New Generation Gastronomy: A Literature Review on Generation Z's Approach to Gastronomy

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Abstract

This study aims to provide an overview of the gastronomic interests of Generation Z (Gen Z), which in this context is defined as people born from 1997 to 2010. Being raised in the digital age, Gen Z interprets food as a means of sustenance and something sustainable, is digitized, is an experience, ethically conscious, and health-focused. This study is based on the extensive qualitative literature review of publications between 2018 and 2025, selected using keywords, which include Generation Z and gastronomy, digital food culture, sustainable eating behaviours, functional foods, ethical food consumption, and Gen Z consumer attitudes, using databases like Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect. The qualitative findings indicated that a significant portion of Gen Z citizens showed a deliberate and value-based attitude to gastronomy, preferring innovative and experience-based consumption patterns. Moreover, this generation shaped gastronomy sector through online activities and moral tastes. The findings suggest that gastronomy stakeholders and educators should create approaches and programs that resonated with the values and digitally focused lifestyles of Gen Z and new trends in sustainable and ethical food consumption.

Keywords: Digitalization, Gastronomy, Generation Z, Sustainability, Functional nutrition.

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1. Introduction

Gastronomy has traditionally been a means of studying nutritional needs, an instrument of cultural expression and social identification, and functions as an economic activity. It is a formidable cultural index that can tell the history, geography, beliefs, customs, and identity of a community. In this context, gastronomy is a multidimensional science that embraces lifestyles, values, and aesthetic knowledge.

Today, it is not only limited to the kitchen but also an area that is influenced by other spheres like media, tourism, digitalization and sustainability. Generational differences are another critical element in these changes, and Generation Z is a prime example of this phenomenon. Generation Z, commonly defined as individuals born after 1997 and before 2010, represents the first cohort to grow up entirely in the digital era. Although some sources define Gen Z as those born after 2000, this study uses the broader range from 1997 to include early adopters of digital technologies who have shaped current consumption patterns (Dimock, 2019; Turner, 2015).

The generation is making a new paradigm in the world of gastronomy. Being raised with digital technologies directly influencing their progress, this generation surrounds technology and digital communication in almost all spheres of life, including food. Gen Z views food not necessarily as a physiological need but as an experience area, where identity is formed, social presence is attained and individual values are asserted and disseminated through social media. In everyday life, there is the habit of posting photos of aesthetically prepared food on Instagram, viewing recipe videos on TikTok, publishing reviews of restaurants on YouTube, and similar activity on Facebook or Pinterest. Furthermore, the role of influencers, foodies, and the creators of gourmet content, who influence the food preferences of Generation Z, direct them to the new trends, ethical food choices, and innovative cuisine experiences can be noticed (Seemiller & Grace, 2019).

Sustainability, environmental awareness, ethical production, and other issues are also very sensitive to

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the Generation Z. Issues like animal welfare in food production, carbon footprints, contributing to local producers and avoidance of food waste directly influence the consumption choice of this generation. The growing popularity of vegan and vegetarian diets is not only motivated by the pursuit of a healthy life, but also by moral and environmental issues. Generation Z is not only interested in 'what' food is, but also "how" and 'where' it is produced (Kristia et al., 2024). On the other hand, experience orientation is also a significnat source of motivation for this generation. Generation Z individuals prefer to have unforgettable experiences and socialise by sharing these experiences instead of ordinary consumption. This situation creates the need for differentiation in the food and beverage sector and supports new trends, such as gastronomy tourism, Street foods and pop-up restaurants. The classical restaurant concept is being replaced by new concepts based on experience-oriented, visual aesthetics and storytelling (Gajić et al., 2025). In conclusion, Generation Z's approach to gastronomy is a reflection of the transformation in social values, technological developments and the search for sustainability. This generation redefines its relationship with food not only in the dimension of consumption but also in cultural, digital and ethical framework. It creates lasting effects in the gastronomy world.

