

Food & Bev Trends



17th Annual

MCK

Agenda



01

Philosophy of Food Trends

02

Trend Evolution

03

Macro Trend

04

The Trends

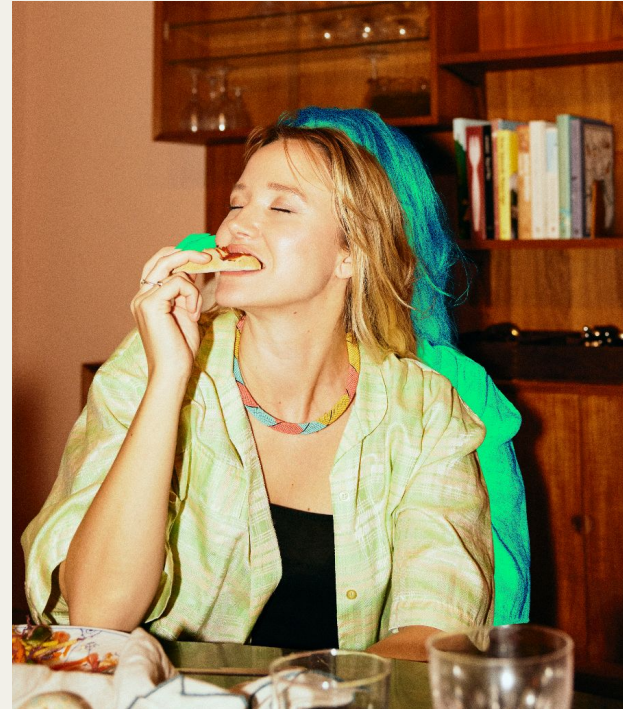
Philosophy of Food Trends

When it comes to food, well, we're obsessed.

We plan our days around it, scroll for it, splurge on it, and document every bite. And in times of economic stress, that obsession only deepens. Food becomes more than just sustenance, it's a measure of stability, comfort, and joy.

Everything from the price of eggs to chain restaurant foot traffic to frozen pizza sales has been used as an indicator of consumer confidence that sends the stock market soaring (or stumbling) in quick succession.

But even though many people are being forced to eat at home or split their grocery bill into multiple payments, many of us would still rather lose a night's sleep than miss out on our favorite meals.



Need more proof of our food obsession?

R&B/HIP-HOP 1/5/2026

MEGAN THEE STALLION OPENS HER FIRST FRANCHISE RESTAURANT: 'I'M SO EXCITED, SO PROUD'



IMAGE SOURCE: INSTAGRAM, FACEBOOK

Wendy's U.S. President Joins McDonald's, Burger King Viral Burger Wars by Making and Inhaling a Baconator on Camera

Pinterest Predicts 2026

CABBAGE CRUSH

Watch a Sneak Peek: 'Chopped Castaways' Comes to Food Network

Stranded chefs battle each other and the elements in our new series "Chopped Castaways."

NEWS | FOOD NEWS

**2026 Food Trends:
High Quality Protein
and Analog Dining**



MCK

Real trends reflect deeper cultural relevance — they explain the “why” beyond what ingredients are “in” or “out.”



The "why" is crucial because our plate mirrors the nation's mood.
What people seek in life, they also **crave in food.**





As our collective moods and desires shift, **trends can evolve over time in various ways.**

Trend Evolution



How trends evolve

01

They are connected with and/or are outgrowths of each other.

