



Beyond The Box

How Consumer Trends Are
Reshaping F&B Packaging

PRESENTED BY

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DATASSENTIAL ONE

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SALES PROSPECTING & TRACKING




01

The 2026 Consumer Landscape

Who they are, what they want,
and how packaging fits in.





CONSUMERS IN 2026 ARE GOVERNED BY A...

Confluence of Contradictions

68%

of consumers say they are
**“extremely” or “very
concerned”** about inflation
and the rising cost of living.

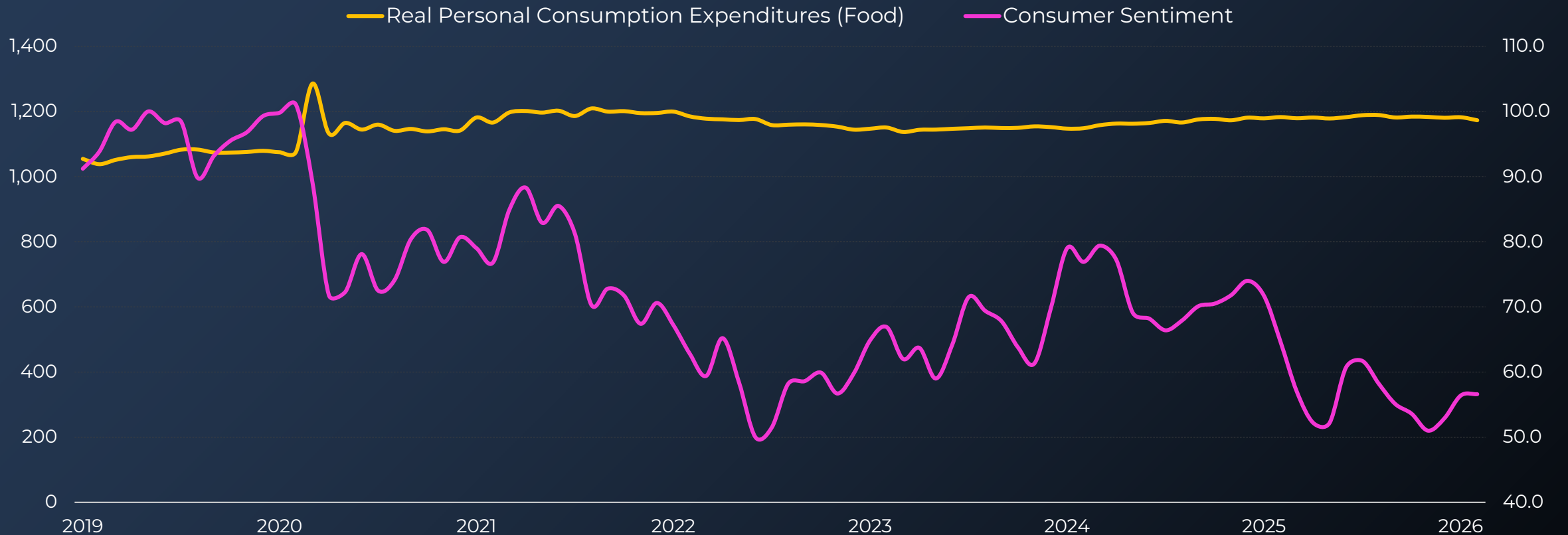
72%

of consumers say they have become
**more selective about where they
spend their money on food.**



Consumer Spending Remains Resilient

Even as consumer sentiment fluctuates, real food spending has remained relatively stable over the past few years.



75%

of consumers agree that they are generally **more cautious with big purchases than small ones.**

49%

of Gen Z say they **often lose track of how much they spend on small or everyday things.**



THE RISE OF...

Little Treat Culture

50%

of consumers **typically have a snack when they're feeling down or need a pick-me-up.**

71%

of Gen Z consumers **had a snack in place of a traditional meal at least once per week in the past month**

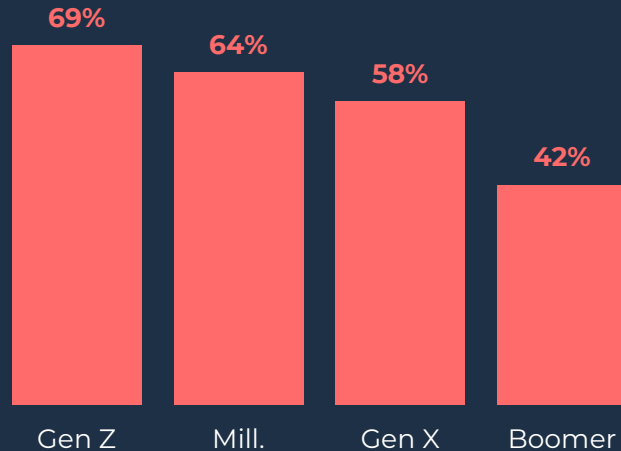


The Three-Meal Day Is Changing

Many Americans – particularly younger generations – are eschewing the three-meal day in favor of snacks and meal skipping.

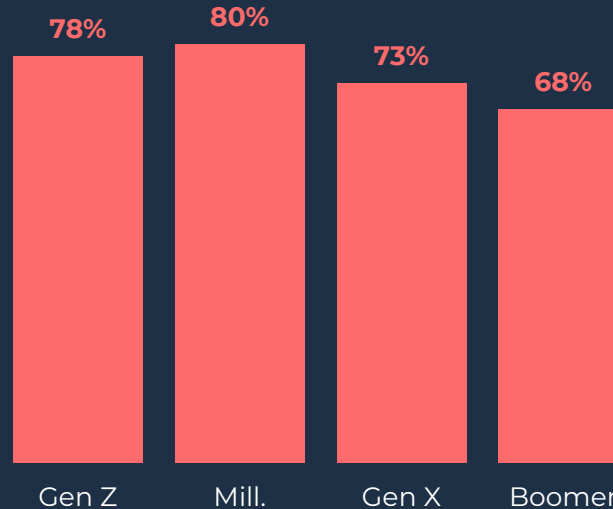
Skip a traditional meal at least once per week

58%



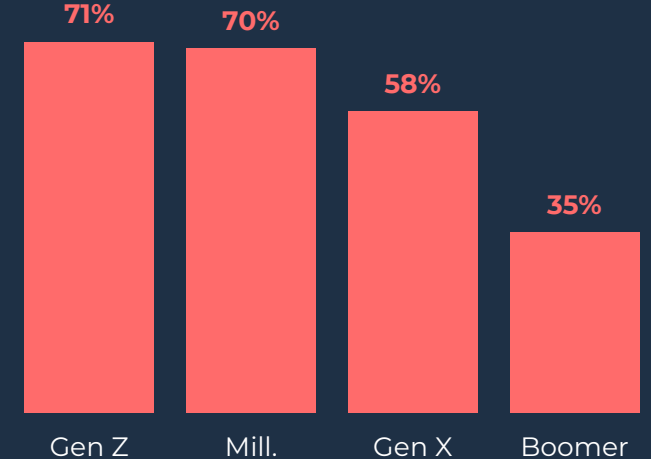
Had a snack outside of traditional meals at least once per week

75%



Had a snack in place of a traditional meal at least once per week

59%





The Rise Of Experiences.



The image is a split-screen composition. The left side shows a young woman with long dark hair, wearing a grey hoodie, sitting on a bed and eating from a green and white ice cream cup with a spoon. She is looking upwards and to the left with a thoughtful expression. The right side shows an older woman with long, wavy grey hair, wearing a dark green tank top, smiling broadly while holding a large wooden bowl filled with a green salad. She is looking to the right. The background on the right is a kitchen with wooden shelves.

Indulgence vs. Health



92%

of consumers **utilize food to accomplish at least one health and wellness goal**

Improving heart health

Managing weight

Improving gut and digestive health

Managing or preventing diabetes

Boosting immune system

Building muscle

Improving / lowering blood pressure

Improving bone health

Improving mobility

Managing inflammation and arthritis

Improving teeth and gum health

Improving vision and eye health

Preventing cancer

Improving hormone health or balance

Providing energy throughout the day

Helping you live longer

Reducing fatigue / tiredness

Improving mental sharpness

Helping you sleep better

Improving / regulating your mood

Improving skin health

Aging better

Detoxifying (cleansing body of toxins)

Managing anxiety / reducing stress

Improving sex drive / performance



37%

of consumers are **currently using or interested in using GLP-1 medications.**

CUSTOMIZATION

71%

of operators say their customers **find the ability to personalize and customize orders more important nowadays.**

PORTION CONTROL

59%

of consumers agree that **if a restaurant near them offered more flexible portion size options, they would be more likely to visit that restaurant.**

The 2026 Consumer At A Glance

Today's consumer is a study in unique contradictions.