2. Methodology

This was a qualitative literature review research formulated to examine the attitude of generation Z towards gastronomy considering this background on issues of digitalization, sustainability, ethical consumption of food, and health-oriented nutrition. The assumptions were based on the secondary sources of data, including the recent scholarly articles, industry reports and international journals of peer review. The priority was given to articles that were published between 2018 and 2024, with a particular preference to current resources that were published in 2024 and 2025, as they were more focused on the issues related to the consumer behavior of Generation Z, gastronomy trends, digital food culture, and sustainable food systems. Data sources selection was systematic and involved the use of relevant keywords to ensure that the most recent and topic-relevant studies were selected. The literature review will represent the current trends and help obtain an evidence-based insight into the new trends in gastronomy and food consumption among Generation Z. Among the key words were such expressions as Generation Z and gastronomy, digital food culture, sustainable eating behaviours, functional foods, ethical food consumption and Gen Z consumer attitudes. The search in the literature was carried out with the help of academic data sources that included Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and Science Direct. The emphasis of the inclusion criteria was on the peer-reviewed publications directly related to the topic and current. A descriptive approach was employed to analyze the collected information, with conclusions from different sources examined comparatively to create an integrative picture of Generation Z's gastronomic habits. Although this study will synthesize knowledge on different dimensions, it should be pointed out that a definite comparison is not always possible under all thematic headings. This methodology transcends a simple compilation of existing material by allowing a thematic content analysis of the data that has been collected. The main research weakness is that this study is based on literature, without direct observations or empirical data. Nevertheless, this limitation is partially mitigated by providing a systematic and comprehensive account of existing academic knowledge, thereby establishing a solid foundation for future research in the field.

3. Key Characteristics and Consumption Behaviour of Generation Z

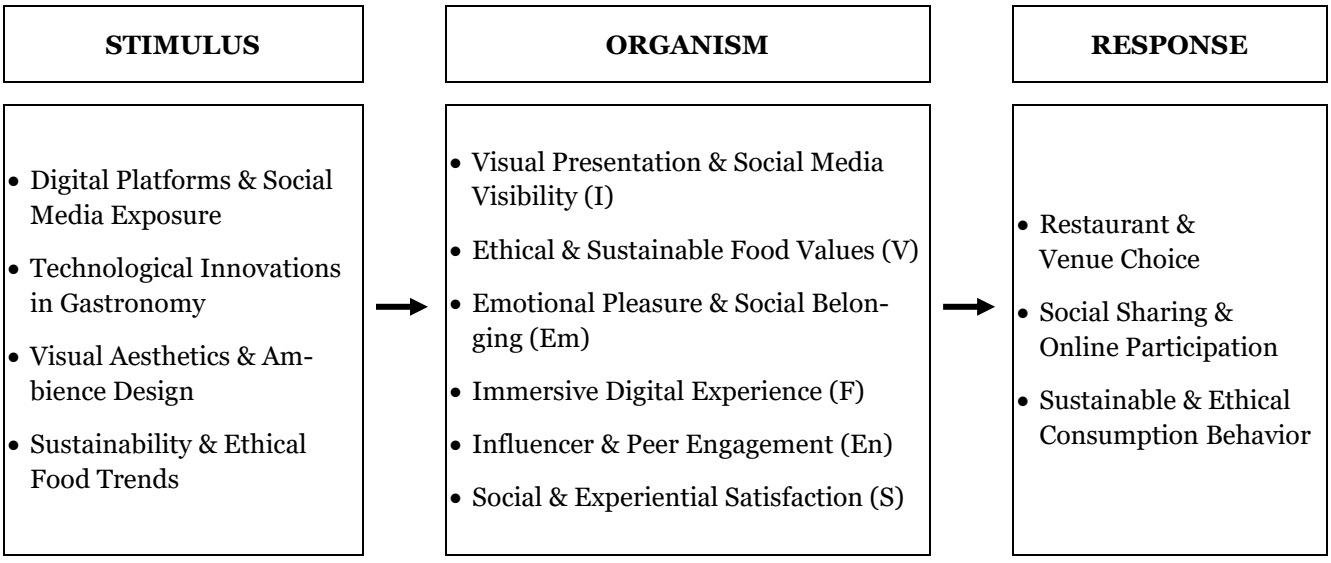
Generation Z consists of individuals who have grown up directly connected with the digital world, have high technology literacy, are individuality-oriented and have strong environmental awareness. This generation seeks harmony with the functionality of the product and the brand's values. Research shows that Generation Z prioritises environmental sustainability, ethical production and social responsibility criteria in their purchasing behaviour (First Insight, 2024). According to a global study conducted by Nielsen (2021), 70% of Generation Z wants to know that the products they buy come from environmentally friendly and sustainable sources. However, not only taste or price, but also the digital visibility, social media performance and environmental impact of the business are decisive in restaurant and brand preference. This generation, especially active on social media platforms, tends to make decisions based on other user comments, visual shares and digital experiences (Priporas et al., 2017). Along with that, social awareness and sensitivity of brands towards social problems, diversity and inclusion policy is closely followed by Generation Z, which directly impacts the buying process (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Here, in contrast to the classical consumption pattern, Generation Y has a more conscious and value-oriented digitalised consumer

image that causes revolutionary changes, in particular, in the sphere of gastronomy and service industry (Kuscher, 2025).

