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"Evolving Plates: Dietary Shifts Among Generation Z and Millennials"

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Abstract
This research paper investigates the influence of lifestyle changes on Generation Z's eating habits, with special consideration given to how daily routines and social shifts alter dietetic choices.
This study aims to identify changes in eating patterns among Generation Z that affect lifestyle changes and compare these with patterns observed among Millennials to highlight generational dietary variations.
Additionally, this paper investigates how lifestyle changes influence Generation Z's consumption of fast and convenient food products, such as fast-food restaurants. Employing a mixed methods approach, this research integrates quantitative survey responses and creates an in-depth analysis.
Findings indicate an increasing shift towards convenience-driven food choices among Generation Z due to digital engagement and fast-paced living, in contrast with Millennials, who tend to adhere more traditionally to eating habits.
This study emphasises the necessity of increased awareness and interventions to foster healthier eating habits through lifestyle-induced diet changes to advance public discourse regarding nutrition and public health.
This analysis underlines the complexity of young adult eating habits and underscores the necessity of multi-layered approaches to encourage healthier lifestyles. Addressing such habits involves considering numerous influences ranging from individual preferences to wider societal trends.

Keywords: Generation Z, Lifestyle changes, Food choices, Dietary changes, Millennials,

Introduction

Much research has been done regarding “Millennials” (Generation Y), born between 1980 and 2000. For Generation Y, food is a reason to bring people together in a highly digitalised era. They pay attention to the ethical details of the food and are conscious about food and the packaging of the food. (Shipman 2020)

Digital technology has a great influence on shaping Gen Z’s eating habits. The article points out that Gen Z, also known as “digital natives,” shows an approach to food consumption shaped by their tech-savvy access to information. This generation depends on digital platforms and resources to be informed about dietary choices. With the help of smartphones and the internet, Gen Z investigates food ingredients, nutritional data, and ethical practices. (Insights into a Conscious Generation, 2024)
The study of Halasi et al. (2023) sheds light on Generation Z adolescents' nutrition knowledge and dietary habits in the autonomous province of Vojvodina, Serbia. The last fifteen years have shown an alarming increase in the frequency of overweight (from 10% to 17.9%) and obese (from 5% to 7.3%) adolescents in Serbia. Despite modest overall nutrition knowledge, less than 10% of adolescents were familiar with the carbohydrates and fats needed in their daily diet. Particularly, overweight and obese youths showed sub-standard nutrition knowledge compared to other BMI groups with adolescents and boys who are in lower grades.

Gen Z is moving towards meatless meals and moving towards vegan food and vegetarian options. This generation is moving towards sustainability and making sure the waste is coming under control. (Mind the Gap: Gen Z Is Craving a More Sustainable Food System, 2022)

Moreover, while adolescents possess certain nutritional knowledge, many struggle to apply it in practice. Unhealthy food consumption (such as sweets, salty snacks, and fast food) was more frequent among educated and obese adolescents. Skipping meals (breakfast, lunch, and dinner) was identified as a common weight control strategy, particularly among girls. Importantly, the study establishes a potential link between nutrition knowledge and BMI, suggesting that improved nutrition knowledge could positively impact the risk of obesity development.
Considering Serbia’s evolving lifestyle as a developing country, addressing obesity requires multifaceted approaches beyond individual knowledge.
In India, the millennial generation is the largest in the world and is majorly responsible for the country’s rapidly expanding consumer market, according to a blog post titled “How specialty food is catching up in India due to Millennials changing preferences. Urbanization has also increased dual household incomes with more disposable salaries and a large global appetite. The blog mentions the same number of major lifestyle-changing factors that impact daily food choices, such as

technology and pandemic food experimentation, wherein widespread technology adoption and access allowed millennials to explore various global food trends that influence their lifestyle and food preferences.