**Value-pressured,
tracking every dollar
on big purchases**



...but spending freely on small,
daily joys — the little treat they
can't resist and often don't notice

**Actively health-
conscious, using food to
achieve wellness goals**



...but emotionally drawn to
comfort food, indulgence, and
the reward of a little treat

**Craving meaningful,
unique, and fulfilling
experiences**




...but finding their most
consistent joy in accessible,
everyday indulgences

**In search of control —
over portions,
ingredients, and health**



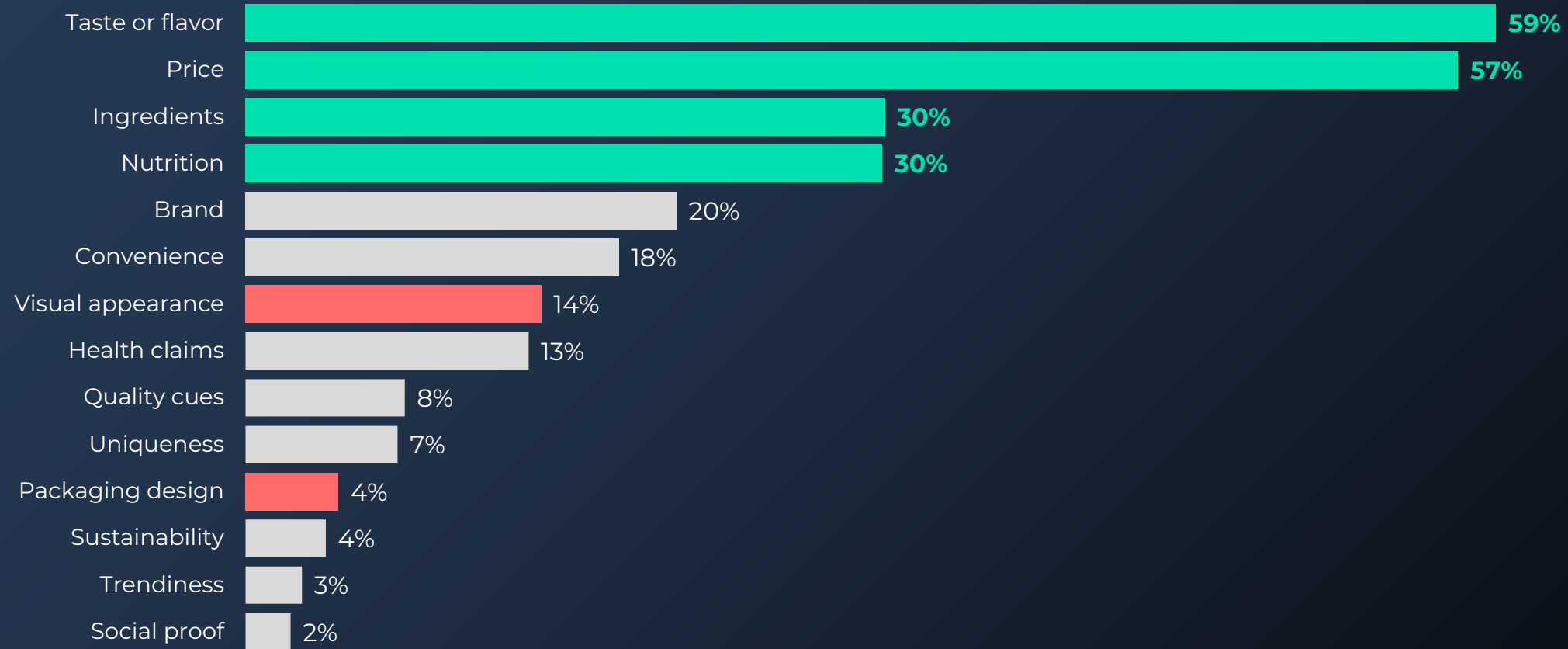
...but looking to packaging and
brands to make those decisions
easier, not harder



Packaging Sits At The Intersection Of These Tensions

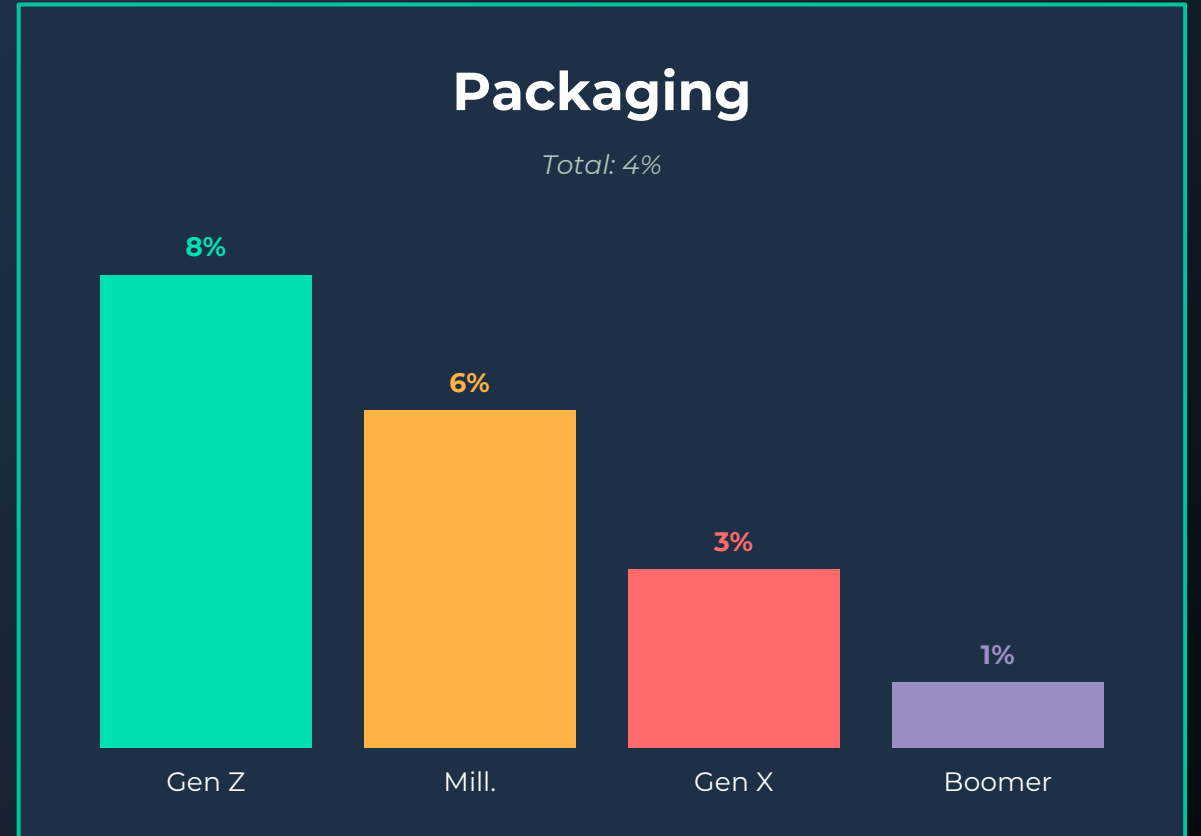
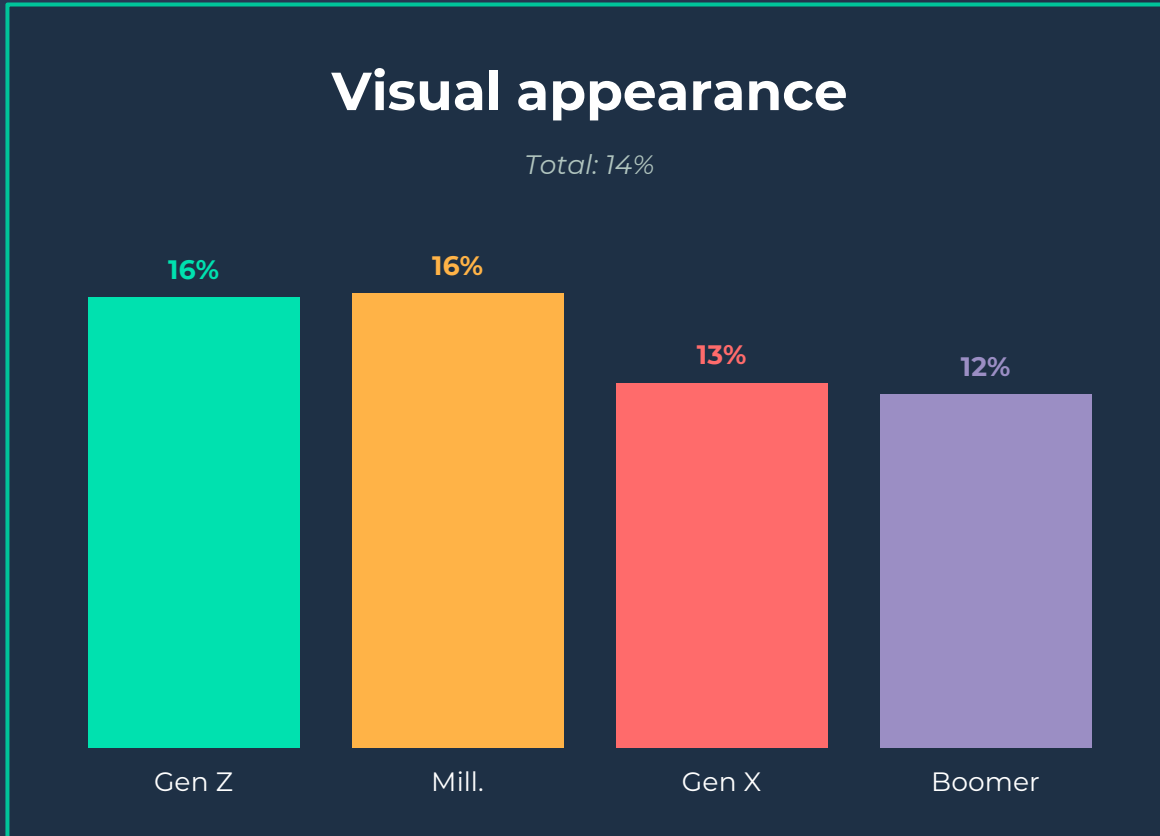
What Actually Drives the Purchase Decision?

When choosing food and beverage items at retail venues, consumers are most likely to prioritize...



Appearance Matters More to Younger Consumers

Gen Z and Millennials are far more likely to cite visual cues and packaging design as purchasing drivers.



