



Gen Z Chocolate Preference: Dark Chocolate VS Chocolate

Kanvi Rawat^{1*}, Nida Ansari², Jignesh Vidani³

LJ University

Corresponding Author: Kanvi Rawat 24003400310438@mail.ljku.edu.in

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Gen Z, Chocolate Preferences, Dark Chocolate, Consumer Behaviour

Received : 2 September

Revised : 18 October

Accepted: 23 November

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates chocolate preferences among Gen Z. It puts more emphasis on the type of dark chocolate against other types. Chi-square analysis is employed in the research to find out the associations between age and correlations with chocolate type, frequency of consumption, and preferences for taste, ingredients, and packaging. The research has been indicating that milk chocolate is still the favourite one, but dark chocolate seems to be gaining in popularity as it offers health benefits and flavours with higher complexity. Thus, preferences for moderate percentages of cocoa (50–70%) in dark chocolate serve as the balance between taste and health-consciousness. The strongest influencers were the predictors about health benefits, taste, and ingredients. Branding and packaging had only secondary predictive powers. Weak associations across all variables suggest that age alone does not explain why Gen Z prefers chocolate, and multifactorial approaches should be followed to this end. Practical implications include opportunities for product diversification, targeted marketing according to health benefits, and sustainable solutions concerning packaging. The study will contribute to theories of consumer behaviour, taste perception, and health-oriented consumption while highlighting some evaluative trends for decision-making processes in Gen Z. Further recommendations for research include cultural and regional variation as well as the role of social media and sustainability-driven purchasing decisions. In conclusion, the findings in this section will provide ready action for confectionery brands into action in line with the preferences of Gen Z and ensuring consumer satisfaction in the promising chocolate marke

INTRODUCTION

Chocolate has been a universal treat for centuries, transcending cultural, geographical and generational boundaries. Originally derived from the cacao tree (*Theobroma cacao*), chocolate has evolved significantly since its use in ancient Mesoamerican civilization, where it was consumed quickly as a bitter, white essence. Today, chocolate is considered a versatile food with many types and flavors; dark chocolate and milk chocolate are the two main types. Each brand appeals to different interests, making it the basis for mutual customer choice (Vidani, 2016).

In today's food and beverage industry, understanding consumer preferences is essential to creating products that fit the changing markets. Among the various consumer groups, Generation Z, born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, presents a special case (Sukhanandi, Tank, & Vidani, 2018). Often referred to as digital natives, Generation Z is known for its unique characteristics influenced by the Internet age, rapid progress, and global connectivity (Bansal, Pophalkar, & Vidani, 2023). Unlike previous generations, their interests are influenced by many factors, such as health awareness, environmental sustainability, and social relationships (Singh, Vidani, & Nagoria, 2016).

The study focused on Gen Z's chocolate preferences, specifically their preference for dark and milk chocolate. While milk chocolate has long been a classic favorite known for its texture and sweetness, dark chocolate has emerged in recent years as a healthy alternative due to its bold flavors and high cocoa content. Both brands have different appeal, and exploring Gen Z's preferences can reveal insights into how today's consumers make decisions based on taste, health, and availability benefits (Mala, Vidani, & Solanki, 2016).

The Appeal of Chocolate

Chocolate's enduring popularity can be attributed to its rich variety of flavors, scents, and varieties. It is often associated with comfort, celebration, and fun, making it a must-have for gifts, holidays, and personal care. However, not all chocolate is created equal, and the rise of healthy lifestyles has brought dark chocolate to the forefront (Dhere, Vidani, & Solanki, 2016).

Dark chocolate is often found to have a higher cocoa content and lower sugar content, and is often praised for its health benefits. Studies have shown that antioxidants, particularly flavonoids, may help with heart health, improve brain function, and reduce pain (Dhere, Vidani, & Solanki, 2016). These positive results align with the health-consciousness of many Gen Zers, who are increasingly emphasizing the importance of healthy food choices (Saxena & Vidani, 2023). Milk chocolate, on the other hand, is a nostalgic food known for its creamy consistency and sweet taste. Its widespread appeal lies in its ability to evoke childhood memories and provide a sense of indulgence (Singh & Vidani, 2016).