Gen Z individuals prefer plant-based diets, with many of them going for vegetarian or vegan lifestyles due to the latest researched concerns about ecological impact and animal welfare (IFIC, 2020). Besides, a study published focuses on demographics likely to prioritize organic and non-GMO foods compared to previous generations (Smith & Chapman, 2021). Convenience plays an important role, as established by findings from the Food Marketing Institute, which show that Gen Z favours ready-to-eat meal packages that suit their fast-paced lifestyles (FMI, 2021). These developing preferences indicate a healthy orientation with health-conscious and eco-friendly consumption patterns among Gen Z.
Cara Rosenbloom (2018) stated in her article that the Millennials influenced a positive change in food trends over the last 10 years. She said that millennials are the largest US age demographic and are the key tastemakers. According to this article, some of the ways millennials influence the ways we eat are: a) They want the truth from food manufacturers; and b) They love customization. c) They want it easy. d) They are redefining "healthy." e) They want better baby food. f) They value the planet. i) They love to snack. j) They love the keto diet. k) They will try anything.

Review of Literature

Millennial eating behaviour

Swaroop and Giddaiah (2020) stated that societal changes have an impact on the food habits of people; these changes were seen due to a rise in income as the respondents shifted their consumption patterns to higher-fat food, processed food, and food sourced from animals. They also mention that urbanisation has contributed to the change in food habits; these changes have been seen due to the influence of friends, family, and peers. The change in food habits is observed due to the increase of working women as they switch to manufactured or prepared meals, which makes their work easier. Louise Petty (2017) mentioned that there have been a lot of changes in the eating lifestyle of people compared to the older generation. Changes such as having meals at a fixed time every day are not observed anymore, and people have lost eating discipline. Changes included skipping breakfast, snacking, and heavy caffeine intake. A set meal schedule was seen earlier as compared to where there is a variety available and we have a lot of food choices. Takeaway, fast, and ready meals have changed the way that meals are prepared and eaten. Even an increase in food waste is observed in the new generation, like millennials and Gen Z. Changes in eating habits, such as increased preference for convenience food, are noticed; this is mostly due to the busy schedules of people. An increase in spending on dining out is noted, which increases the calorie intake as compared to the previous generations like baby boomers. Although with all these cons we also have some pros too, such as an increase in fruits, exotic vegetables, chicken, and low-fat dairy that is observed in young generations. It also mentioned shockingly that less exercising is observed to increase lifestyle diseases.

Health Perception

Balyan (2018) investigated the food choices of college students and the determinants of their food choices. The study concluded that most of the students preferred contemporary foods such as chow mein, burgers, sandwiches, etc. Most students preferred spicy and non-vegetarian food. The determinants of food choices were: good taste, healthy food, good nutrition, hygiene, low cost, good quality, and convenience. The changes were also due to changes in lifestyle such as busy schedules, discipline, self-control, budget limits, options available, and the duality of the income of the household as a result of urbanisation. Gandhi R. (2024) examines the relationships between gender and food preferences, knowledge content about healthy choices such as vegetables with enough rice to prevent unhealthy eating and overall food preferences. These results showcase that gender plays a major role in food preferences. Gender-specific eating patterns must be acknowledged for designing effective interventions to promote healthier eating behaviours, according to culture. Gender can impact healthy food selection and enjoyment when it comes to eating less. As this research continues to unfold, its conclusions will inform strategies for public health programs and help develop an understanding of gender dynamics when it comes to food and beverages. Giovanni Sogari (2018) aimed to recognise issues in healthy lifestyle behaviours among US college students. This study aimed to research the being's social and environmental issues that influenced students' healthy eating choices. The result stated that the participants were influenced by individual, social, and environmental factors in universities. The ecological model can help university communities gain more insights into how and why students make certain food choices and support them in staying healthy. It also states that the colleges and dining halls on campus also have a crucial role in guiding the students to eat healthily.