IN THE PAST MONTH...

37%

of consumers **purchased a new type or brand of food and beverage at a retail store primarily because of how it looked.**

34%

of consumers **purchased a food or beverage that looked great but turned out to be low quality or disappointing.**



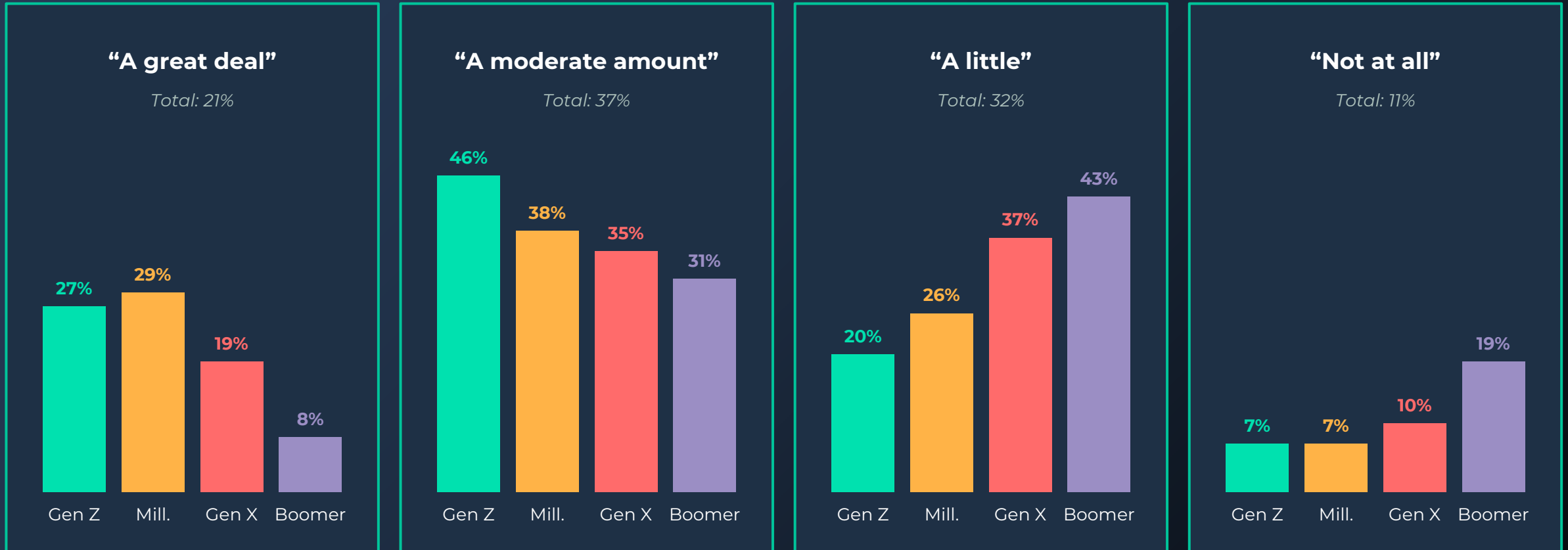


58%

of consumers say packaging **affects their food and beverage purchasing decisions** “a great deal or “a moderate amount.”

Does Packaging Matter More to Some Generations?

Younger consumers are far more packaging-influenced than their older counterparts.



Looks Matter — But Quality Wins Long-Term

Consumers hold nuanced views: appearance can signal quality and justify price, but most won't abandon a product they love just because of how it looks.

"If a product delivers on quality, I'll keep buying it no matter how it looks."

76%

"If a food or drink doesn't look appealing, I assume it won't taste good."

56%

"A great-looking food or drink product (item or packaging) makes me feel better about my purchase, even if it costs more."

42%

02

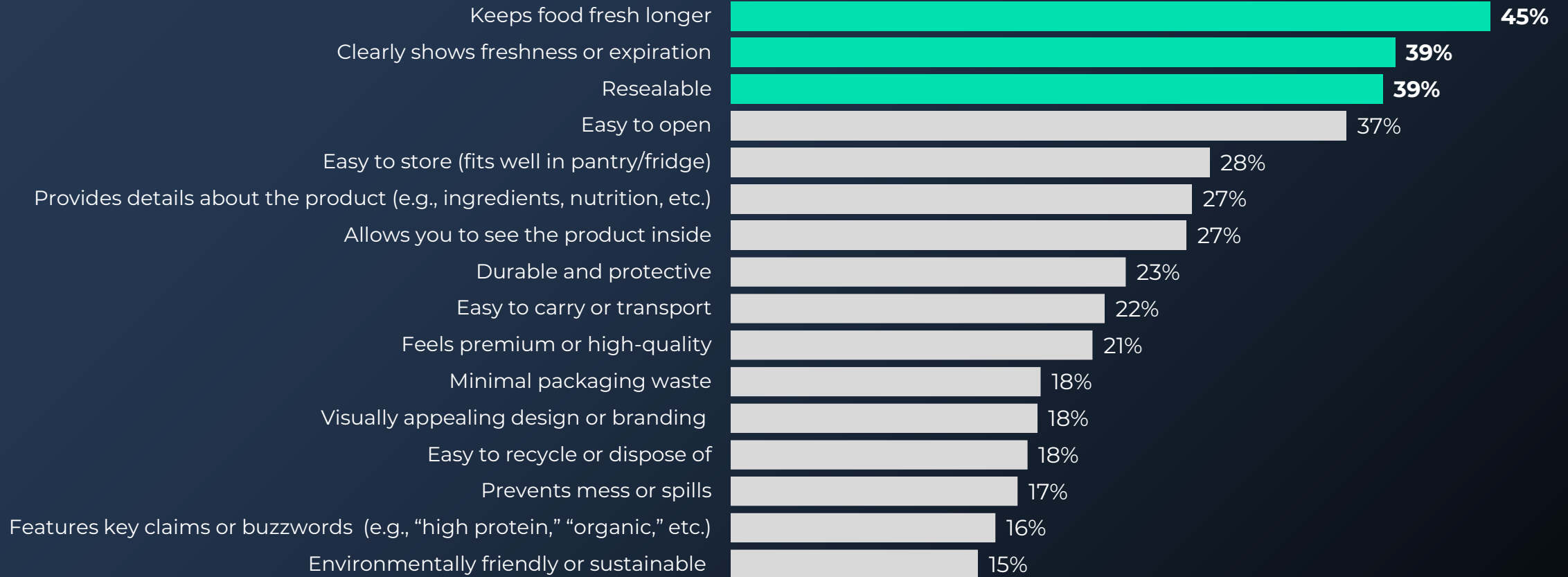
Packaging Table Stakes

What shoppers actually prioritize
at the shelf and at foodservice.



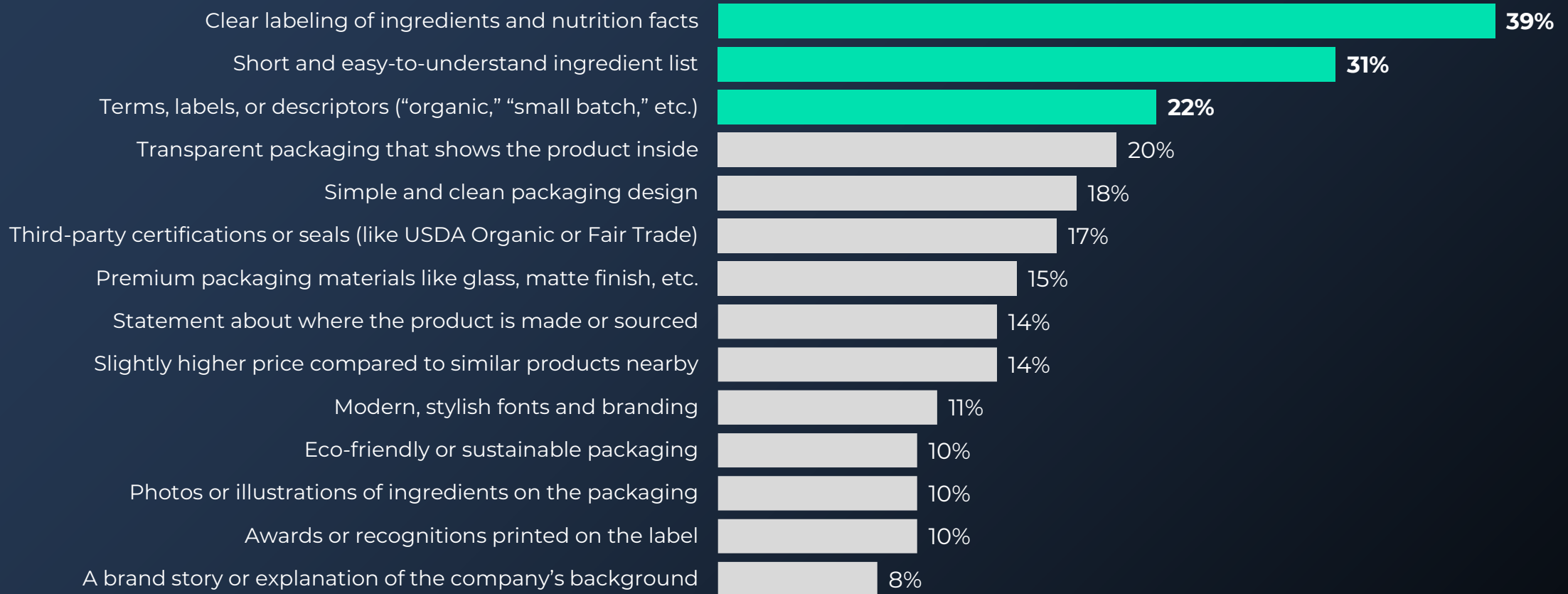
At the Shelf, Function Trumps Everything

When choosing between food and beverages at retail, shoppers care most about basic, functional elements.