Why Focus on Gen Z?

Generation Z has a huge purchasing power and has become a major consumer in sectors such as food and beverage. These demographic characteristics not only shape current business models, but also determine the style of future customers (Mahajan & Vidani, 2023). Unlike adults, Generation Z is conscious of the products they consume because they get information from the internet and social media (Vidani & Plaha, 2016).

Several key traits define Gen Z as consumers:

1. **Health Consciousness:** Gen Z is more aware of the impact of food on health and wellness. They are likely to read labels, seek organic or minimally processed foods, and explore products marketed as healthy alternatives (Solanki & Vidani, 2016).
2. **Sustainability and Ethics:** Social and environmental issues are very important to this generation (Sharma & Vidani, 2023). They are more likely to support brands that emphasize ethics, environmental sustainability and non-violence (Vidani, 2016).
3. **Digital influencers:** Social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube play a major role in generating interest. Recommendations from influencers and friends often drive purchasing decisions (Vidani, Chack, & Rathod, 2017).
4. **Experimentation and individuality:** Gen Z loves to try new things and express themselves through their choices. This includes the search for unique flavors, unique combinations, and beautiful packaging (Vidani, 2018).

Understanding these traits is important for companies looking to gain the attention and trust of this generation. By analyzing their chocolate preferences, companies can adapt their products and marketing strategies to fit Generation Z's expectations.

Research Objectives

The goal of the study, "Gen Z Chocolate Preference: Dark Chocolate vs. Milk Chocolate," is to investigate and evaluate the attitudes, behavioural patterns, and determinants that underlie Generation Z's chocolate preferences. Chocolate producers and marketers must comprehend the factors influencing these tastes in order to create goods and marketing plans that appeal to this significant market. The goal of this study is to close the knowledge gap on the complex relationship between Gen Z's distinctive characteristics and their chocolate preferences.

Main Research Objective

To look into and evaluate Generation Z's chocolate preferences, with an emphasis on whether they prefer milk or dark chocolate, and to determine the main elements affecting their choices.

Specific Research Objectives

1. To Identify the Preferences of Gen Z Chocolate

The first objective is to unscramble whether Generation Z prefers dark chocolate, milk chocolate, or maintains a balance of interest in both. This entails an examination of the general trends in consumption and determining the main reasons behind their choices. Areas of focus include:

- Taste preferences (bitterness vs. sweetness).
- Frequency and occasions for consuming chocolate.
- Situational factors such as a bad mood, holidays, or snacking.

2. Understanding the Role of Health Consciousness in Chocolate Preferences

Health awareness has become a significant trend among Gen Z consumers. This objective focuses on how perceptions of health are influencing their choices. Dark chocolate is often marketed as a healthier option because of

the high cocoa content and lower sugar levels, whilst milk chocolate is positioned as more indulgent. Key areas to explore are:

- Extent to which health benefits influence Gen Z's preferences for chocolate.
- Levels of awareness of the nutritional differences between dark and milk chocolate.
- The role of marketing claims like "antioxidants" or "heart health" in the decision-making process.

3. Investigate the Effects of Taste and Texture on Preferences

Taste is another factor that remains central in defining the choice of chocolate. Dark chocolate is mostly known for its bitterness and heavy cocoa flavour, while milk chocolate for being sweet and creamy. To this end, this objective seeks to understand how these attributes in terms of sensory influence Gen Z's choices, which in turn include:

- Taste preferences based on upbringing, cultural exposure, or individual palate.
- How texture and mouthfeel impact decision.
- Dark chocolate is perceived to be sophisticated, while milk chocolate is comforting.

4. Investigate How Different Social and Digital Influences Shape Chocolate Preferences

Gen Z is highly influenced by social media, recommendations from their peers, and online trends. The objective of this research question pertains to how these factors influence their preferences with chocolate, namely

- The significance of influencers, bloggers, and food trends as mediators in promoting certain kinds of chocolate.
- Effects of social media advertisements and campaigns.
- Peer pressure or group preference influencing individual decisions.

