

Discerning consumers shape food culture trends in 2023

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(Image credit: Pexels)

Culture is always shifting, evolving toward our society's greatest aspirations. Once largely an aspiration, health and wellness culture is now mainstream in the United States with nearly all consumers engaged in some activity to increase their longevity and improve their quality of life. As aspiration has morphed into our lived reality consumers have become more informed and discerning.

Especially in times of economic strain, consumers are inclined to do their due diligence to determine which health and wellness products are really worth their price. Discerning consumers expect companies to deliver products with great tastes and textures, nutrient density, clean labels, and ethical *and* sustainable ingredient sourcing and production practices. This is a high bar for food and beverage companies to achieve, and yet, it is essential to maintaining relevancy in today's food culture. Another key to preserving relevancy is to stay abreast of the trends that will help shape future demand.

Trends tracking and cultural curiosity keep Hartman Group consultants at the leading edge of the food and beverage industry. Three macro trends have captured our attention for 2023: purposeful procurement, innovative experiences, and the culture of wellness.

First, consider purposeful procurement in which the trio of quality, wellness and sustainability are driving innovation. More specifically, discerning consumers are looking to food and beverage companies to solve problems like the pervasiveness of microplastics.

Second, food and beverage companies should be concerned about innovative experiences. In this trend, disruptive retailers are incubators of new and emerging brands as we are entering the era of hyper-curation.

Finally, within the culture of wellness trend, we see the urge to democratize wellness via the creation of wellness products and services that are inclusive of all consumers regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, education or income.

Diving deeper into purposeful procurement, discerning consumers aspire for their purchases to align with their values but are all too often challenged by barriers such as price and accessibility. In an increasingly competitive environment where consumers are no longer forced to make trade-offs, we see values-based shopping transitioning away from compromise and toward commendable quality. Here products meet both the consumer's quality standards *and* their expectations for ethics and sustainability.

At the heart of innovative experiences, we witness the evolution of food trends becoming inextricably tied to the influence of social media. Viral recipe videos from innovative creators are enabling broader consumer access while bending food traditions and challenging ideas about who gets to decide what is authentic. Social media trend cycles are quickening, and the rise of the creator economy is fostering a surge of microtrends surfacing at a dizzying pace. Evaluating microtrends' relevance in consumer culture can reveal how your brand can engage with the creator economy and benefit in the short or long term.

In modern wellness culture, we see that American consumers are collectively stressed out and endlessly busy. Post-pandemic and inflation-weary, mental and physical resilience is still top of mind for discerning consumers. Nourishing nervines and adaptogens can support and restore the nervous system, but many of the products available in today's marketplace lack herbal expertise, reducing product effectiveness and consumer confidence.

Tracking and dissecting these macro trends is but one path toward winning in the 2023 marketplace and beyond. There are many more trends and routes to growth, but we hope by sharing these observations we have assisted with relevancy maintenance and creating greater empathy for today's discerning consumer.

As CEO of The Hartman Group, Demeritt drives the vision, strategy, operations and results-oriented culture for the company's associates as The Hartman Group furthers its offerings of tactical thinking, consumer and market intelligence, cultural competency and innovative intellectual capital to a global marketplace.

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