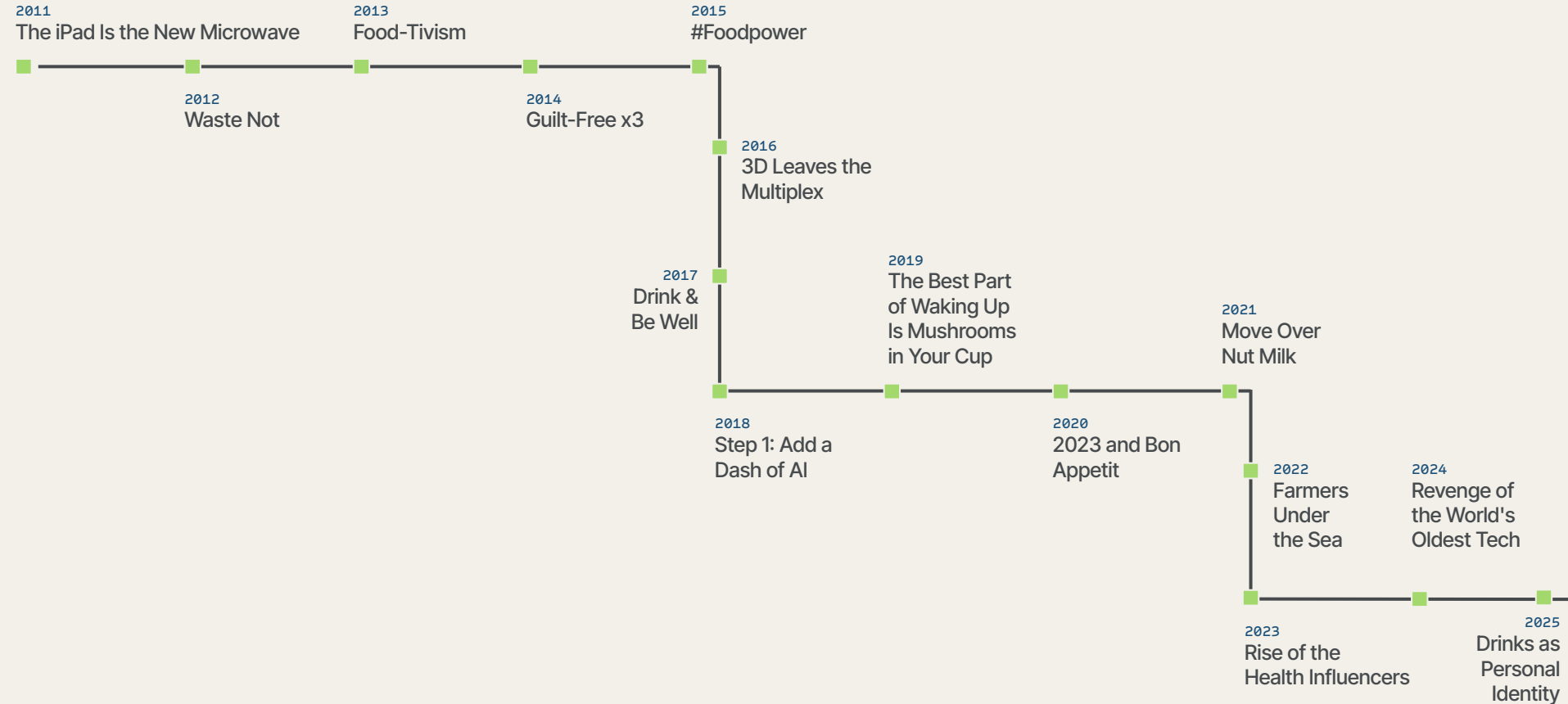
02

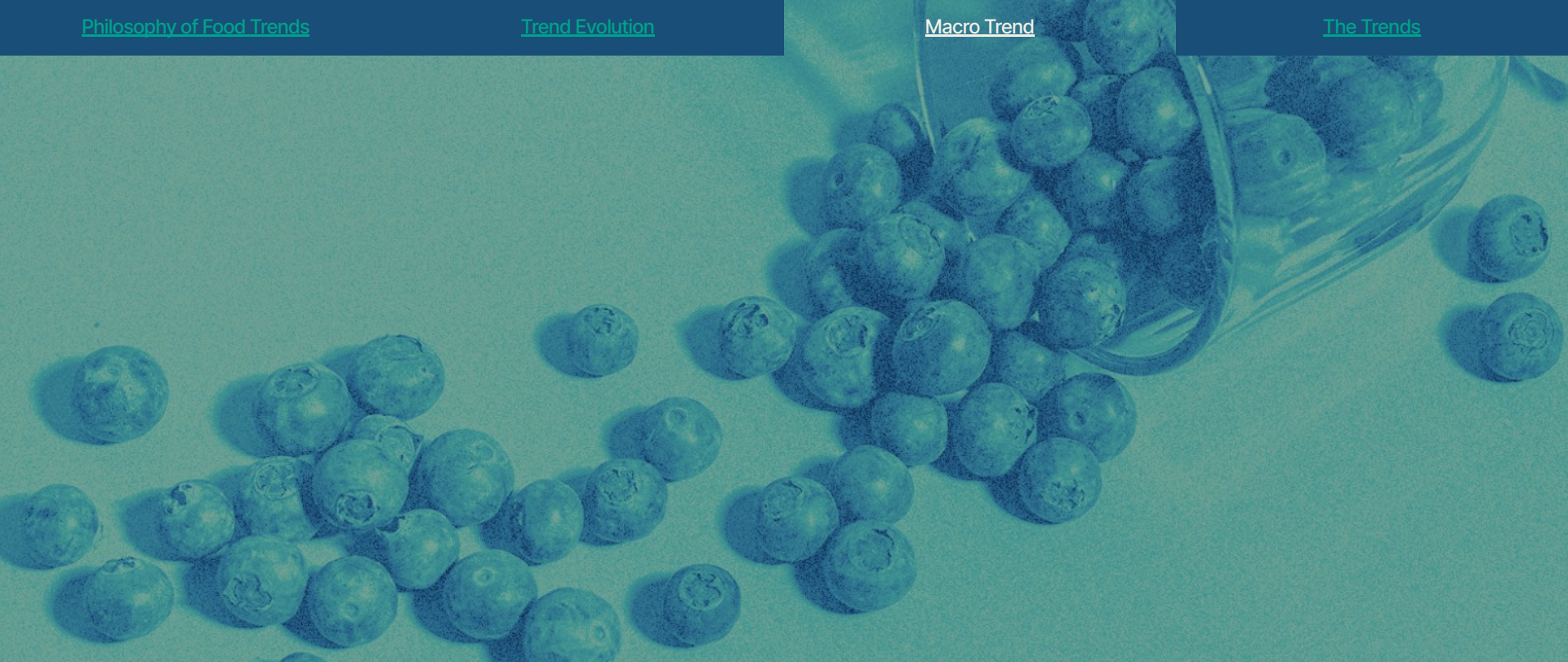
They plateau and become mainstream, morphing from trend to norm.

03

As trends get more attention, they naturally draw opposing thoughts, which can take hold and create their own counter-trends.

Trends we saw coming



A glass bowl filled with fresh blueberries is tipped, spilling the fruit onto a light blue, textured surface. The blueberries are vibrant and appear to have a natural bloom. The scene is lit from the side, creating soft shadows.