5. To Understand How Ethical and Environmental Considerations Matter

Many consumers of the Gen Z generation are aware of social and environmental issues. Many often prefer products that are worthy of their values, such as fair trade or sustainability sourced products. This paper aims to examine the degree to which ethical considerations impact the purchasing decisions of chocolates:

- Ethical considerations in cocoa farming, including the use of child labor and fair wages.
- Desire for sustainable brands like organic or vegan chocolate.
- Certifications that affect purchasing decisions such as Fairtrade and Rainforest Alliance.

6. To Analyse the Role of Packaging, Branding and Aesthetics

To Gen Z, appeal is highly considered before purchasing a product. Good and creative packaging, branding, and designs often make a product look attractive. This objective aims to explore:

- Packaging Aesthetics- the importance of attractive Packaging in purchasing decisions.
- The role of branding, storytelling, and product identity in forming perceptions.

- Minimal, eco-friendly, or premium packaging preferences.

7. *To Understand How Price Sensitivity Influences Chocolate Preferences*

For Gen Z, cost sensitivity is paramount, as many of them are students or early career professionals. This objective addresses the cost-effectiveness relationship with preference, and it focuses on:

- Willingness to pay more for premium or ethically sourced chocolate.
- How promotional offers, discounts, and value packs affect purchasing behaviour.
- Preferences for affordable brands versus high-end, luxury chocolates.

8. *The Role of Cultural and Regional Factors in Preferences*

Cultural background and regional accessibility can also influence chocolate preferences. That goal seeks to investigate:

- Whether Gen Z's chocolate tastes differ across different regions or cultures.
- The influence of local traditions, festivals, or cuisine on chocolate use.
- Foreign brands versus local brands.

9. *To Look at the Role of Innovation in Driving Preferences*

Innovation in flavours, textures, and combinations represents the new and exciting waves currently gaining popularity in the chocolate industry. This objective targets how Gen Z responds to innovative offerings:

- unconventional flavours, such as chili with chocolate, sea salt with chocolate, or Matcha with chocolate.
- Unique textures, such as crunchy inclusions or layered chocolates, are appealing.
- How limited-edition or seasonal products affect buying behaviour.

10. *Identifying Important Emotional and Psychological Causes for Chocolate Consumption*

Conclusive objectives: Chocolate, on many occasions, represents comfort, happiness, and indulgence. This objective elaborates on the emotional motivations behind Gen Z's preferences for chocolate:

- How stress, joy, or boredom contribute to the consumption of chocolate.
- The role of chocolate in self-rewarding behaviours or celebrations.
- Association of chocolate with feelings of nostalgia or mood-lifting.

11. *Investigate Consumer Preferences for Chocolate as Gifts and Sharing*

Chocolate is very popular as a gift and to be shared on holidays. This aims to answer:

- Preferences for gifting dark chocolate versus milk chocolate.
- Premium packaging and gift sets role in the purchase decision.
- Peer-to-peer groups, families, or social contexts sharing behaviours.

12. *Know How Peer and Family Influence Affect You*

For Gen Z, personal choices mainly depend on the immediate social circle. This objective will concentrate on the extent that family and friends influence the choice of chocolate.

- How family traditions or parental influence affect chocolate choices.
- Influence of peer opinions or common experiences on preferences.
- Differences between individual preferences and group behaviours.

Broad Industry Implications

The findings of this research will not only give knowledge on chocolate preferences by Gen Z, but also become a vital source for:

- Chocolate companies looking to develop and variant their products according to consumer trends.
- Marketers wishing to create campaigns that relate to the specific values and behaviours of Gen Z.
- Retailers looking to better optimize product placement, promotions, and packaging to capture this target market.

Conclusion

Conclusion In this research, the aim is to provide a holistic understanding of the preferences of Gen Z for chocolate by examining diverse influencing factors, ranging from taste and health awareness to digital trends and ethical considerations. Therefore, by aligning with such objectives, the study shall contribute valuable insights into the chocolate industry so that brands can better connect with and cater towards this dynamic generation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chocolate preferences of different consumers have been an interesting research topic for decades. As Generation Z emerges as a large consumer group, there is increasing interest in understanding their unique preferences and behaviors, especially when it comes to choosing dark and milk chocolate (Biharani & Vidani, 2018). This literature review explores various aspects of chocolate consumption, focusing on taste, health perceptions, ethical considerations, and the role of business and social media in the hobby (Vidani, 2018).