Weight and exercise

Mishra et al. (2022) mentioned in their article that the majority of youngsters engaged in regular physical activity and adhered to healthy eating habits. However, people consumed significantly fewer green leafy vegetables than they did junk food. Their health would suffer as a result of this. Young people are advised to increase their consumption of green leafy vegetables. The sale of fast food inside college campuses should be outlawed in favour of a variety of healthier, delicious foods in the college canteen, as the youth's consumption of junk food has increased, likely as a result of the nearby, easily accessible fast food restaurants. To encourage wholesome eating practices, this is something that must be done. Renzo

and Gualtieri (2020) found that a limited relationship is identified between eating habits and lifestyle changes in Gen Z and Millennials. The perception of weight gain was observed, but also a slight increase in physical activity was reported. A shift towards farm or organic purchasing for fruits and vegetables was also observed. Leena VS, Lazar.S., and Jibi Paul (2018) stated the extent to which young people crave junk food, the causes of these cravings, the effects of this eating behaviour, and the responses taken to the obesity problem. It was noted that obesity is now recognised as a problem affecting the young. It is well established that consuming too many calories and engaging in insufficient physical activity both have a significant role in weight gain and obesity. According to research, young people may benefit from instruction that links lifestyle decisions with results related to weight to make healthy practices more desirable, either for personal gain or to prevent negative repercussions. Tony et al. (2022) wrote in their article on eating habits during and pre-Covid-19 that the findings are partially related to the eating habits of Gen Z put forward in the article that there was a significant transformation in food habits during and before COVID-19, especially in the young adults who used to live away from their homes. The food choices and diet patterns improved in the youth during the pandemic. The article also stated that an increase in snacking and exercise was observed. Also, the preference for immunity food, organic farming, and organic food showed an increase.

Research Gap

The earlier research focused on either how millennials or Gen Z were consuming food and their dietary habits. The multiple studies lacked a comparison of how both generations are different when it comes to their choice of diet. This study aims to integrate the comparison of Gen Z and millennials which was one of the identified gaps. the research focuses on bridging a one of the gap identified where the influence of life style change is studied.

Research Methodology-

The research methodology engaged in an analytical and Descriptive nature of the study, comprising both primary and secondary data where the secondary data was collected through different research papers, books, journals, and different resources that were made available in the public domain. The primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire which was floated among the Gen Z and Millennials across the geographical spread of Pune City. These questionnaires consisted of seven questions aimed at understanding the impact of lifestyle changes on their eating habits. A total of 210 Questionnaires were floated out of which we received 145 responses, after accounting for unengaged respondents and further data cleaning 14 responses were discarded and a total of 131 responses were taken for consideration.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse the existing literature on dietary transitions among Generation Z and Millennials, identifying key socio-cultural, environmental, and technological factors influencing their eating habits.
2. To analyse the parameters influencing Reasons towards change in eating habits along with the benefits derived through healthy eating habits.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Frequency Distribution

Sr.No.	Particulars	Options	Frequency	%
1	Generation	Millennials	46	35.1
		Gen Z	85	64.9
		Total	**131**	**100**
2	Changes in Gen Z eating habits	Yes	48	56.5
		No	37	43.5
		Total	**85**	**100**
3	Change in Millennials' eating habits	Yes	30	65.2
		No	16	34.8
		Total	**46**	**100**

4	Consuming More Fast Food	Yes	61	46.6
		No	70	53.4
		Total	**131**	**100**
5	Consuming ready-to-eat food	Yes	74	56.5
		No	57	43.5
		Total	**131**	**100**
6	Consumption of Frozen Food	Yes	50	38.2
		No	81	61.8
		Total	**131**	**100**
7	Increase in Snacking	Yes	72	55.0
		No	59	45.0
		Total	**131**	**100**
8	Increase in refined flour intake	Yes	60	45.9
		No	71	54.1
		Total	**131**	**100**
9	Eating Healthy Food	Yes	65	49.7
		No	66	50.3
		Total	**131**	**100**
10	Increase in Junk Food	Yes	58	44.2
		No	73	55.8
		Total	**131**	**100**
11	Following personalized diets	Yes	89	67.9
		No	42	32.1
		Total	**131**	**100**
12	Use of Organic Food	Yes	74	56.5
		No	57	43.5
		Total	**131**	**100**
13	Increase intake of Stale Food	Yes	67	51.2
		No	64	48.8
		Total	**131**	**100**
14	Shift towards a vegan diet	Yes	58	44.2

