

Study: Young Adults Are Enthusiastic About Returning to In-Restaurant Dining

These consumers crave connection, customized options and culinary adventures.

CHICAGO — With most pandemic-related restrictions in the rearview mirror, young adults are craving the personal connections and culinary adventures that come from dining out.

According to new research from Y-Pulse, the health crisis drove many innovations in take-out and delivery that consumers aged 18-34 embrace; however, they are enthusiastic about returning to in-restaurant dining experiences.

“Even though many of the young adults we surveyed reported learning new cooking skills and techniques during the pandemic that they enjoyed, they are enthusiastic about having the freedom to enjoy the personal connections and experiences of in-restaurant dining that they have missed for more than a year,” said Sharon Olson, executive director of Chicago-based Y-Pulse. “The challenge for restaurateurs is managing the surge in demand with the challenges of fluctuating public safety guidelines and employee hesitance about returning to work.”

The Y-Pulse research found three key factors characterize the expectations of young adult consumers fueling their desire for a new normal that includes an enthusiastic return to in-restaurant dining:

1. Craving Connection

Foodservice venues have become a home away from home for many young adults, and during the pandemic these



consumers were keenly aware of their loss of this important way to connect with their friends Y-Pulse said. Although this tech-savvy generation became adept at virtual connections on social media platforms, only 44 percent said they enjoyed sharing virtual meals as much as dining out.

Even with transformative changes in touchscreen and kiosk-ordering, only 36 percent of young consumers say they prefer ordering this way. Eighty-eight percent agreed that they prefer ordering from a real person when in a restaurant.

2. Customized, On-Demand Choices

Young adults have been known to be among the most demanding of customers in terms of expecting customized options readily available to them at their convenience, yet their expectations were radically adjusted in the past year, according to Y-Pulse. Seventy-nine percent agreed that they have a greater appreciation of all of the restaurant experienc-

es they used to take for granted. Yet, as life opens up they are ready to chart the course for a new normal that meets higher expectations. Sixty percent said they were tired of restaurants that have pared down their menus and offer only a limited variety of items.

3. Culinary Adventure is on The Menu

Even though comfort and familiarity were staples on the pandemic menu for these young adults, they are ready for some culinary adventure. The research found that 81 percent like to try new dishes and flavors at restaurants. Indulgence is also part of the plan with 72 percent agreeing that a little bit of indulgence will become part of their regular routine. Nearly

three-quarters of young adult consumers said that eating food they feel good about is more important to their wellness than watching their weight.

Y-Pulse is a division of Olson Communications. It began surveying Gen Z and millennial consumers nationwide in summer 2020 to gain a better understanding of the dining expectation, attitudes and tendencies of pandemic-era consumers. More than 1,500 young consumers have been surveyed. The research cited in the latest report focuses on the most recent wave of the study released in 2021 that included a nationwide sample of more than 700 young adult consumers ages 18-34.