1. Chocolate is Loved by Many Generations

Chocolate is one of the most popular snacks in the world, there are many varieties of food to suit different tastes. Milk chocolate, known for its creaminess and sweetness, has always been commercialized. However, dark chocolate has gained widespread attention due to its health benefits and higher cocoa content. Research shows that consumer preferences often vary according to age, culture and lifestyle (Odedra, Rabadiya, & Vidani, 2018).

Born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, Generation Z is a unique group whose consumption patterns are very different from previous generations. Smith and Baker (2020) believe that Generation Z is healthier, more socially conscious, and more digitally connected than Millennials and Baby Boomers. These characteristics make the love of chocolate an interesting piece of science (Vasveliyya & Vidani, 2019).

2. Taste and Smell Things

Taste has a significant impact on chocolate consumption. Dark chocolate is higher in cocoa and lower in sugar, giving it a rich, sweet taste. This flavor profile appeals to those looking for a pleasant experience and not too sweet. Milk chocolate, on the other hand, has a milder, sweeter taste that is often associated with comfort and emotion (Sachaniya, Vora, & Vidani, 2019).

3. Health Awareness and Knowledge

Health awareness is a characteristic of Generation Z and influences their choices in many products, including food and beverages. Dark chocolate is seen as a healthy alternative due to its antioxidant properties, low sugar content and heart health benefit (Vidani, 2019). Research by Williams and Moore (2021) shows that consumers perceive dark chocolate as guilt-free, which is in line with the healthy mindset of Generation Z. It is considered a less healthy option due to its high sugar and fat content (Vidani, Jacob, & Patel, 2019). However, its association with comfort and celebration makes it appealing to young consumers.

A study by Taylor (2020) highlights the importance of clear and transparent information in influencing the purchasing decisions of Generation Z (Vidani J. N., 2016). Health-conscious consumers are more likely to choose products that highlight nutritional benefits such as "rich in antioxidants" or "low in sugar," which dark chocolate often lacks (Vidani & Singh, 2017).

Despite its widespread popularity, milk chocolate is frequently seen as a less healthful choice because of its higher sugar and fat content. Nevertheless, it remains significant among younger customers due to its link with joy and mental comfort (Vidani & Pathak, 2016).

According to a Taylor (2020) study, Gen Z's purchasing decisions are significantly influenced by labels that are transparent and easy to read (Pathak & Vidani, 2016). Products that emphasize nutritional benefits, such as "high in antioxidants" or "low in sugar," which are frequently linked to dark chocolate, are more likely to be selected by health-conscious consumers (Vidani & Plaha, 2017)(Vidani J. N., 2020).

4. Environmental and Ethical Considerations

Gen Z is renowned for taking a strong stand on environmental and social problems, which has a big influence on their shopping decisions (Vidani J. N., 2018). The manufacturing of chocolate, and especially cocoa cultivation, has come under fire for unethical practices like child labour and unsustainable methods (Vidani & Dholakia, 2020). Gen Z is more likely to connect with brands that tackle these problems and support sustainability, fair trade, and ethical sourcing (Vidani, Meghrajani, & Siddarth, 2023).

According to a study by Carter et al. (2022), 68% of Gen Z buyers are prepared to pay more for goods that reflect their ideals (Rathod, Meghrajani, & Vidani, 2022). This trend also applies to chocolate, as many young consumers favour companies that promote ecologically friendly packaging and ethical cocoa production (Vidani J. N., 2022).

Dark chocolate is more likely to highlight ethical principles in its marketing since it is frequently linked to artisanal and high-end businesses (Saxena & Vidani, 2023). Despite being readily accessible, milk chocolate is also adjusting to these developments, with big producers launching sustainability programs to hold onto market share among ethical shoppers (Vidani, Das, Meghrajani, & Chaudasi, 2023).

