

Top 10 Consumer Trends for 2012: Weight as a Hot Topic



Are we what we eat? More consumers, health experts and government bodies seem to think so although many heavier consumers are in denial. What are consumers doing to stay healthy?

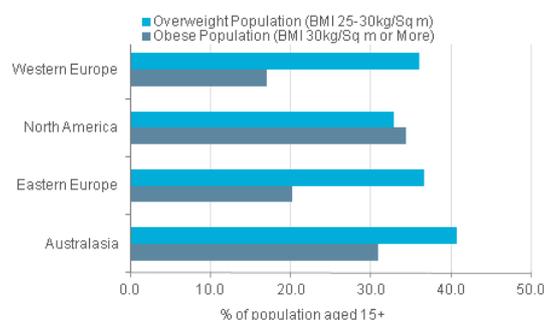
This piece is the tenth in a weekly series of consumer comments exploring each of the trends Euromonitor International identified in the recent Top 10 Trends for 2012 article.

UK pop diva Adele, who was recently censured by fashion czar Karl Lagerfeld for being too fat, told CNN that she likes her curves and wouldn't ever diet. The accompanying public discussion was only the latest media and public frenzy over the issue of weight and controlling it. In 2012, the spotlight on weight is just part of a renewed public awareness of what we eat, body image, exercise and general health. Indeed, Euromonitor International's Annual Study 2011 finds that respondents globally rank good health as the most important determinant of happiness (even if awareness that health is important doesn't always lead to healthy living).

Concerns about the prevalence of obesity are spurred by worrying global rises in proportions of overweight and obese consumers. The top three obese nations in 2011 were Kuwait, Mexico and the USA, with 40.3%, 36.9% and 35.7% of their populations aged 15+ classified as obese respectively. Click to tweet! Obesity is a major global health challenge, enhanced by lifestyle changes such as more sedentary lives, the growth of convenience food and snacking, a consumer feeling that the problem belongs to others, the greater use of technology and contracting consumer food budgets. It is also due to the throngs of consumers who seem to have forgotten that a balanced and varied diet and a lifestyle with plenty of physical activity is the key to good health. It is this awareness, however, that is spurring policy changes such as controversial 'fat tax' initiatives to get consumers moving, eating well, and more health-aware.

According to US Association for Pet Obesity Prevention (APOP), 53% of dogs and 55% of cats in the USA are either overweight or obese. Click to tweet! As is the case of their owners, too much food and too little physical activity are to blame. Nestlé unveiled a co-marketing venture between its Purina pet food and the Jenny Craig (human) weight-loss brands late last year. Obese and Overweight Population in Selected Regions: 2012

% of population aged 15+



Source: Euromonitor International from WHO/OECD

Note: Obese Population (BMI 30kg/sq m or More). Obese population is measured as percent of population aged 15+. Overweight Population (BMI 25-30kg/sq m). Overweight population is measured as percent of population aged 15+. Data for 2012 are forecast.

Food trends, convenience food and convenient 'remedies'

The growth of the convenience food market has been identified as a key cause of obesity and being overweight both in the developed and the developing world. Euromonitor International Annual Study 2011 findings show that the younger a respondent is, the more likely they are to eat away from home at least once weekly (up to 2.2 times more likely than the oldest respondents), while the young tend to assemble their meals from pre-prepared ingredients (43%) and are much more likely to order takeaway food. Interestingly though, younger respondents eat and drink more healthfully and pursue specialised diets including dieting to lose weight. Overall, although respondents in developing countries are more active on a daily basis than people in developed nations, respondents as a whole show a well-rounded approach to health. After exercise, not smoking, access to medical care, limited daily stress levels and limited alcohol consumption are all essentially tied for second-most important to health.

Fast food sales are taking off in India, especially among the young, as dining out moves from being a special occasion to a routine part of life for more middle class consumers.

"Argentines do not think of sedentary lifestyles as a problem. Everybody knows that cholesterol and tobacco are bad, but [tech-led] sedentary lifestyles are perceived as a minor issue," according to Héctor Kunik, head of the country's Sports Medicine Association. Explains former health minister in Brazil, José Gomes Temporão: "The standard of food is changing drastically. The structure of the family is evolving, women are working more and there is a rise in prepared foods. There is a new lifestyle, with TV, the internet and lack of exercise, while violence stops kids going out on the streets."

New services cater to the consumer interest in watching their weight AND convenience. For instance, October 2011 saw Los Angeles-based ThinDish launch online; a site focusing exclusively on restaurants that serve dishes totalling 600 calories or less and offering discounts as well as taking orders.

Self-perceptions and dieting

The dominant body image that prescribes that women – and increasingly men – should be thin puts intense pressure on tweens, teens and older young people. A recent issue of UK magazine Men's Health has headlines like "10 dinner recipes that will help you lose weight".