Packaging & Design Can Signal Quality

Clear labeling, ingredient transparency, and high-impact descriptors can visibly signal quality to discerning shoppers.



What Consumers Need from Foodservice Packaging

Delivery packaging must solve, first and foremost, for the journey to reach the diner.



Consumer Perspectives on Foodservice Packaging

Delivery packaging is now a critical brand touchpoint — poor execution can damage reputation and reduce repeat orders.

"Poor packaging (leaks, sogginess, mess) can ruin the overall meal experience"

87%

"High-quality packaging makes me think more positively about the restaurant"

77%

"Well-designed packaging can make takeout feel like a restaurant experience"

74%

"Consistent poor packaging = less likely to reorder from that restaurant"

74%

"Too much packaging waste makes me view the restaurant negatively"

50%

03

Health, Wellness, and Control

How F&B packaging can keep pace with — and respond to — the latest shifts in health and wellness.



92%

of consumers **utilize food to accomplish at least one health and wellness goal.**

95%

of consumers **actively avoid or limit at least one ingredient or food attribute.**



Trust Is Not Guaranteed Across The Food System

Fewer than half of consumers say they trust large CPG brands or restaurants to provide healthy food and beverage products.

"I trust small, local food companies to provide products that are healthy."

59%

"I trust restaurants and cafeterias to provide products that are healthy."

45%

"I trust large food companies to provide products that are healthy."

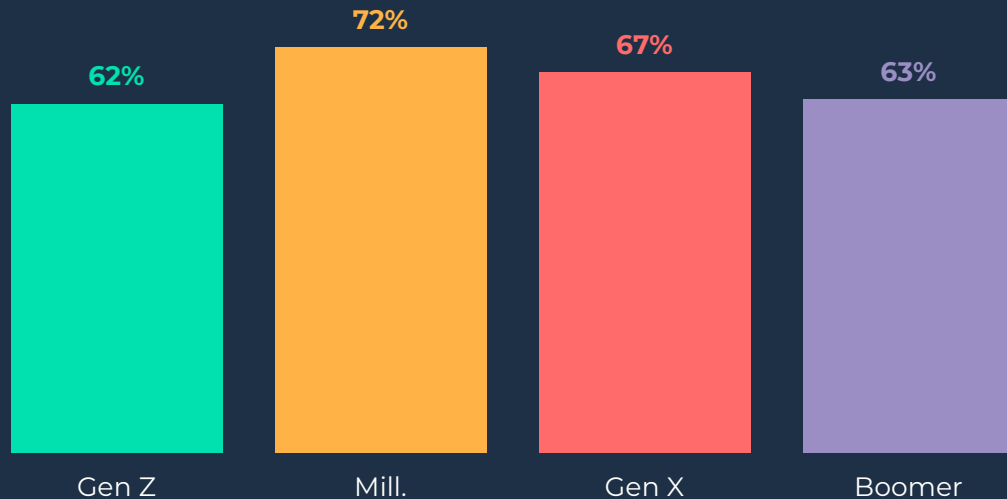
39%

Health Is Personal And Increasingly Autonomous

Consumers are growing more skeptical of top-down dietary guidance and are more likely to prioritize personal judgment.

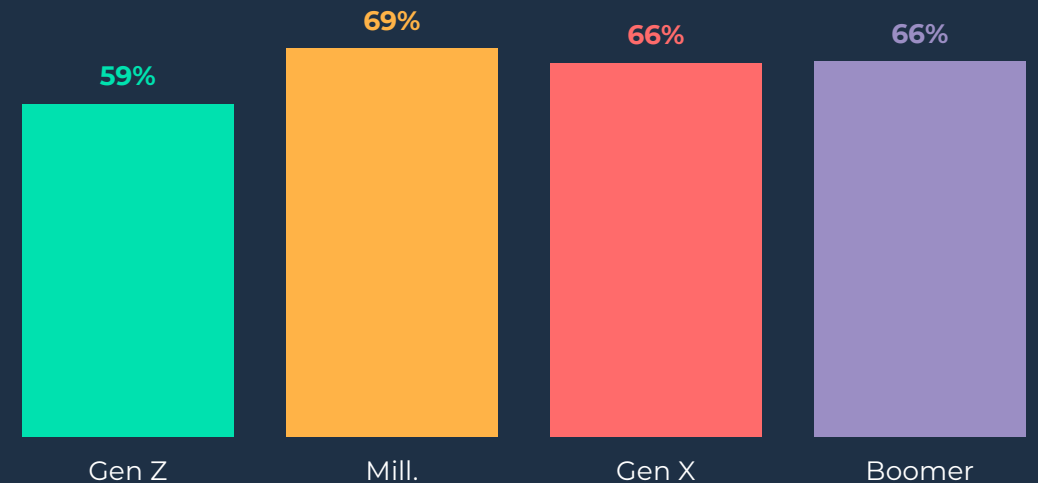
“When it comes to health and wellness, personal choice matters more than public health policy.”

67%



“Only I can determine what foods are best for me and my family.”

66%

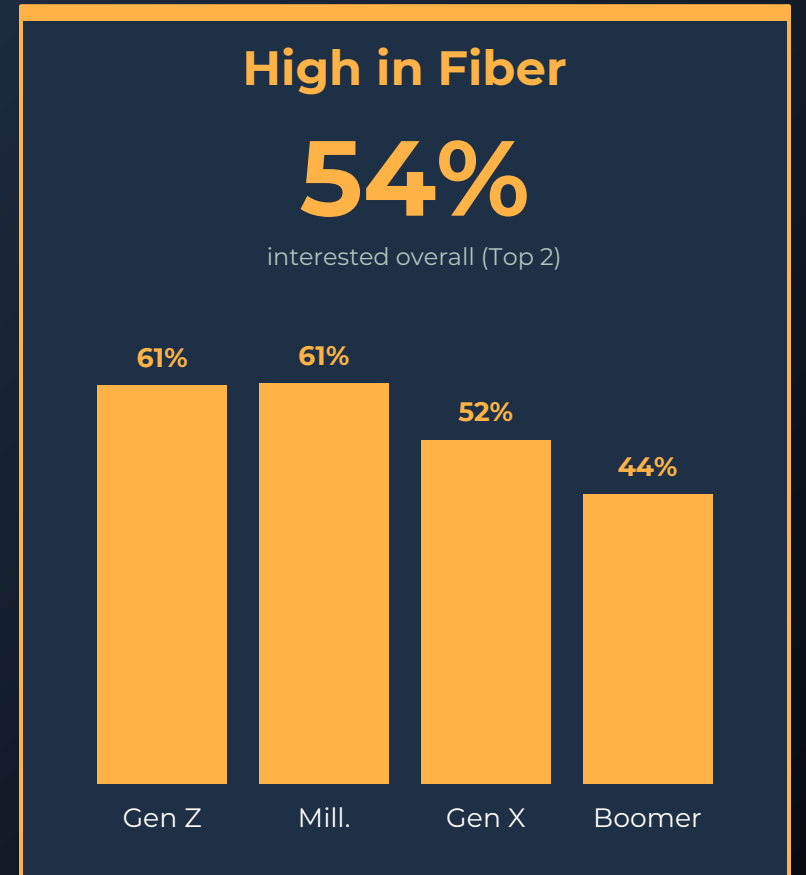
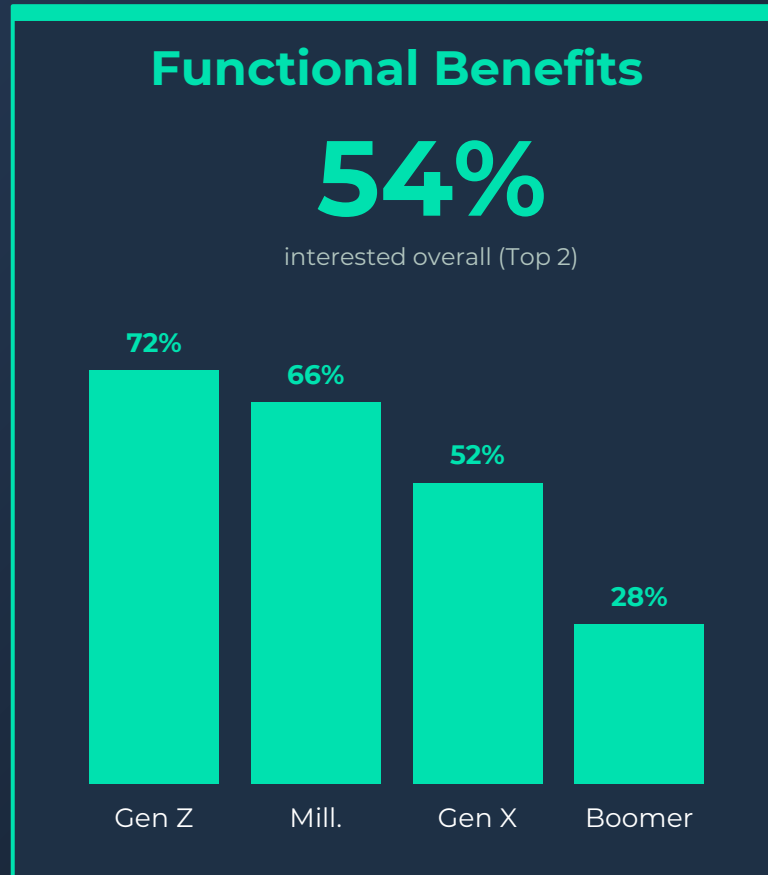
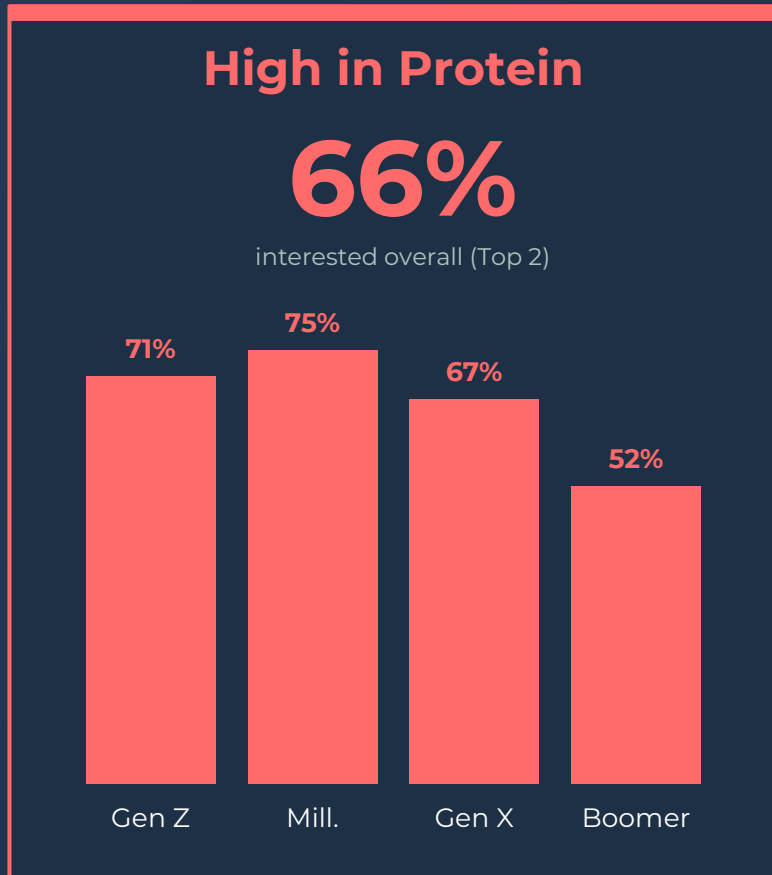


