii</sup> Deutsche Bank Research, November 2018

<sup>iii</sup> Multiple sources: Incendar.com; Ehlert, R., "A 'Baby Boomer Die-off'? Boomers won't go down quietly, even after a year like 2016," Idaho Statesman, December 28, 2016, UPCEA Research

<sup>iv</sup> Multiple sources: [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov), [www.datacenter.kidscount.org](http://www.datacenter.kidscount.org), UPCEA Research

<sup>v</sup> [www.un.org](http://www.un.org)

<sup>vi</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/generation-z-is-eating-fake-meat-2017-10>

<sup>vii</sup> <https://impossiblefoods.com/insights/generationaltrends/>

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>ix</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/generation-z-is-eating-fake-meat-2017-10>

<sup>x</sup> <https://www.livekindly.com/79-gen-z-meatless/>

<sup>xi</sup> <https://aaronallen.com/blog/gen-z-food-trends>

<sup>xii</sup> <https://mercyforanimals.org/wow-generation-z-creating-5-billion-vegan>

<sup>xiii</sup> Gottfried, J, and Grieco, E., "Younger Americans are better than older Americans at telling factual news statements from opinions," Pew Research Center, October 23, 2018

<sup>xiv</sup> Settembre, J., "Why Gen Z spends more money on food than fashion," MarketWatch, April 11, 2018.