A glance at newspapers, media websites or celebrity-themed magazines will show that a key theme is a grading of celebrities in terms of how well they are maintaining their looks and health – a clear concern of ageing societies today where many are working past traditional retirement age.

Despite efforts from some women's magazines and enlightened fashion designers to moderate the craze for body beautiful – the February 2012 issue of French Elle Magazine featured a plus-size cover girl, for instance – the impact of popular TV modelling shows and über-angular film stars like Angelina Jolie lingers. There are significant swathes of consumers, typically young women, who are under-eating due to a distorted body image and negative influences of celebrity culture and advertising.

Euromonitor International's Annual Study 2011 confirms that consumer interest in dieting takes in emerging and developed markets. Young respondents to Euromonitor International's Global Youth Survey meanwhile, claim to skip meals two or more days a week – particularly breakfast. In the 15 leading youth markets, one-third of 16-24 year olds claim to be trying to lose weight. This rises to more than four in ten in the USA, Philippines and Mexico, and is lowest in Japan and India. Family influence appears to be a significant factor. Those living alone are more likely to be on a diet than those living with their parents, whereas those living away from their parents, with their own families, are most likely to be dieting. Additionally, healthy food was found to be popular worldwide, with 56% of global youth buying healthy.

Those most likely to do so are in Colombia, Turkey, Mexico, Germany, China and Indonesia.

Meanwhile, a study from Slimming Magazine conducted in November 2011, finds that while over one in four Britons are obese, most of them are in denial, with three quarters of those with a severe weight problem seeing 'obesity' as something that happens to other people. This is because weight problems are 'normalised' due to the rapid rise in obesity.

The motivational challenges that face dieters have been the subject of many innovations over the years, and using the latest technology to incorporate gaming mechanics seems like a logical next step. Foodzy is a site that turns healthy eating into a game, with rewards for those who make healthy eating choices and a mobile app on the way.

Weight control policy

Alarmed by the 'obesity epidemic' many policy makers, health professionals and health bodies are advocating greater state intervention in the diets and lifestyles of citizens even though many consumers are vocal in their opposition to prescriptive health policies. A snapshot of policy and organisational moves in selected countries follows:

- Worried by the increase in overweight and obese nationals, Brazil's public health advocates are arguing for aggressive official measures, ranging from healthier school meals and the aggressive promotion of breast-feeding to taxes and tougher warnings on unhealthy food products;
- Schools in Bangalore are discouraging parents from giving processed food to their children;
- German consumer organisations are protesting the way food is made to appeal to children via "baiting tactics": "These include cold meats and cheeses cut into animal shapes, toys in cereal boxes or ready meals with artificial tastes for toddlers," said Gerd Billen, chairman of the federal consumer organisation: Verbraucherzentrale Bundesverbands in late January 2012;
- In Hungary, a new tax on foodstuffs high in salt, sugar and carbs was implemented in September 2011;

- In France, diet guru Pierre Dukan is now urging the government to grade students on their weight in a bid to curb growing obesity. In his book, published in January 2012, Mr Dukan suggests that senior high school students be awarded extra marks if they manage to maintain an acceptable Body Mass Index (BMI);
- In early 2012, an aggressive US\$50 million Strong 4 Life health campaign in Atlanta, Georgia sparked controversy because it features pictures of real obese children and direct messages about weight loss. Many have criticized these ads for targeting overweight kids rather than obesity – reducing young children into stereotypes of big is bad.

Catering to the larger consumer

Catherine Schrodetzki, an activist for the rights of larger people, believes they should have their needs better met by brands: "Larger people basically don't fit. Anything that you would assume that you would fit in, like a seat in a cinema, or a seat in a different place, an airline or whatever, we don't fit. We don't fit clothing, we don't fit in the shower," she explains. She maintains that some suitable products exist at the luxury end of the market but there are few options. "Bring us into the mainstream, we are mainstream" she argues.

About Euromonitor International's Annual Study, Global Youth Survey and Quick Pulse Surveys

Euromonitor International's Annual Study surveyed 16,000 consumers of all ages (15-65+) in eight mature and developing markets in July and August 2011, questioning respondents on the following themes: health and wellness, food and drink, technology, shopping and leisure, personal traits and values.

Euromonitor International's Global Youth Survey reached out to young consumers living in 15 countries with the largest and fastest-growing youth populations. Fielded August-September 2011, the survey questioned 16-24 year olds on the following themes: financial expenditure, food and drink, technology, leisure activities, personal traits and values.

In Quick Pulse surveys, Passport Survey reaches out to Euromonitor's network of in-country analysts and in-house researchers around the world in order to find out more about current consumer attitudes and habits on a wide variety of topics, from economic outlook to daily activities.

Fonte: CreativeBloq, 24 May 2012. [Portal] Disponível em:
<<http://blog.euromonitor.com/2012/05/top-10-consumer-trends-for-2012-weight-as-a-hot-topic.html>> Acesso em: 25 May 2012.