A composite image featuring a woman on the left and a smartwatch on the right. The woman, with curly hair and wearing an orange top, is shown in profile, eating a burger with her eyes closed. The smartwatch on the right displays a colorful data chart with a line graph and bar elements. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

Intuition NOT NECESSARILY Science

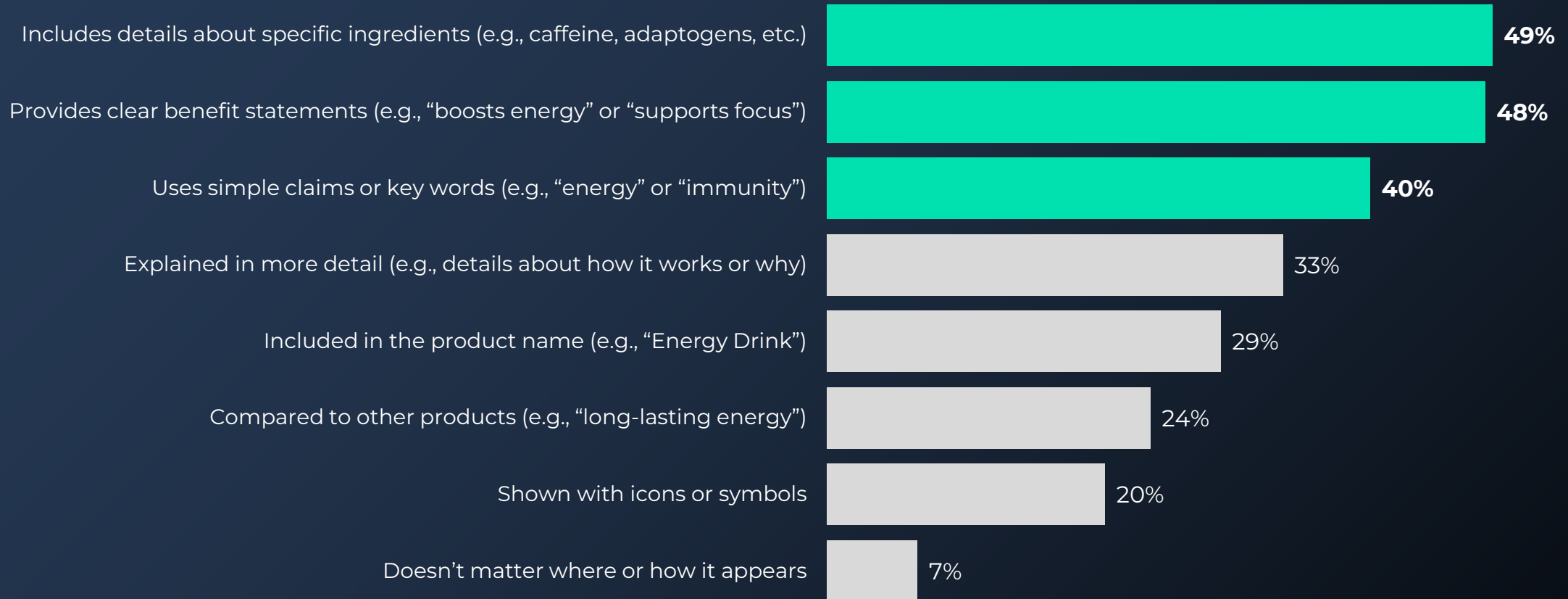
Protein, Fiber & Function Lead the Wishlist

Consumers show strong appetite for health-forward F&B products, like items that are packed with protein, fiber, and functional benefits.



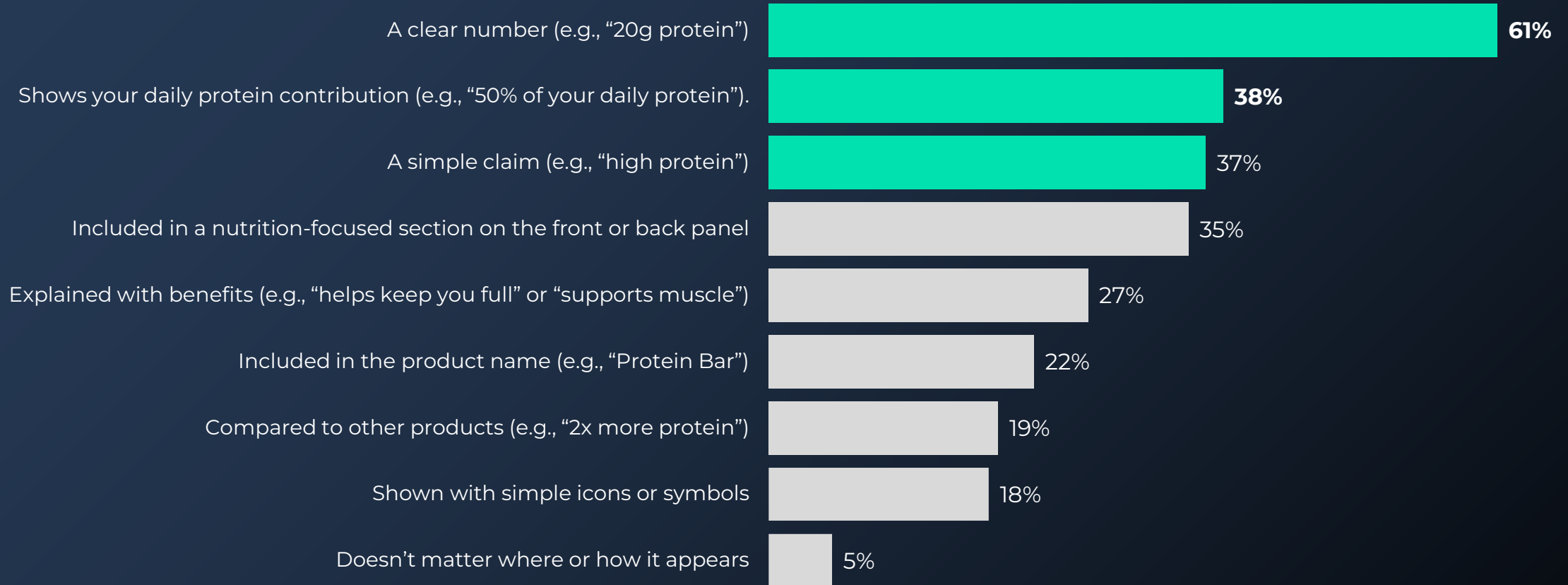
Functional Claims Are Most Effective When Specific

Consumers prefer ingredient details and direct benefit statements over vague buzzwords or icons — specificity builds credibility.



How Protein Should Be Communicated

A specific number is the most preferred format for communicating protein content on-pack, but overall, simplicity is best.



How Fiber Should Be Communicated

A specific number is also the most preferred format for communicating fiber content on-pack, but overall, simplicity is best.