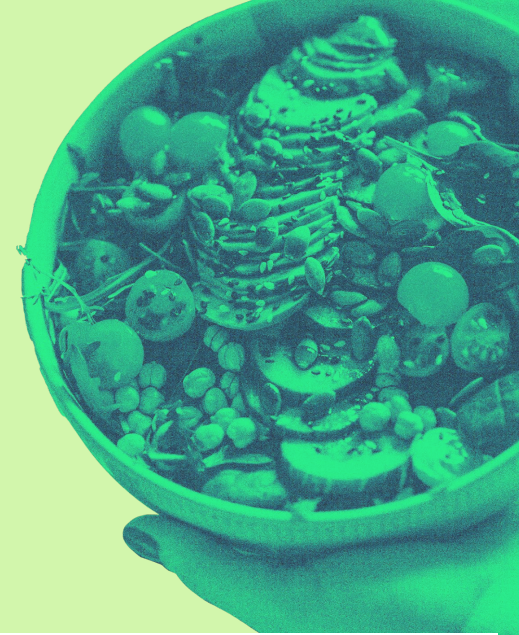
Macro Trend

The background is a solid teal color with a subtle, darker teal pattern of leaves and branches, creating a textured, organic feel.

**Micro trends reflect
macro shifts —**
they reveal the deeper **cultural forces**
shaping what we crave and why.

For the past several years,

Chaos has been dominating macro-force.



America's trade chaos is just beginning

Tariff wrangling will stretch through the rest of Donald Trump's term, and beyond

AI's Impacts on Society: A Look into the Crystal Ball

First Patient With Wuhan Coronavirus Is Identified in the U.S.

The Failure of Silicon Valley Bank and the Panic of 2023

Andrew Metrick

How to handle Will Smith's slap is just one of many crises facing academy after Oscars

Some gave in to the chaos, others actually delayed milestones.



LOVE & RELATIONSHIPS

How We Fell Out of Love With Marriage

WELLBEING

Scroll, Eat, Repeat: It's The Age Of Doom Eating – Here's How To Break The Cycle

But after years of
dealing with chaos,
people aren't
waiting for stability
anymore, **they're
starting to take
back control.**



People are trying to **be intentional** and **control the noise.**



The unstoppable rise of digital detox retreats

Life & Culture / Feature

Is 2026 the year of analogue?

Videos extolling the virtues of 'going analogue' are going viral on TikTok. Is this just another fad — or the start of a generational movement?

Dressing Up for Work Is a Thing Again—Why Corporate Girls Are 2025's Most Influential Outfit Inspo

I Bricked My Phone for 2 Weeks. My Brain Feels Much Better.

Joy — not just fatigue — will shape news habits in 2026

"For some people, there is real pleasure in checking out of the news."

And are finding ways to **get life moving again.**



South Korean birth rates have been rising for 17 consecutive months.

GEN Z:

+10% **+12%** **-20%**

Feels in control of their future

Setting lots of goals

Job churn

SOURCE: MORNING CONSULT, CNN

From Goblin Mode to **Pilot Mode**

After years of pure chaos at a macro level—AI, a new administration, tariffs, GLP-1s, inflation—people are starting to have a sense of stability again. Okay, stability might be a stretch, but instead of being resigned to the chaos, people are starting to take matters into their own hands where they can. It's a pivot from "everything is a dumpster fire" to "I can't fix the world but I can fix my breakfast." The shift is real, and it's affecting everything from lifestyles, to social media habits, to food choices.

After years of vibes, prayers, and doom scrolling, we're shifting from goblin mode to reclaiming the pilot seat. We're a little more optimistic, a little more dialed in, and looking for ways to optimize.

So get in, loser, we're going pilot mode!

Goblin mode

noun [U] informal

us /'gɑː.blɪn,mʊd/; **uk** /'gɒb.lɪn,məʊd/

the behavior of someone who wants to feel comfortable and do and eat whatever they want, not caring about trying to be clean, healthy, or attractive, or about pleasing or impressing other people.

Pilot mode

noun [U] informal

us /'paɪ.lət,mʊd/; **uk** /'paɪ.lət,məʊd/

the behavior of someone who is trying to take more control of their daily choices, focusing on small, actionable ways to improve their life despite the dumpster fire—prioritizing routines, health, and incremental optimization.

The Trends

01

Locked in
Over Wired

02

Dinner for Two?