4. The Relationship between Experience and Digitalization in Gastronomy

Consumption of food has become an experience, a sight, and even a social act with each generation: with Generation Z, food consumption is not simply a bodily need, but it has become an experiential, visual, and social affair. This generation views gastronomy as the way of personal satisfaction that can be used not only to engage in social interactions but also as a way of expression of individual identity using digital channels. The Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube platforms are the main factors that affect the preferences of food and beverage among Gen Z in their study on how digitalization affects the gastronomic environment, Pencarelli et al. (2023) note a tendency of Gen Z to share their eating experience and create content rich in pictures. This trend has influenced the reshaping of various elements, such as patterns in menu, interior decoration, and presentation, to suit appearance in the visual sharing on the social media. Furthermore, the concept of digitalization, such as augmented reality (AR) menus, the possibility to have a virtual tour of a restaurant, online reservation, QR code menu, digital screens, owndo kiosk, and mobile order apps are direct answers to the need of this generation to be immersed in the dining experience (Pantano & Gandini, 2017). These applications do not only make the interaction more interesting but also offer convenience, interaction, and shareable moments which resonate with the digital-first lifestyle of Gen Z. Gen Z is likely to digitalise the whole experience of dining, including the presentation of food and its mood, and they broadcast this procedure through social media and make the gastronomic process a performance on social media (Daradkeh et al. 2023). Consequently, food consumption has ceased being an individual affair but it has become a social and culturally stimulating experience. The process of digitalization, specifically such applications as TikTok and Instagram, promotes the exchange of food experience and has contributed to the redesign of various parameters, including menu layout and the decoration of the interior. Indicatively, a survey shows that 55% of the TikTok users indicate that after viewing the menu of a restaurant in the platform, they are more likely to visit it (Opena & Dudkiewicz, 2025). Moreover, 45 percent of Gen Zers use social media to research a recipe and eat out or cook before they eat (Jang et al., 2024). These finding help clearly understand how digitalization and social media are transforming the relationship between the Gen Z with food and the gastronomic experience.

The relationship discussed above can be explained through the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) model proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). This model hypothesizes that behavior is affected by external stimuli which subsequently impact internal thought processes and affective processes. Figure 1 in this context shows the impact of digitalization in the



** I: Image, V: Value, Em: Emotion, F: Flow, En: Engagement, S: Satisfaction.*

Figure 1. The relationship between digitalization and gastronomic experience of Generation Z

gastronomic experiences of the Generation Z in the S-O-R framework. Considering them within the framework of the correlation between digitalization and gastronomic experience, Digital Platforms and Social Media Exposure, Technological Innovations in Gastronomy, Visual Aesthetics and Ambience Design, and Sustainability and Ethical Food Trends can be viewed as stimuli that influence the perceptions of individuals. The internal processes (organism) triggered by these stimuli include Visual Presentation and Social Media Visibility, Ethical and Sustainable Food Values, Emotional Pleasure and Social Belonging, Immersive Digital Experience as well as Influencer and Peer Engagement. Consequently, the behavioral responses (response), such as Restaurant and Venue Choice, Social Sharing and Online Participation, and Sustainable and Ethical Consumption Behavior are affected by these internal states.