		No	73	55.8
		Total	**131**	**100**
15	Reading the label	Yes	81	61.9
		No	50	38.1
		Total	**131**	**100**
16	Change in taste palette	Yes	72	55.0
		No	59	45.0
		Total	**131**	**100**
17	Change in spending power	Yes	51	39.0
		No	80	61.0
		Total	**131**	**100**
18	Weight gain or loss	Yes	68	52.0
		No	63	48.0
		Total	**131**	**100**
19	Increase or decrease lifestyle disease	Yes	78	59.5
		No	53	40.5
		Total	**131**	**100**
20	Increases reliance on convenience food	Yes	69	52.6
		No	62	47.4
		Total	**131**	**100**

Source: Primary data

The data offers valuable insights into the dietary patterns and lifestyle shifts observed among the Millennial and Gen Z populations. Out of the 131 individuals who participated in the poll, 46 belonged to the Millennial generation, accounting for 35.1% of the total, while the remaining 85 individuals were from Generation Z, making up 64.9% of the total. Among the Gen Z cohort, 56.5% (48 individuals) saw alterations in their dietary patterns, whereas 43.5% (37 individuals) did not. Within the Millennial demographic, 65.2% (30 individuals) experienced alterations in their dietary patterns, while 34.8% (16 individuals) did not.

Regarding specific habits, 46.6% (61 individuals) of the total participants indicated an increase in their consumption of fast food, whereas 53.4% (70 individuals) did not. 56.5% of individuals (74 people) reported an increase in the intake of ready-to-eat food, whereas 43.5% (57 people) did not report any increase. Regarding frozen food, 38.2% (50 individuals) reported an increase in consumption, whereas 61.8% (81 individuals) did not.

Snacking habits have experienced a rise among 55% (72 individuals) of the participants, whereas 45% (59 individuals) have reported no alteration. Regarding refined flour intake, 45.9% (60 individuals) had an increase, whereas 54.1% (71 individuals) did not. 49.7% (65 individuals) exhibited healthy eating habits, while 50.3% (66 individuals) did not.

The consumption of junk food has experienced a 44.2% increase, with 58 individuals reporting this increase. Conversely, 55.8% of individuals (73 persons) did not report any increase in junk food consumption. 67.9% of individuals, which amounts to 89 people, adhere to personalized diets, whereas the remaining 32.1%, or 42 people, do not. 56.5% of the

participants, which corresponds to 74 individuals, reported consuming organic food, whereas 43.5% of the participants, equivalent to 57 individuals, did not.

Surprisingly, 51.2% (67 individuals) of participants reported a rise in consuming expired food, while 48.8% (64 individuals) did not. Out of the total sample size, 44.2% (58 individuals) indicated a transition to a vegan diet, whereas 55.8% (73 individuals) did not report such a change. 61.9% of individuals, or 81 people, had the habit of reading food labels, while 38.1% of individuals, or 50 people, did not engage in this behaviour.

55% (72 individuals) reported changes in taste preferences, while 45% (59 individuals) did not notice any change. Regarding purchasing power, 39% (51 individuals) experienced a shift, whilst 61% (80 individuals) did not. 52% (68 individuals) had weight fluctuations, either in the form of weight increase or weight loss, whereas 48% (63 individuals) did not report any changes in their weight.

Finally, 59.5% (78 individuals) indicated a fluctuation in lifestyle diseases, whilst 40.5% (53 individuals) did not encounter any alterations in this regard. 52.6% (69 individuals) have experienced a rise in their dependence on convenience food, whereas 47.4% (62 individuals) have not reported any increase in reliance on such food. This data showcases diverse patterns and modifications in dietary preferences and way of life among the groups that were examined.

Table 2: Normality Testing

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			**Shapiro-Wilk**		
	Statistic	d.f.	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Reasons towards change in eating habits	.076	131	.000	.978	131	.000
Advantages of change in eating habits	.209	131	.000	.936	131	.000
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction						

Source: Primary data

It can be seen from Table 2, that the significant value for the dependent variables is less than 0.05 thereby leading to the conclusion data fails to match normality. It further indicates the usage of non-parametric testing towards further tests.

