

Younger generations embrace ‘SNACKIFICATION’



More reliance on snacks in place of traditional main meals means younger consumers are on the look-out for options that fit in with their personal diet plans, finds Sebastian Emig

THE shift toward all-day snacking to replace traditional meals isn't new. Rather, it has been going on for decades. However, it has accelerated even more in recent years as established savoury snacks manufacturers and start-up incubators roll out better-for-you offerings that are gaining greater acceptance with today's consumers.

Potato crisps continue to be one of the mainstays of the global snack foods market. However, the savoury snacks sector is coming under increasing pressure from other forms of snacks as consumers' expectations broaden. Consumers are now snacking on foods ranging from hot-eating products (e.g. microwaveable or toasted sandwiches) to dairy products (e.g. cheese strings or pro-biotic yoghurts), as well as more traditional forms of snacks, such as snack bars, fresh fruit or confectionery.

Demand for snacks remains high throughout the world, with consumers being cash-rich but time-poor. They lead busy lifestyles and the need for foods that can be eaten conveniently and on-the-go shows no sign of declining; especially among the younger age groups who observe less strict mealtimes.

The biggest of all trends is the demographic shift. Every survey shows that for younger consumers - whether they're millennials compared to Gen X or Gen Z compared to millennials - the number of snacking occasions increases, and that gives current companies and newcomers

to the industry more opportunity to meet their needs.

On the other hand, the younger generation is less brand-loyal. They search for novel products with a WOW-factor, which are more eco-conscious and are different in some way from the more-established options.

In order to respond to this pressure, snack makers continue to experiment with a wider range of flavours that appeals to this increasingly sophisticated consumer base. Many people, especially from the younger age groups, are now actively seeking out a broader range of flavours, often inspired by ethnic cuisine. In such instances, manufacturers frequently take the opportunity to add provenance as a selling point for their snacks. In western countries such as the UK, street food is becoming increasingly popular, especially among younger age groups such as millennials. This is now being reflected in flavour innovation within the crisp category.

In geographical terms, sales of snacks such as potato crisps remain heavily skewed towards western countries and nations with large populations. The USA has the world's largest market, ahead of the UK, Germany, Russia, China, Brazil and India. Most of the current growth opportunities are believed to lie in emerging economies such as China and India. In markets such as this, growth in demand is most evident among younger urban consumers, who lead more time-pressured

lifestyles and have higher levels of disposable income.

One of the main challenges facing the market in the coming years is a continued focus on the nutritional composition of many types of savoury snacks. In the past, these have been linked with high levels of salt and saturated fat, as well as being held up as an example of poor diets. Although products such as low-fat and low-sodium crisps have been around for some time now, recent evidence suggests that health-conscious consumers are increasingly seeking all-round nutrition from their snacks.

What we have seen over the past year is a shift from calorie counting to a more focused approach. In Europe, for example, instead of monitoring calorie intake, consumers look for the presence or absence of specific ingredients that suit their personalised diet plans.

As a result, snackers are likely to check both the high and low qualities of a snack, as well as products manufactured using a baking (rather than frying) process. Clear on-pack labelling that indicates both the 'low in' and the 'high in' attributes of a product will drive consumer interest in specific healthier snack products.

Some of the most popular snacks introduced globally over the past year have included cheese, meat, fruit and vegetables. The range of ingredients included in snack packs has been growing to include such categories as olives and sweet or savoury biscuits. Even pickles and mushrooms are finding their way into the snack

format, but few of these combination packages contain any salty snacks beyond nuts and pretzels.

TO EAT OR NOT TO EAT – THAT IS THE QUESTION

In April, the academic journal *The Lancet* published an article titled ‘Health effects of dietary risks in 195 countries, 1990-2017: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2017’. In conclusion it stipulates that since 1990, the number of deaths and Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) attributable to dietary risks significantly increased to 11 million deaths and 255 million DALYs, and that in 2017, more than half of diet-related deaths and two-thirds of diet-related DALYs were attributable to a high intake of sodium, low intake of wholegrains and low intake of fruits. High consumption of red meat, processed meat, trans fats and sugar-sweetened beverages were also ranked among the dietary risks for deaths and DALYs for most high-population countries.

The report went on to say that although sodium, sugar, and fat have been the main focus in the policy debate around diet over the past two decades, this latest assessment shows that the leading dietary factors for mortality do indeed include diets high in sodium, but they also include those low in whole grains, low in fruit, low in nuts and seeds, low in vegetables and low in omega-3 fatty acids.

Furthermore, the study challenges the effectiveness of traditional, population-level dietary interventions like mass media campaigns, food and menu labelling, food pricing strategies, school procurement policies

and worksite wellness programmes. It claims that the observed effects are far below the level required to achieve an optimal global diet, and that there is almost no evidence on the effectiveness of these interventions on the consumption of several important dietary components, both positive and negative (i.e. nuts, wholegrains, sea food, red meat and processed meat).

In a nutshell, the report suggests countries could, in future, adopt laws, subsidies and penalties to help them stick to a healthier diet and save the planet.

The reactions to this report differed quite strongly among the concerned stakeholders. While FoodDrinkEurope issued a press release stating that ‘Europe’s food and drink industry has already proven its active contribution to the fight against malnutrition and diet-related NCDs, and the shift towards more sustainable food systems’, the Italian delegation at the UN Official Account of the Italian Mission to the UN in Geneva tweeted in a very strong way: ‘#EATLancet Here is why we believe @EATforum Commission Report is extremely controversial and @WHO should avoid being involved in it #healthydiets #traditionaldiets #nutrition4health’.

The World Health Organization has backed out of sponsoring the launch event promoting the report following criticism that there is ‘no scientific justification’ for everyone in the world to adopt a standard diet. It is unclear what prompted the UN body to pull its sponsorship. However, the views of Italy’s ambassador to the UN, Gian Lorenzo Cornado, may have played a role.

He penned a letter to the WHO that questioned whether the agency should back the global push for countries to encourage the diet. In a scathing attack, he argued that it could cause millions of people working in the agriculture industry to lose their jobs, as well as those in other areas of food production. Cornado also warned that a global shift to a plant-based diet could spell an end to traditional cuisines across the world. He added that such a move also risked the ‘total elimination of consumers’ freedom of choice’.

Additionally, the report’s conclusion that ‘vested commercial interests’ should be excluded from the policy table is directly at odds with the conclusions of the political declaration that was adopted by all Heads of State and government at the High Level Meeting on NCDs, which took place during the General Assembly of the United Nations in September last year. This supports meaningful engagement with the private sector, including through public-private partnership.

At ESA, we follow the principle of sensible snacking – that a moderate consumption of savoury snacks can be part of a healthy and balanced diet. We will continue defending this principle vis-a-vis all opinion leaders and policy makers in order to maintain the overall permissibility of savoury snacks. ■



Director General Sebastian Emig*

*in his capacity as permanent representative of PrimeConsulting BXLBCN SL

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