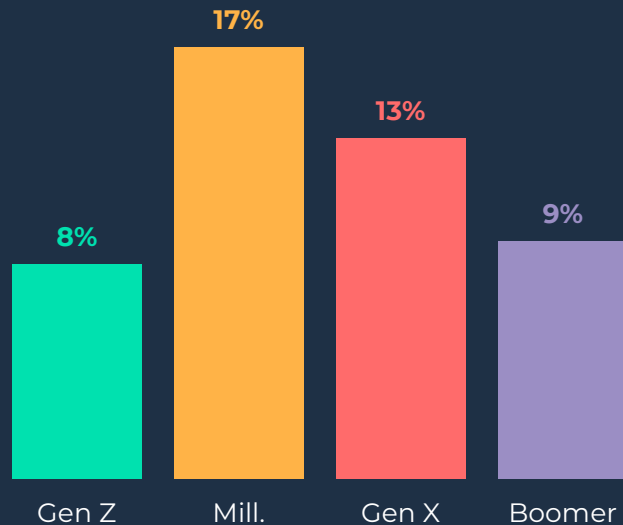


GLP-1 Users Are Changing How They Shop

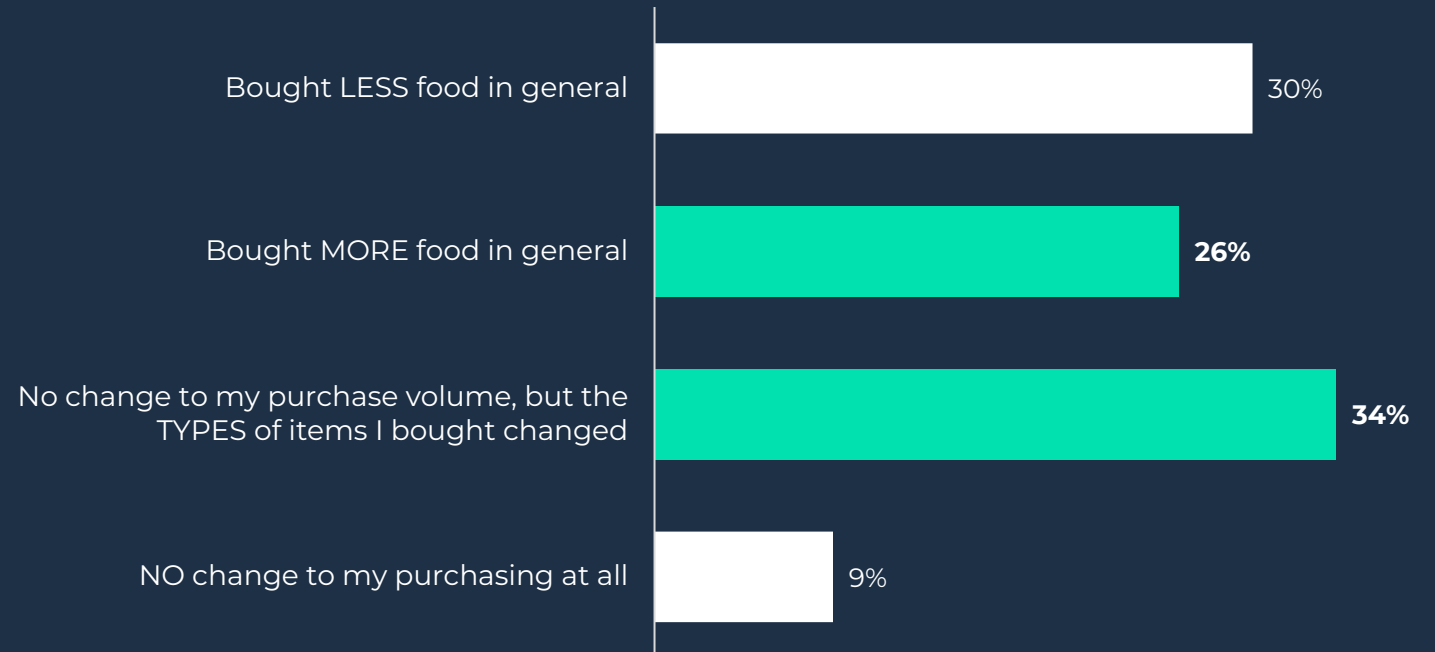
GLP-1 adoption is already reshaping food purchase behavior — with most users buying differently, not just less.

“I am currently using GLP-1s.”

12%



How have GLP-1s changed how consumers purchase food?



33%

of consumers are interested
in special dishes or menus
from foodservice designed
for GLP-1 users.

32%

of consumers are
interested retail products
designed for GLP-1 users.



What GLP-1 Users Need From Food & Beverage

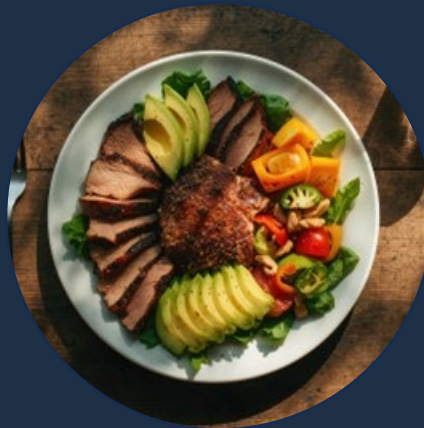
GLP-1 users have distinct needs that packaging and foodservice have room to fulfill.

Smaller Portions



GLP-1 users eat less. Packaging that offers portion-appropriate sizes or clear serving information becomes more relevant.

Protein Density



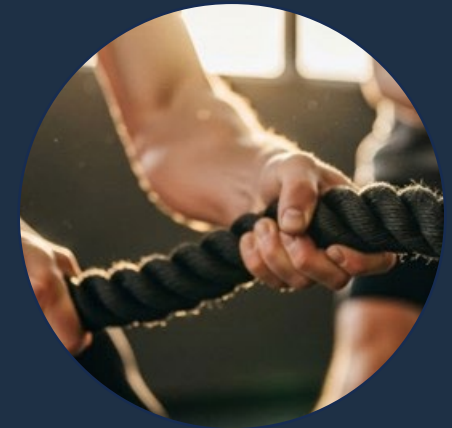
Users prioritize protein per calorie. Visible, front-of-pack protein claims become a powerful purchase trigger.

Ingredient Transparency



This consumer reads labels intently. Clean, simple ingredient communication builds trust.

Functional Benefit Clarity



'Supports satiety' and similar claims directly address GLP-1 user goals. This is emerging white space.

04

Beyond Logic: The Emotional Turn

Where delight, discovery, and
vibe take the lead.



IN THE PAST WEEK...

68%

of Gen Z consumers **had a drink/snack/dessert just to brighten their day.**

49%

of Gen Z consumers **made a spontaneous stop at a café or drive-thru just for a treat.**

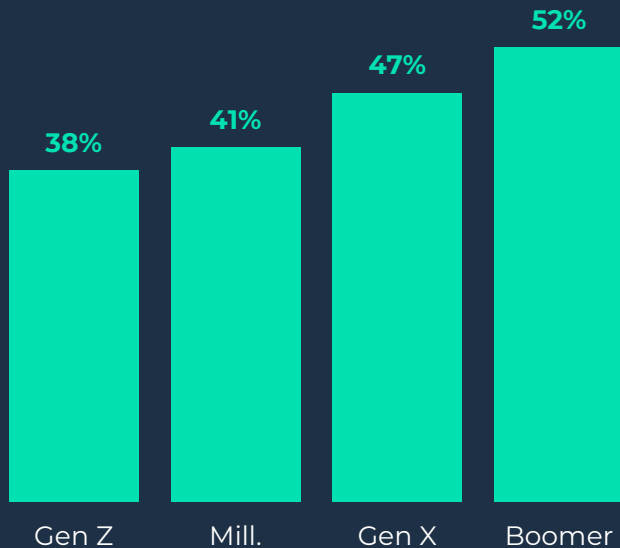


Logic vs. Vibe: How Consumers Actually Decide

Most consumers skew logic-led, but emotional and vibe-driven purchasing is a growing force especially among younger generations.

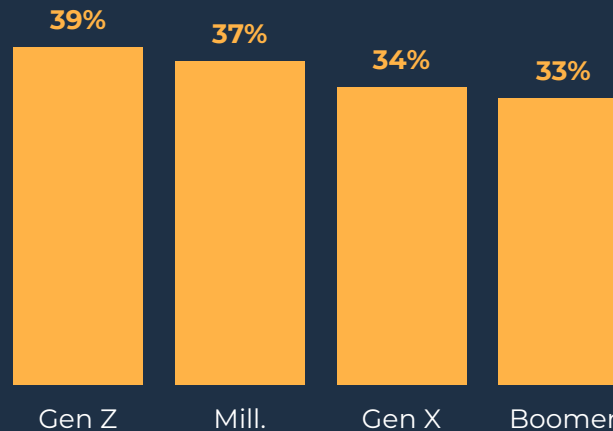
“I’m more likely to choose products based on logic and function.”

45%



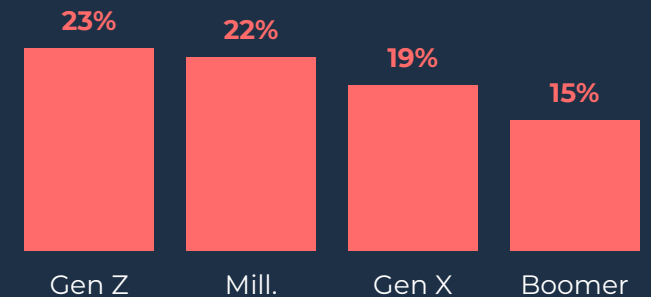
“I’m equally likely to choose products based on logic or vibe.”

36%



“I’m more likely to choose products based on feel and vibe.”