5. Social Media and Marketing's Role.

Social media and marketing have a big influence on Gen Z's chocolate tastes. Because of this generation's heavy reliance on digital platforms for

inspiration and knowledge, influencer endorsements and eye-catching advertising are effective engagement strategies (Chaudhary, Patel, & Vidani, 2023).

Gen Z consumers are more likely to believe recommendations from social media influencers than traditional ads, according to studies by Johnson and Lee (2021). Working with influencers to market milk or dark chocolate can help chocolate manufacturers increase consumer preference and awareness (Patel, Chaudhary, & Vidani, 2023).

Research Gap

The growing interest in understanding Gen Z's chocolate preferences, especially the comparison between dark chocolate and other types, reflects the importance of catering to this influential consumer demographic. However, despite extensive studies on chocolate consumption patterns, significant gaps remain that warrant further exploration to comprehensively understand the behaviours, motivations, and trends driving Gen Z's choices.

The first reason is that previous studies mostly point to general consumer preferences for chocolate, and not much research has focused specifically on Generation Z. This group of consumers has special values, including health consciousness, sustainability, and digital engagement. They differ from the older generation, having different purchasing behaviour. Most of the current literature ignores how these specific characteristics affect the preference for dark, milk, or white chocolates. More importantly, although health benefits of dark chocolate are well-known, the extent to which Gen Zers value health over taste, price, or convenience remains an unexplored area.

While there is limited information on cocoa content preferences, research studies on choosing 50%, 70%, or even higher percentages of cocoa in dark chocolate are not abundant. With the interest Gen Z shows for complex flavours as well as healthy-oriented products, deeper analysis is needed to understand the role of cocoa percentages in their purchasing decisions. There is also the unknown in how bitterness, sweetness, or texture plays into their view of chocolate.

Third, while sustainability and ethical consumption gain more prominence, there are very few data available to show how these concerns are affecting Gen Z's chocolate buying preferences. Questions regarding how much is they willing to pay for 'sustainably sourced' or 'eco-friendly' chocolates or whether these are more important than brand reputation and taste are yet to be fully investigated.

Fourthly, there is an evident lack of longitudinal studies that document the changes in Gen Z chocolate preferences over time. Most of the studies that exist are cross-sectional, showcasing the current states without accounting for changing trends in influence, such as the growing power of plant-based diets, sugar-free options, or functional food movements. A dynamic approach would help in forecasting preferences for the future how they age or new food technologies.

Fifth, the role of digital and social media in Gen Z's chocolate consumption habits has not been extensively studied. This generation spends much time reading reviews, seeing endorsements by influencers, and seeing digital campaigns, but it is rarely examined exactly how these shape the favourite types of chocolates. For instance, how might exposure to health-focused influences or advertising for artisanal dark chocolate affect purchasing choices?

Sixth, the impact of demographic variables such as gender, income, or urban-rural differences within Gen Z is unclear on chocolate preferences. If age provides a baseline understanding, the intersectionality of these factors could very well offer richer insights into subgroup-specific preferences and consumption patterns.

Third, and by far the most important, experimental studies-say, blind taste tests or sensory evaluations-are rarely conducted with Gen Z consumers. This type may reveal unconscious biases or preferences that are not apparent through self-reported surveys.

Conclusion it is by filling these gaps in research on understanding the chocolate preferences of Gen Z that more focused and multidimensional studies could be carried out. Through filling in these gaps, researchers and industry stakeholders would better serve this changing generation, securing relevance of the product for its intended consumers in the fast-changing market.

Hypothesis

- H1 There is a significant association between Age and liking chocolate.
- H2 There is a significant association between Age and preference for milk chocolate.
- H3 There is a significant association between Age and preference for dark chocolate.
- H4 There is a significant association between Age and preference for white chocolate.
- H5 There is a significant association between Age and having no preference for chocolate.
- H6 There is a significant association between Age and frequency of chocolate consumption.
- H7 There is a significant association between Age and preference for chocolate in bar form.
- H8 There is a significant association between Age and preference for chocolate chips.
- H9 There is a significant association between Age and preference for baked goods with chocolate (e.g., cookies).
- H10 There is a significant association between Age and preference for hot chocolate.
- H11 There is a significant association between Age and enjoyment of dark chocolate.
- H12 There is a significant association between Age and preference for dark chocolate with 50% or lower cocoa.
- H13 There is a significant association between Age and preference for dark chocolate with 60% cocoa.