Hypotheses testing

H_0: There is no significant difference between Generations and reasons for change in eating habits

H_1: There is a significant difference between Generations and reasons for change in eating habits

Table 3: Generation and reasons towards change in eating habits

Null Hypothesis	**Test**	**Sig.**	**Decision**
There is no significant difference between Generations and reasons towards change in eating habits	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.

Source: Primary data

Table number 3 indicates that the significant value is 0.00, which is less than 0.05, thereby indicating our failure towards acceptance of the null hypothesis. There is a significant difference between Generations and reasons towards change in eating habits.

Table 4: Mean Rank Table

Particular	Mean Rank
Millennials (1981-1996)	52.38
Gen Z (1997-2012)	73.37

Source: Primary data
Table number 4 indicated the Mean Rank comparison indicating that Generation Z with a mean rank of 73.37 presented a higher influence towards change in eating habits as compared to Millennials with a mean rank of 52.38.

H_0: There is no significant difference between generation and advantages of change in eating habits.
H_1: There is a significant difference between generation and advantages of change in eating habits.

Table 5: Generation and reasons towards change in eating habits

Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
There is no significant difference between generation and advantages of change in eating habits	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.519	Retain the null hypothesis.

Source: Primary data
Table 5 indicates that the significant value is 0.519, which is greater than 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis is accepted, which means there is no significant difference between the generation and advantages of changing eating habits.

Discussion
The findings of this study align with the existing literature, which highlights the influence of lifestyle changes, urbanization, and societal shifts on the dietary patterns of younger generations, particularly Generation Z and Millennials. The increased reliance on fast food, convenience foods, and eating outside reflects the fast-paced lifestyles and time constraints faced by these generations.
While convenience and exploration of new cuisines are significant drivers, it is essential to address the potential health consequences associated with these dietary changes, such as weight gain and lifestyle diseases. Interventions aimed at promoting healthier food choices and balancing convenience with nutrition are crucial. The challenge for the industry is to develop healthier options for quick food. Gen Z is willing to pay more for a healthier plant-based food option in convenience food by paying more, especially for a burger patty. This is a positive study for the product developer. (Meixner et al., 2024)
Furthermore, the study highlights the impact of social media and peer influence on dietary choices, emphasising the need for responsible advertising and education campaigns targeting these influential factors.

Significance of the Study
To the Dieticians - Comprehending the shifting dietary inclinations and motives of Generation Z and Millennials allows dietitians to develop tailored nutrition regimens that correspond with modern eating habits. This study provides recommendations for sustainable and health-conscious food choices that address the nutritional requirements and lifestyle preferences of younger populations.
To the Millennials and Gen Z - This study offers significant insights into their dietary shifts' determinants, such as health awareness, environmental considerations, and convenience. By comprehending the benefits of changing dietary practices, young consumers can make informed decisions that improve their well-being while conforming to their values and societal norms.
To the Budding Research Scholars - This study enhances the existing literature on dietary behaviour by providing empirical information regarding the factors influencing changes in eating habits. It establishes a basis for subsequent studies on nutritional trends, consumer behaviour, and public health, facilitating multidisciplinary studies that examine the interplay of dietary choices, psychology, and societal effects.

Conclusion

This study has shed light on the significant impact of lifestyle shifts on the dietary patterns of Generation Z, highlighting the increased consumption of convenience foods, fast food, and eating outside. While convenience and exploration of new cuisines are driving factors, the potential health consequences, such as weight gain and lifestyle diseases, cannot be ignored.

The findings emphasize the need for targeted interventions and educational campaigns that promote healthier eating habits while considering the unique challenges and preferences of younger generations. Additionally, addressing social media influence and peer pressure through responsible advertising and awareness programs could play a crucial role in shaping healthier dietary choices. Dietary habits among Gen Z and Millennials are evolving quickly. While there are some unhealthy trends, like increased fast food consumption, there are also positive shifts, such as a growing interest in organic and personalized diets. This information is vital for policymakers, healthcare professionals, and the food industry to help promote healthier eating habits and meet the needs of these generations.

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