20%

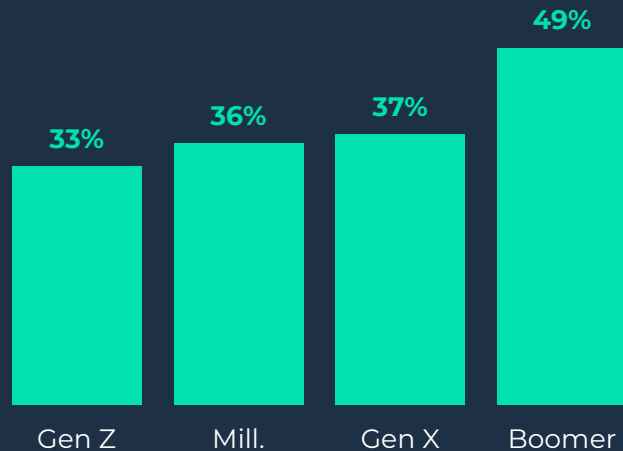


Simple or Bold? Most Consumers Say It Depends

Context drives preference, and there's clearly still room for bold and creative choices when it comes to product or packaging design.

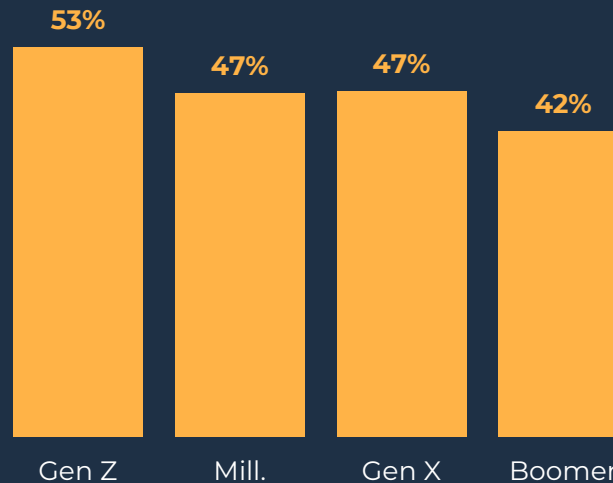
"I'm more likely to purchase foods or beverages with simple, clean, and minimal packaging design."

39%



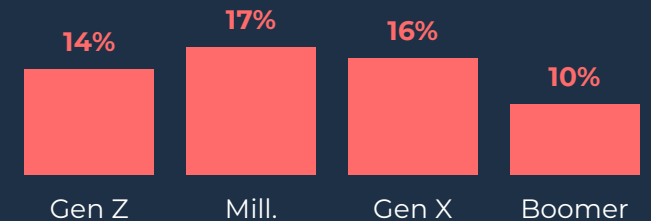
"I'm equally likely to purchase foods and beverages with minimal or bold / creative packaging design."

47%



"I'm more likely to purchase foods and beverages with bold, colorful, and creative packaging design."

15%



A group of diverse young adults are gathered around a table outdoors, smiling and toasting with beer. The scene is bright and festive, with greenery in the background. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent dark rectangle in the center of the image.

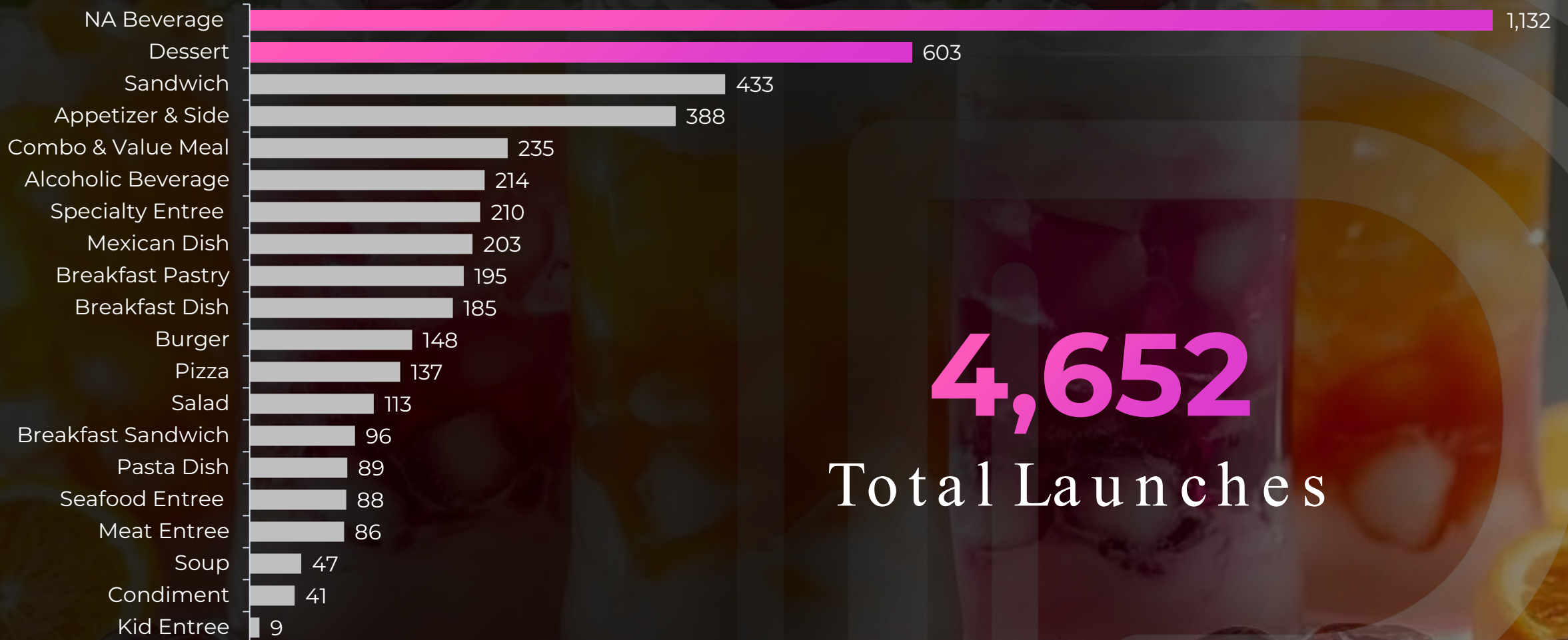
**Consumers – Especially Younger
Generations – Still Crave
Creativity and Excitement**



Menu and Flavor Trends Tell The Same Story.

Top Restaurant Launches by Category

ROLLING 12 MONTHS



4,652
Total Launches

TRENDING ITEMS & FLAVORS

In-Your-Face Bold Flavors



Hot Honey

+246% 4-year menu growth



Chili Crisp

+760% 4-year menu growth



Nashville Hot

+77% 4-year menu growth

TRENDING ITEMS & FLAVORS

New Global Discovery



Keralan Cuisine

39% consumer interest



Salsa Macha

+200% 4-year menu growth



Suya Spice

+79% predicted 4-year growth

TRENDING ITEMS & FLAVORS

Indulgence & Sweet Flavors



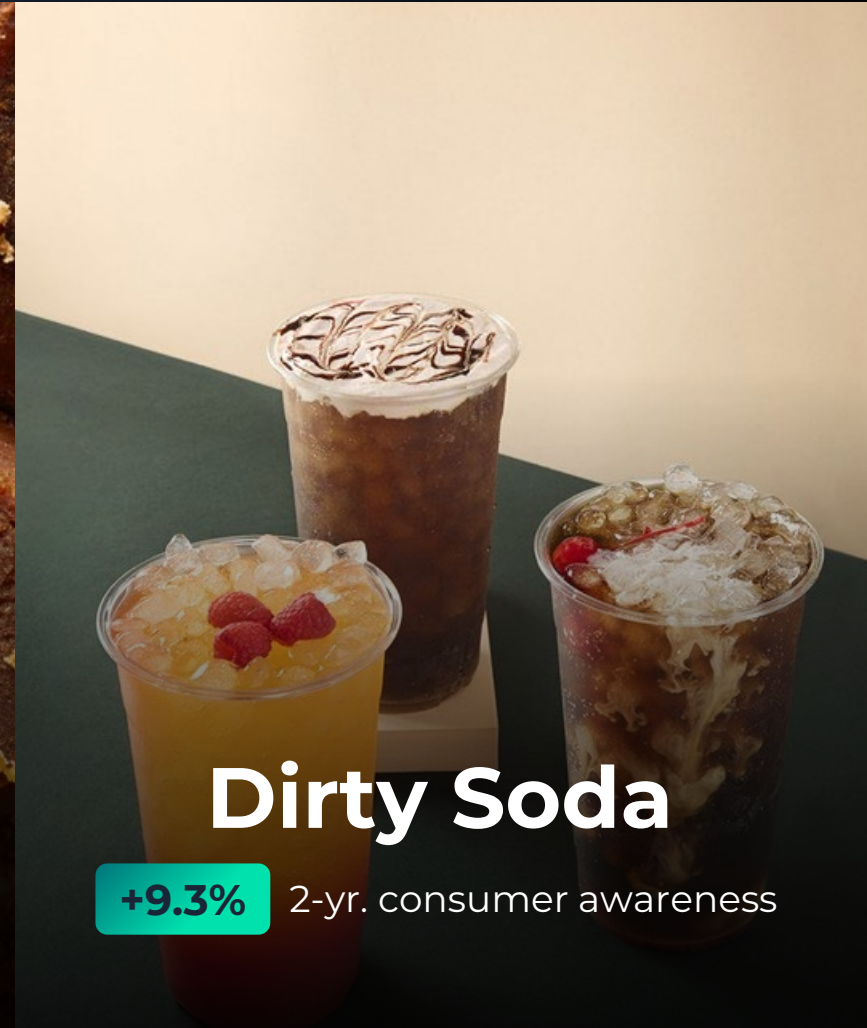
Ube

+196% 4-year menu growth



Piloncillo

49% consumer interest



Dirty Soda

+9.3% 2-yr. consumer awareness

TRENDING ITEMS & FLAVORS

Texture in Foods & Beverages



Dubai Chocolate

67% consumers love/like this



Cold Foam

+128% 12-mo. menu growth



Popping Boba

+67% 12-mo. menu growth

TRENDING ITEMS & FLAVORS

Old Is New Again



Sticky Toffee

+44% 4-year menu growth on dessert menus



Walking Taco

+4.8% 2-yr. consumer awareness



Baked Alaska

+228% 4-year menu growth on dessert menus

IN THE PAST MONTH...