03

Served
Up Steamy

04

Squeaky
Clean Celebs

05

GLP-1
Butterfly Effect

06

This Is Your
Brain on Food

07

Food Is
Literally a Luxury

08

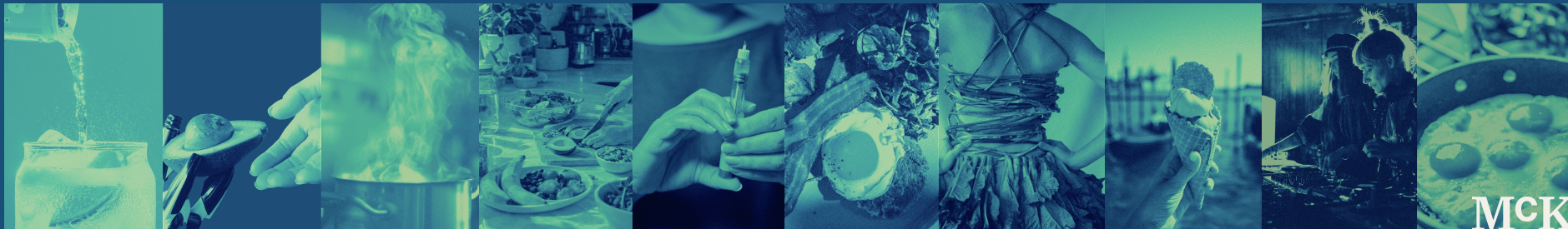
No Plane?
No Problem

09

Sober Curious
to Sober Partying

10

Protein
Personalities



Locked in **Over Wired**



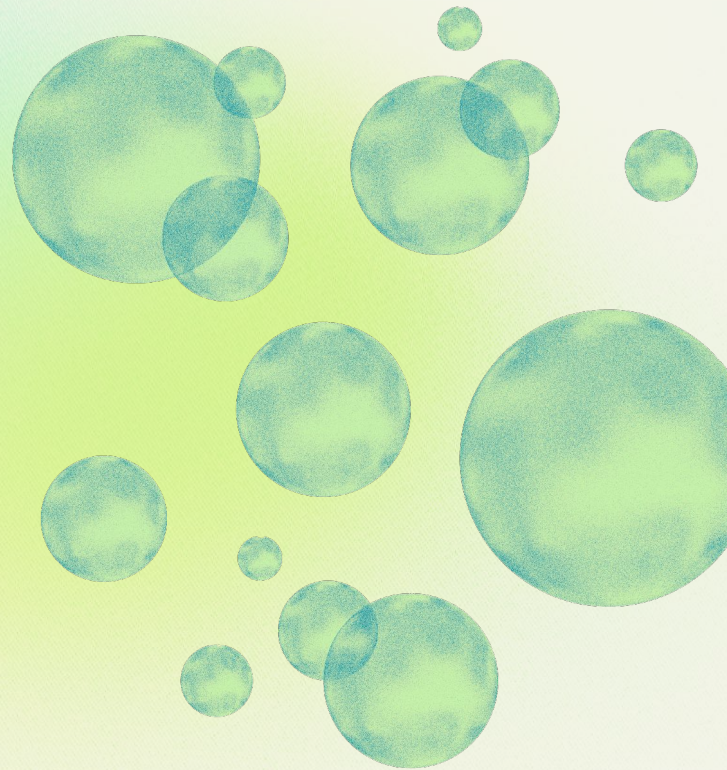
IMAGE SOURCE: GETTY

MCK

CULTURAL SPARK:

55% of Gen Z
and Millennials
use **beverages**
as part of their
personality.

SOURCE: CONSUMER-TRENDS-2026-FOOD-BEVERAGE





This year, people aren't **chasing energy spikes;**

they're going to be using energy to lean into a sense of calm, long-term clarity, and emotional balance. The goal isn't about "hype" anymore; it's all about being "high-functioning."

What we're seeing



NICOTINE ENERGY DRINKS

-FOCUSED

Nic and Jet Fuel has launched a line of nicotine-infused energy drinks as an alternative to traditional caffeine-based beverages. Sugar-free and marketed as “clean fuel,” these drinks **aim to deliver sustained focus without the crash** of conventional energy drinks.



MONSTER CREATES FEMALE-FOCUSED DRINK

FLRT, set to make its debut in early 2026, is sugar free and includes **functional ingredients supporting skin and hair health**. The brand will launch with four initial flavors: strawberry fling, guava lava, berry tempting, and sunset squeeze.



ADRAFÜL WANTS TO EXTEND ENERGY

Founded by UT dropout Sebastian Campos, the company has introduced a line of energy beverages that **combine caffeine with adrafinil**, a stimulant medication designed to **promote wakefulness**.



NEUTONIC BLENDS ENERGY FOR BOOSTED FOCUS

The rise of nootropic-infused beverages offers a **refreshing alternative to traditional energy solutions**, focusing on cognitive enhancement without the usual energy crash.

Table for Two?



IMAGE SOURCE: GETTY

MCK

CULTURAL SPARK:

26% of Gen Z
have had a
**romantic
or intimate
interaction
with AI.**

SOURCE: TECH RADAR





AI is starting to become **more prominent in the social world of food,**

moving beyond its role as a behind-the-scenes tool and into the realm of experience and companionship. It's no longer just about recipe suggestions or calorie tracking. AI is shaping how we choose, enjoy, and even socialize around meals.

What we're seeing



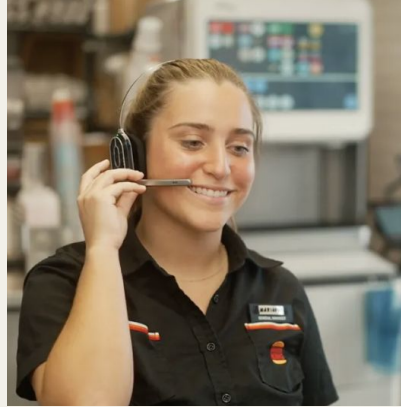
THE AI CHEF THAT'S REDEFINING DINING

Dubai's newest hotspot, Woohoo, is a futuristic restaurant powered by an AI chef named Aiman, who **generates innovative recipes by analyzing thousands of dishes**, flavor pairings, and food science principles.



AI COMPANION DINNER DATES

A wine bar in Hell's Kitchen was transformed into what organizers are calling the world's first AI dating/companion café. **Patrons were invited to bring their devices and go on a "date" with their AI chatbot companions** in a real-world setting, complete with tables, food, and a cozy atmosphere.



MEET PATTY, THE NEW AI EMPLOYEE AT BURGER KING

Burger King introduced an **AI-powered voice assistant named "Patty" into employee headsets** at 500 U.S. locations, with plans for a wider rollout. Powered by OpenAI, Patty acts as a "manners coach" monitoring for politeness ("please," "thank you"), assists with kitchen tasks, and manages inventory to improve speed and service.



ROBOT DINNER THEATER

The world's first robot-themed restaurant in Beijing E-Town offers an immersive "robot dinner theater" experience featuring **AI-driven service, a five-piece robot band, and robotic bartenders**. Located in the E-Town robot mall, it combines dining with AI performances, including robot stand-up comedy and automated food prep.

Served Up Steamy

IMAGE SOURCE: GETTY

MCK

CULTURAL SPARK:

Shows like Heated Rivalry, Euphoria, and The Beauty are **pushing the boundaries of what is being shown and what people are wanting to see.**



IMAGE SOURCE: NPR, FANDOM WIRE, FX NETWORKS

MCK



Food brands are leaning into that **vibe inviting flirtatious interactions with consumers.**

Food brands intentionally want to own a provocative edge to stand out in crowded feeds, spark virality, and position themselves as part of lifestyle culture rather than just a product.