5. Sustainability and Ethical Consumption Trends

Gen Z is more conscious and sensitive towards ethical and sustainable consumption than past generations. Their eating habits are closely connected with the problem of sustainable agriculture, animal welfare, decreasing carbon footprint, and local production. As written in the consumer trends report by Mintel (2022), the representatives of Generation Z consider vegan and plant-based products as healthier options and a way to express their moral values. This has made a tremendous impact on the menus of the restaurants, most of which have been launching vegan, plant-based, and ethically sourced dishes to satisfy their demands. Also, as Sarker et al. (2022) suggest, food waste appears to be an issue of growing concern among many Generation Z individuals, making zero-waste kitchens increasingly relevant. In addition to veganism, this generation shows a notable interest in organic foods, fair-trade products, and items identified as sustainable. The ability to produce products in a nature-friendly way, pack them in eco-friendly formats, and reduce waste has become one of the value propositions of companies catering to this audience. In addition, Generation Z is loyal to ethical brands, asking about environmental efforts and dismissing the allegations of greenwashing (De Jong et al., 2020). Through this, Generation Z has been changing the gastronomy not only in taste and presentation but also by incorporating ethics and environmental issues in the production and consumption of food and the general culture of gastronomy. For example, the restaurant sector must aim at establishing more transparent and sustainable supply chains since Gen Z consumers are very attentive to ethical and ecological concerns (Priporas et al., 2017; Fromm and Read, 2018). Additionally, the practice of using digital technologies and sustainable practices could be introduced to the curriculum of culinary educational institutions to improve the future professionalism of students capable of addressing the needs of this generation (Turner, 2015; Djafarova & Bowes, 2021).

6. Health-oriented and Functional Food Preferences

The active lifestyle of Generation Z is a physical necessity and one of the major features of their identity and value system. This generation is more attracted to the products that can be described as healthy in terms of their nutritional value and, therefore, prefer gluten-free, low-sugar, low-carb, organic, and probiotics-enriched products. Gen Z consumers have paid much attention to functional foods that enhance their immune and digestive health, including spirulina, chia seeds, matcha, and kombucha (Philippe et al., 2021). This result has forced most products within the gastronomy industry, such as restaurant chains and cafes to adjust their products. According to research, Generation Z attaches great importance to the utility and possible health-related benefits of food, in addition to taste (Röös et al., 2021). Furthermore, the representatives of this generation do not just read the nutrition labels, but also use the provided information to make their purchasing choices. In this case, health and functional food preferences arise within the framework of the holistic approach that involves personal well-being and is supported by the long-term quality of life and sustainability principles. The label reading behavior of Generation Z is one of strict interest in the products' ingredients, nutritional value, and ethical aspects, showing a more active attitude to food choice. Also, their attitudes towards dietary supplements are determined by the complex of being health-conscious and socially influenced, which results in their ambivalent attitude towards supplementation.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Generation Z is present as consumers in gastronomy and also a driving force transforming the sector due to their digital lifestyles, preferences, and values. Their attitude towards gastronomy is the truly health-conscience mind driven by environmental and ethical factors and is tightly connected with digital technologies. In contrast to the classical consumption

habits, Generation Z does not see eating as a physiological necessity, but as an experience and lifestyle and a kind of personal expression that can be easily manifested on social media. Sustainable agriculture, animal welfare, zero-waste kitchens, functional foods, and digital dining experiences are some of the trends that are transforming the gastronomy industry as it adapts to the demands of this generation. Thus, it is suggested that restaurants, cafe chains, chefs, and gastronomy entrepreneurs will make the menus, service concepts, and marketing strategies based on the values of Generation Z. Cooperation with the local producers and utilizing seasonal and sustainable products, eco-friendly packaging, online booking systems, and augmented reality (AR) menus are some of the strategies capable of attracting and retaining Generation Z customers. Similarly, gastronomic educational establishments should not be dominated by conventional cooking technologies. However, they should incorporate some of the latest subjects in their coursework like sustainable kitchen operations, digital gastronomy, and functional food design. Notably, Generation Z will also gain access to the gastronomy industry as customers and as professionals, entrepreneurs, and content creators of the future. Therefore, further research is needed to explore how Generation Z can evolve into producers, with attention to gastronomic entrepreneurship, sustainable entrepreneur models, and digital gastronomy. Cooperation among universities, governmental and commercial organizations can promote community-based and environmentally-aware gastronomy systems which will adhere to the values of Generation Z. Finally, Generation Z is transforming modern gastronomy not only but is also the most important generation that shapes its future. Their expectations are key to developing a viable gastronomic culture.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The author declares that they have no financial or non-financial competing interests.

Author's Contributions

T. Soyadlı (0009-0008-3987-2611): *Conceptualization, Methodology, Literature Search, Data Curation, Writing – Original Draft, Review & Editing, Supervision.*

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