24%

of consumers **tried a new restaurant, café, or menu item because it was trending or looked good on social media.**

23%

of consumers **purchased a new type or brand of food and beverage at a retail store after seeing it on social media.**

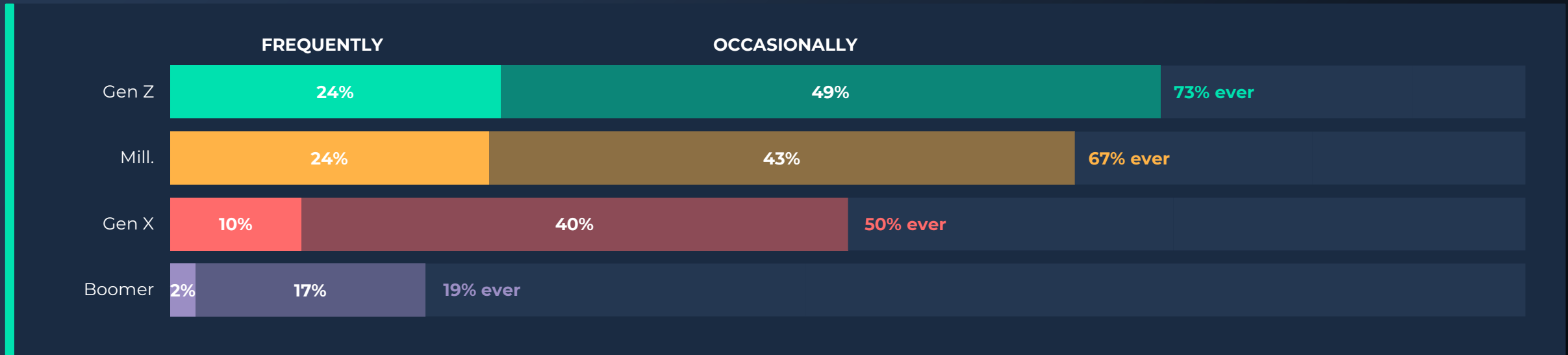


Packaging Is Now a Content Piece

Social media has transformed packaging from a container into a discovery mechanism — one that drives actual purchase.

53%

of consumers have purchased a food or beverage product at least once because they saw the packaging on social media

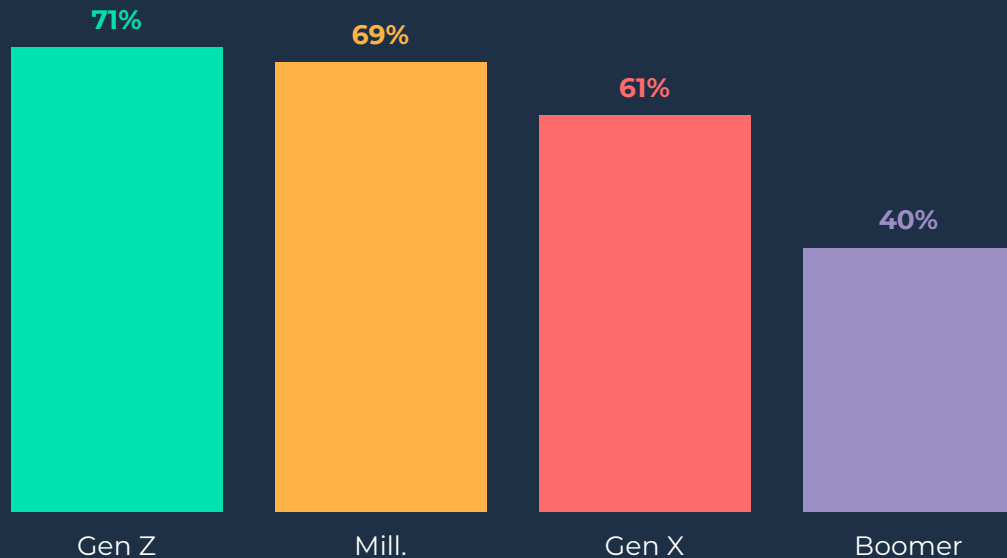


Consumers Are Ready for Bold, Creative Packaging

Strong majorities say they enjoy when brands get creative or launch special limited-time packaging — signaling a genuine appetite for design that surprises, delights, and earns a second look.

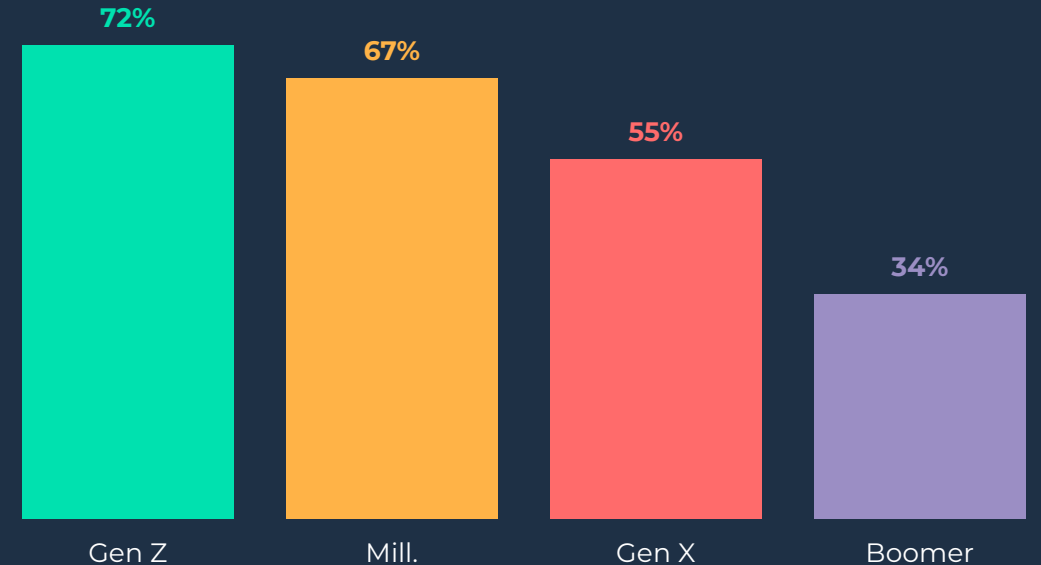
"I like when restaurants use special or limited-time packaging different seasons, holidays, or promotions."

Total: 60%



"I like when restaurants get creative and switch up their packaging."

Total: 57%





05 Final Takeaways

01 Treat culture is a spending floor

Consumers are value-pressured on big purchases but won't cut small daily joys. The emotional charge behind a "little treat" is real — packaging that mirrors that feeling wins at shelf.

02 Specificity signals credibility

"20g protein" beats "high protein." Ingredient transparency and concrete numbers give consumers the logic they need to justify the emotional buy.

03 Trust gaps favor indie brands

Small and local brands hold a significant trust advantage. Large CPG can close this gap through packaging transparency, honest claims, and authenticity signals.

04 GLP-1s are reshaping retail formats

GLP-1 users buy differently, not just less. Smaller formats, portion control cues, and satiety-forward communication will become table stakes within 3–5 years.

05 Bold design earns the emotional sale

Most consumers still lead with logic — but delight, novelty, and vibe are growing forces, especially among Gen Z and Millennials. Creative packaging that surprises and excites doesn't just get noticed, it gets shared.

06 The viral packaging moment is a real growth strategy

From Starbucks bearista cups to Dunkin coffee buckets, expressive packaging drives cultural buzz and repeat purchase. Brands that treat packaging as emotional media — not just a container — will capture the next wave of consumer enthusiasm.

DATASSENTIAL ONE

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Insights that drive action. Outcomes that drive revenue.

AI-accelerated intelligence built to fuel clarity and confidence for actionable food & beverage decisions. Powered by Datassential One.

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Personalize and validate your innovation strategy

CHAIN BENCHMARKING

Monitor competitors and compare pricing

SALES INTELLIGENCE

Target high-potential opportunities and boost your conversion rate



WHAT FOODIES ARE SAYING		
TOP CONVERSATION THEMES		
1.	Comforting and Flavorful Shrimp Dinner Recipes	15,420
2.	Soft Lemon and Berry Summer Cookies	14,256
3.	Creamy Vegetarian Comfort Dinners with Freshness	13,986
4.	Affordable Southeast Asian Street Food Pricing	12,072
5.	Easy No-Bake Creamy Fruit Cheesecakes	11,893

Ask a question in any food, flavor, or beverage to get started.

What snacks are more popular with Costco shoppers? What are the most polarizing vegetables? What are the most loved non-alcoholic beverages among Fast Casual visitors?

What are the most loved pizza varieties in the US? [Ask Search](#)

What desserts do foodies love most?

Do consumers like pickles more once they try them?

Is consumer affinity for gochujang growing, and with which...?

Which pizza varieties appeal most among convenience store users?

DIPPING SAUCES

- Inception
- Adoption
- Proliferation
- Ubiquity

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