What we're seeing



DORITOS PARODIES AN ADULT FILM

The campaign centers on a 2025 short-film, "A Spicy, but Not Too Spicy Plumber", where actor Walton Goggins plays a by-the-books plumber. The ad is **full of tongue-in-cheek innuendo and comedic tension.**



SQUEEZE'S SEXUAL AWAKENING

A recent rebrand turned freeze dried fruit into a **flirty and playful snack for hot girl walkers and moms on the go**, quite literally tempting customers with its "Open for a Good Time" labeling.



BEANS THAT BOOST YOUR SEX LIFE

Tonka beans are often compared to vanilla beans, but with spicy notes. They are **used in a lot of desserts and are described as being an aphrodisiac.** Despite being banned in the U.S., the beans have showed up on menus.



A1 REBRANDS MEATLOAF AS BEEFCAKE

Steak sauce brand A1 hijacked People's "Sexiest Man Alive" issue with an integrated campaign aimed at **turning America's oldest, most boring dinner staple into a modern, sexy icon.**



HOOTERS GOES BACK TO THEIR ROOTS

The original founders of Hooters are buying back a large portion of the chain after recent bankruptcy, aiming to revive the brand. The founders argue there's a moral obligation to save the chain, describing it not just as business—but as a **cultural institution** and a "neighborhood oasis."

Squeaky Clean Celebs



IMAGE SOURCE: PINTEREST

MCK

CULTURAL SPARK:

U.S. alcohol
consumption is at a
90-year low, while
**concern around
the health impacts
of moderate
drinking surges.**

SOURCE: GALLUP



MCK



Move over, Aviation Gin and Casamigos.

Celebrities are broadening their horizons to health and wellness ventures to create new revenue streams with the goal of extending their personal brands to adapt to a more health-conscious culture.

MCK

What we're seeing



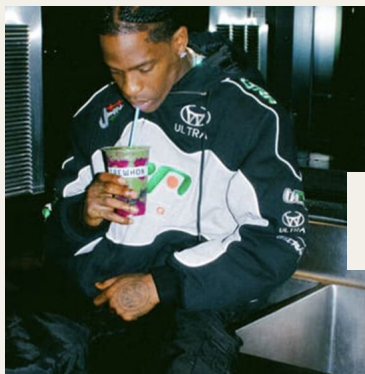
CARDI B IS BOBBIE'S CHIEF CONFIDENCE OFFICER

The partnership aims to reframe infant feeding with confidence and pride, promoting Bobbie's European-style, clean-label formulas. Bobbie isn't just selling formula. Through Cardi Bobbie, they're positioning themselves as culturally relevant.



ELLIE GOULDING'S MUSHROOM BLEND

Ellie Goulding recently co-founded a wellness brand called Everystate, launching a **mushroom supplement line**. Goulding says the idea isn't just a celebrity endorsement, it's a concept she has personally used and invested in.



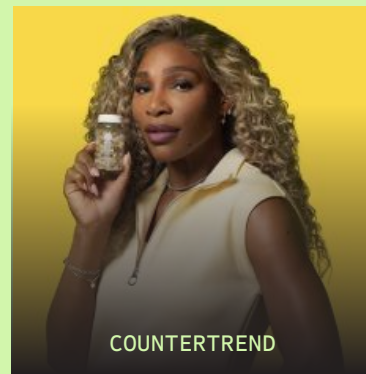
TRAVIS SCOTT'S NEW EREWTHON SHOTS & SMOOTHIES

Rapper Travis Scott teamed up with **upscale grocery chain Erewhon (under his Cactus Jack brand)** to launch **pressed-juice shots and smoothies**. These drinks come in hot-sauce-style bottles and include vitamin-rich blends.



KIM KARDASHIAN CO-FOUNDER OF UPDATE

Kim Kardashian is joining **clean-energy drink company Update** for its relaunch as a co-founder. As co-founder of Update, Kardashian is tasked with brand building, product design and consumer insight.



SERENA WILLIAMS SUPPLEMENT BACKLASH

Serena Williams is increasingly **positioning herself as a voice in health and wellness** with Ritual and Ro—endorsing products and sharing her personal routine. Yet the visibility has also sparked debate about the authenticity of celebrity influence in the space.

GLP-1 Butterfly Effect



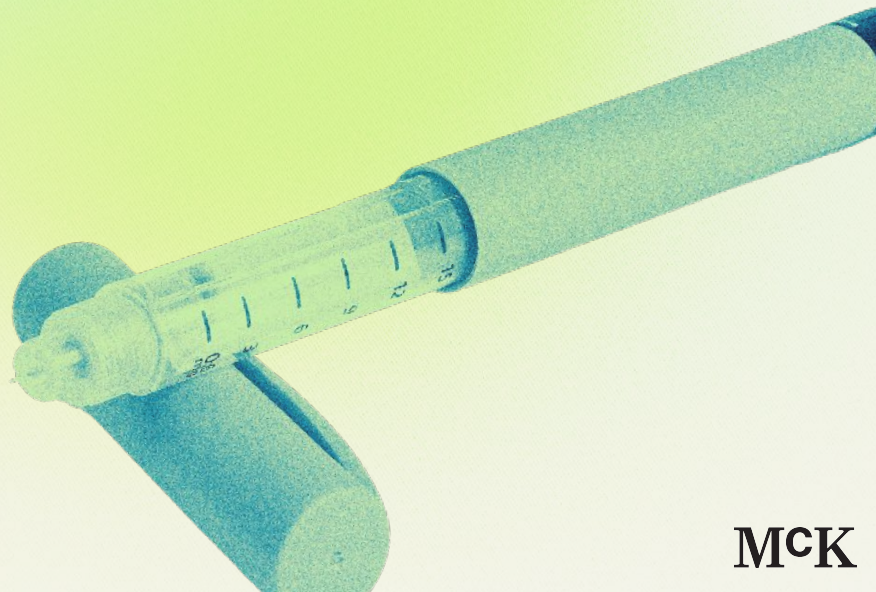
IMAGE SOURCE: GETTY

MCK

CULTURAL SPARK:

**GLP-1 users to
make up 35%
of food and
beverage sales
by 2030.**

SOURCE: CIRCANA



What we're seeing



GLP-1 FITNESS

Sesh is a 12-week fitness program built around the unique physical changes people experience on GLP-1s. The program **revolves around preserving muscle, boosting metabolism, and protecting joints.**



GOURMAND FRAGRANCES

Fragrances are a surprising category where sales are up as people take weight loss products. Data reports **perfume sales are up 23% as people seek "sensory inputs"** they no longer get from food.



COMBATING "OZEMPIC FACE"

Image Skincare is a new product explicitly formulated and **marketed to counteract skin changes associated with rapid weight loss from GLP-1s.** It blends hyaluronic acid, bakuchiol, biomimetic collagen fibers, and amino acids to help plump, firm, and hydrate.



OZEMPIC PERSONALITY MAKES FOOD AND LIFE FEEL "MEH"

Some GLP-1 users say the drugs don't just reduce appetite but also dull emotional responses, making life feel flat. By quieting the signals that drive cravings, GLP-1 drugs may also dial down some of the motivation and excitement that come from anticipating rewards.



GORDON RAMSAY REFUSES TO CHANGE HIS MENU FOR GLP-1s

"That is absolute bulls--t... There's no f---ing way we're giving in to the Mounjaro jab." He criticized the concept, saying diners are responsible for their own eating habits. "The problem is with them for eating too much in the first f---ing place."

This Is Your Brain on Food



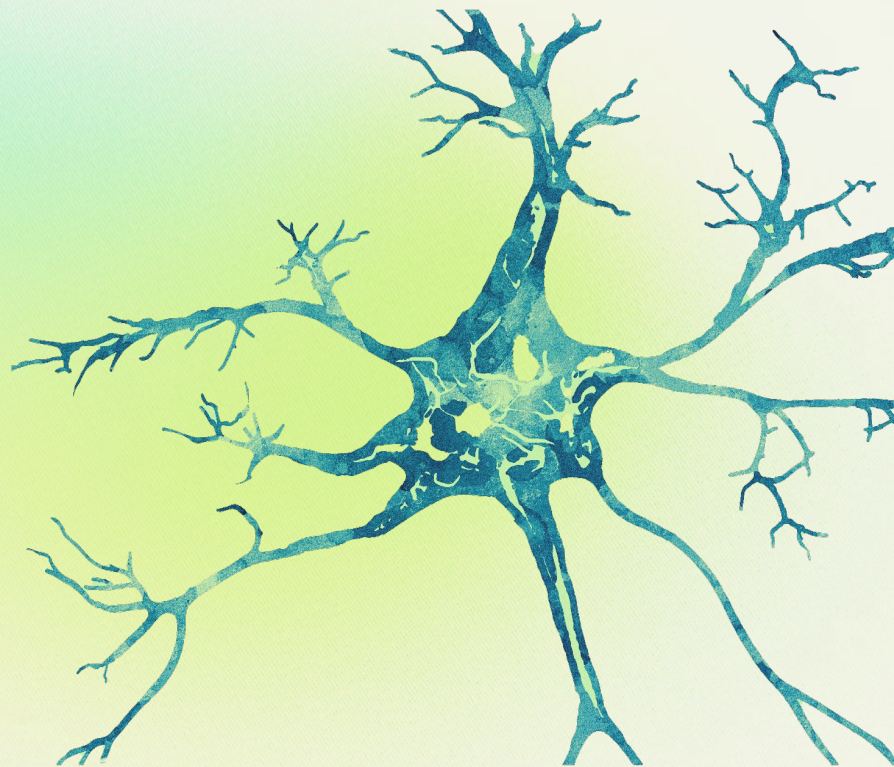
IMAGE SOURCE: GETTY

MCK

CULTURAL SPARK:

**78% of
consumers agree
food is about
multi-sensory
experiences.**

SOURCE: ADM

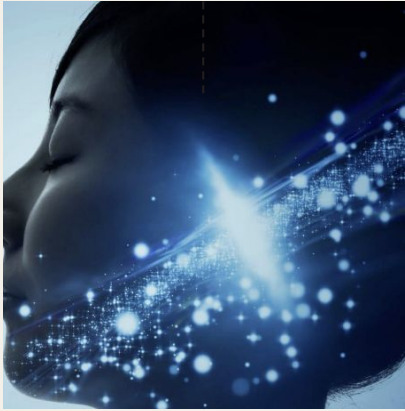




This year, we're seeing brands **go beyond** **"functional"** **foods.**

We're seeing food brands, chefs, and startups design menus, flavors, and food experiences that intentionally influence emotions using neuroscience insights.

What we're seeing



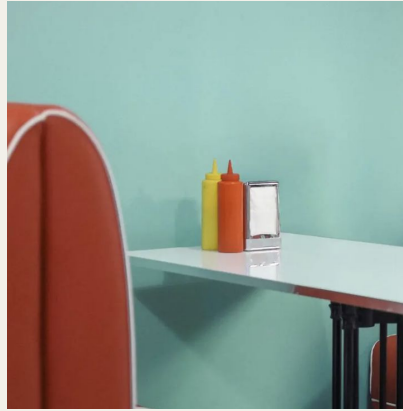
IFF'S MOOD INTELLIGENCE /BRAINEMOTIONS

A proprietary research and flavor creation platform that blends sensory psychology and flavor chemistry to **design products that evoke particular emotional and cognitive responses.**



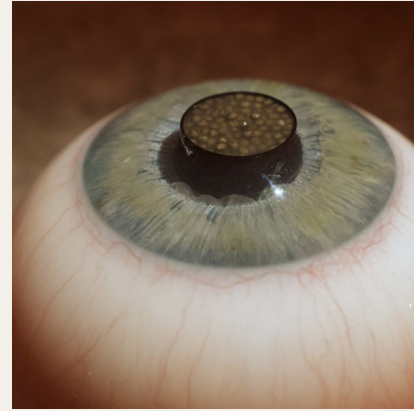
LOLLIPOP FOR YOUR BRAIN

Instead of sound traveling through the air, Lollipop Star **sends vibrations through your teeth and jaw to the inner ear, so you hear the music "inside your head."** Users bite down gently with their molars to activate it, and the experience is described as muted but memorable.



NEUROGASTRONOMY IS ENGINEERING NOSTALGIA

Some brands are trying to recreate flavors from the past by **tapping into nostalgia and the science of neurogastronomy.** This is a way for the brain to build flavor by mixing taste, smell, texture, temperature, and memory.



EDIBLE PROVOCATION: FOOD DESIGNED TO EVOKE EMOTION

Alchemist in Copenhagen is a highly theatrical, multi-hour dining experience that blends gastronomy with sensory science, narrative, and emotion. **Dishes and sequences are designed to evoke reflection, surprise, and emotional response.**

Food Is Literally a Luxury



IMAGE SOURCE: PBS

MCK

CULTURAL SPARK:

78% of
Americans now
consider **fast
food a luxury
purchase** due
to rising prices.

SOURCE: NCA



MCK



Last year, we saw brands and consumers talk about **food as a luxury.**

But now brands are intentionally committing to this by putting food in the spotlight in an elevated and exciting way.

What we're seeing



CHICKEN FINGERS ON THE RUNWAY

Raising Cane's opened New York Fashion Week with a runway show featuring "chicken-finger-inspired" couture designed by Joe Ando-Hirsh. The event **blended fashion and food, drawing an audience of athletes, influencers, and industry names.**



YOU CAN NOW SMELL LIKE BREAD

There's a growing surge in **bread-and-bakery-inspired fragrances that are giving people comfort smells.** This trend ties into what people are calling "comfort commerce" where consumers are seeking sensory, cozy, comforting experiences.



PICKLE STREETWEAR IS SUDDENLY A THING

KFC created a transparent puffer jacket filled with real pickle juice and sliced pickles. It was part of a PR stunt tied to their pickle-heavy menu launch (Pickle Mania). The jacket was inspired by an AI-generated concept that went viral, which KFC turned into a real product.



KITH'S NEW STREETWEAR IS STREET FOOD

Ronnie Fieg is expanding Kith beyond fashion and into food. With the launch of Ronnie's Diner in London and Ronnie's Pronto in West Hollywood, Fieg is turning stores into immersive destinations that blend elevated sandwiches with streetwear culture.

No Plane?
No Problem.

IMAGE SOURCE: GETTY

MCK

CULTURAL SPARK:

Trader Joe's tote bags have **become a status symbol overseas,**

with the bags selling for more than
a thousand dollars.

SOURCE: THE INDEPENDENT





With political tensions and tighter wallets, **people can't travel as much internationally.**

But this doesn't mean that people aren't seeking out novel and global experiences. Instead, brands are bringing these places to them just right around the corner.

What we're seeing



LUCKIN COFFEE GOES GLOBAL

China's largest coffee chain opened its first U.S. locations in June 2025. It's known for **heavy app-based ordering and discount pricing**. In the U.S., Luckin has continued its **expansion with multiple Manhattan outlets, promotional deals**, and has partnered with DoorDash for delivery to boost visibility and convenience.



MOVE OVER K-POP, IT'S TIME FOR K-BURGERS

In August 2025, the Japanese-Korean burger chain Lotteria **launched its first U.S. location** in Fullerton, CA, introducing its **bulgogi burgers, shrimp burgers, fried chicken**, and other global menu items to American diners.



HEY TEA CONTINUES TO EXPAND IN THE US

Though launched in the U.S. in 2023, **China's premium tea brand continued expanding stateside in 2025** with multiple locations across California, Texas, and New Jersey, drawing large crowds for its fruit and milk teas.



DIN TAI FUNG MOVES BEYOND LOS ANGELES

The brand has opened a location in Portland, Oregon, and Bellevue, Washington, establishing a Pacific Northwest presence outside California. They also have a **flagship restaurant in New York City (Times Square)**, which has become one of its highest-profile U.S. outposts.



TORONTO STRIP MALL BECOMES HALAL DESTINATION

A busy suburban plaza near Toronto's Ridgeway Plaza has become a **symbol of Canada's changing immigration landscape**. Opened in 2022, it quickly turned into a **major food destination for Middle Eastern and South Asian restaurants and halal food**.

Sober Curious to Sober Partying



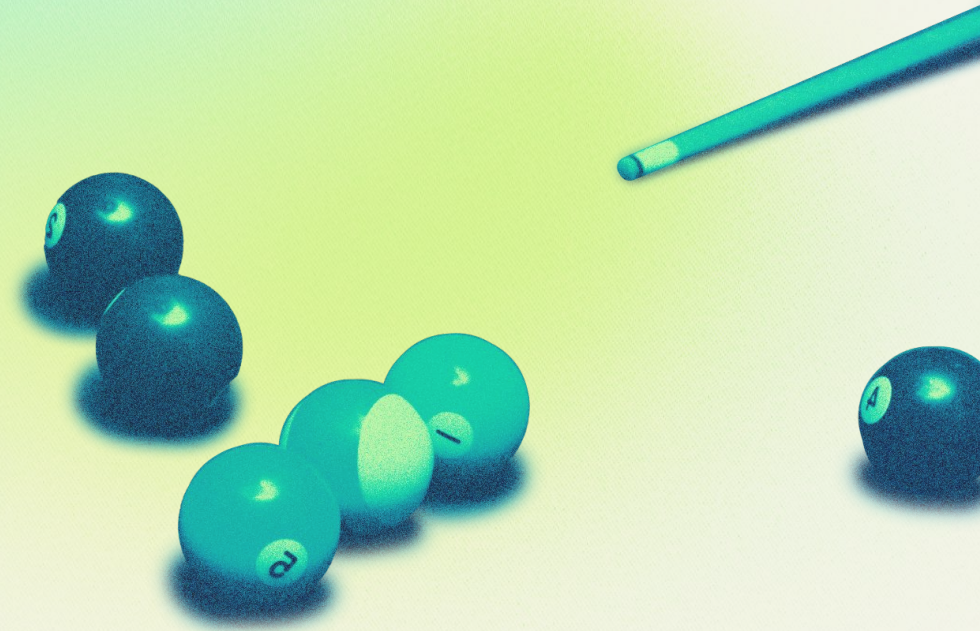
IMAGE SOURCE: GETTY

MCK

CULTURAL SPARK:

36% of Gen Z
are still
**socializing by
going to bars
and pubs.**

SOURCE: MINTEL





With the rise of the **sober - curious** movement,

people are being more intentional and virtuous about what they consume. People are looking for the brands that agree that the party doesn't have to stop when sober, and instead gives them the space to let loose and feel free.

What we're seeing



A CHEEZ-IT NIGHTCLUB

From October 9-11, 2025, **Cheez-It** opened **Studio Cheez**, a branded, immersive late-night club experience serving **Cheez-It-infused cocktails and mocktails** at Virgo in NYC's East Village for guests 21+. The activation turned the space into a fully themed venue celebrating the iconic snack.



COFFEE RAVES

"Coffee raves" are emerging as a new kind of social event. The concept traces back to Daybreaker, which began in New York in 2013 with **early-morning sober dance events featuring wellness elements instead of alcohol**. These raves are especially popular among Gen Z and sober-curious audiences.



LATE NIGHT TEA HOUSES

A new wave of late-night teahouses are emerging across Los Angeles, **offering a non-alcoholic alternative to bars and nightlife**. These spaces are designed as "third places" and give younger generations somewhere to gather outside of home and work. They are offering spaces where people can linger, socialize, and unwind for hours.



NYC SOBER NIGHTLIFE CLUB

Bright Nights Social curates **alcohol-free nightlife experiences in New York City, blending culture, community, and late-night energy**. Events range from tea bars and bagel parties to meditations and holiday parties.

Protein Personalities



IMAGE SOURCE: GETTY

MCK

"Maxxing" mentality is part of a **broader social media movement.**

People are defining themselves by how much they're doing ("looksmaxxing," "skin-maxxing," "gym-maxxing," "fiber-maxxing") to optimize and over-perform in health behaviors.

IMAGE SOURCE: GETTY



MCK



Protein isn't just about macros anymore, **it's about meaning.**

What was once a mass, one-size-fits-all category is now splintering into hyper-personalized expressions of self, often even leaning into gendered cues. Protein has become a canvas for personality that's tailored to who you are, how you live, and how you want to feel.

What we're seeing



THE FIRST CREATINE CEREAL

Man Cereal is a hyper-functional, culture-first brand that pushes the “protein in everything” trend to its logical extreme. They’re **turning a nostalgic breakfast staple into a performance product**. The cereal is packed with protein and infused with creatine.



WATER THAT’S PACKED WITH 20 GRAMS OF PROTEIN

With around 15–20 grams of protein in a light, juice-like drink, Ready Clear Protein Water is **stripping away the heaviness of traditional shakes and reframing protein** as something you can sip all day, not just after a workout.



GLOW PROTEIN PRODUCTS GIVE WOMEN “BEAUTY FUEL”

Part of the “pink” protein movement, Glow is a brand that is **positioning itself as the first protein beauty bar** with daily beauty supplements. The bars are filled with collagen, hyaluronic acid, vitamin C, and 10+ grams of protein.



EVEN KIDS NEED EXTRA PROTEIN

Protein is now being framed as **developmental and functional, not just fitness for children**. SnakStars is a brand for kids that is leaning into the double digits of protein, making snacking feel closer to adult bars than traditional kid snacks.

Thank You!



Any Questions? Contact Us

hello@mckinney.com

MCKINNEY DURHAM

318 Blackwell St
Durham, NC 27701

MCKINNEY DALLAS

6600 Chase Oaks Blvd, Suite 180,
Plano, TX 75023

MCKINNEY NYC

1 Penn Plaza
37th Floor, New York, NY 10119

MCKINNEY PHOENIX

6200 E Thomas Road, Suite 200,
Scottsdale, AZ 85251

MCKINNEY LA

4539 West Adams Blvd
Los Angeles, CA 90016

MCKINNEY TORONTO

161 Liberty Street, Suite 200,
Toronto, ON M6K 3G3