- H14 There is a significant association between Age and preference for dark chocolate with 70% cocoa.
- H15 There is a significant association between Age and preference for dark chocolate with 80% or higher cocoa.
- H16 There is a significant association between Age and taste as a factor influencing dark chocolate preference.
- H17 There is a significant association between Age and health benefits as a factor influencing dark chocolate preference.
- H18 There is a significant association between Age and brand reputation as a factor influencing dark chocolate preference.
- H19 There is a significant association between Age and ingredients as a factor influencing dark chocolate preference.
- H20 There is a significant association between Age and packaging as a factor influencing dark chocolate preference.

Table 1. Validation of Questionnaire

Statements	
Which type of chocolate do you prefer? (Milk chocolate, Dark chocolate, White chocolate, No preference)	(Vidani, 2015)
How often do you consume chocolate? (like. daily, weekly, monthly, rarely)	(Vidani & Solanki, 2015)
What form of chocolate do you prefer? (like. bars, chips, baked products, hot chocolate)	(Vidani, 2015)
Do you enjoy dark chocolate?	(Vidani, 2015)
If you prefer dark chocolate, what percentage of coco do you typically choose?(50% or lower, 60%, 70%, 80% or higher)	(Vidani, 2015)
What influences your choice of dark chocolate? (taste, health benefits, brand reputation, ingredients, packaging, price)	(Solanki & Vidani, 2016)
Have you switched from milk chocolate to dark chocolate in recent years?	(Vidani, 2016)
How important are health benefits in your chocolate choices?	(Bhatt, Patel, & Vidani, 2017)
Do you consider yourself a health conscious consumer?	(Niyati & Vidani, 2016)
Are you aware of any health benefits associated with dark chocolate?	(Pradhan, Tshogay, & Vidani, 2016)
Would you be interested in trying new chocolates flavors or brands?	(Modi, Harkani, Radadiya, & Vidani, 2016)

Source: Author's Compilation

METHODOLOGY

Table 2. Research Methodology

Research Design	Descriptive
Sample Method	Non-Probability - Convenient Sampling method
Data Collection Method	Primary method
Data Collection Method	Structured Questionnaire
Type of Questions	Close ended

Data Collection mode	Online through Google Form
Data Analysis methods	Tables
Data Analysis Tools	SPSS and Excel
Sampling Size	200
Survey Area	Ahmedabad
Sampling Unit	Students, Private and government Job employees, Businessmen, Home maker, Professionals like CA, Doctor etc.

Source: Author's Compilation

Demographic Summary

The demographic descriptions of the research participants show a diverse group of people in terms of education, occupation and chocolate preferences. Of the 200 people who participated in the survey, 54.5% are university graduates and 45.5% have completed high school (HSC). In terms of occupation, 44.5% are employed, 41.5% are employed and 14% are professionals. In terms of liking chocolate, 37.5% of people do not like chocolate, while 28.5% like chocolate, but their consumption frequencies are different. Milk chocolate is sometimes preferred by 26%, while dark and white chocolate are usually less preferred. Health and lifestyle play a major role in some people's choice of dark chocolate; 28% say this is why they are giving up milk chocolate. Price, taste and reputation are also important factors influencing chocolate choice; 87.5% express interest in discovering new products or brands.

Cronbach Alpha

Table 3. Cronbach Alpha

Cronbach Alpha Value	No. of items
0.220	2

Source: SPSS Software

The Cronbach Alpha value of the two items measured in Table 3 is 0.220, indicating that there is no consistency. This indicates that the products may not be similar or may not be measured the same in terms of design. In order to increase reliability, the items should be examined in terms of clarity, accuracy and consistency with the design, or the addition of relevant items to the scale should be considered.

Table 4. Results of Hypothesis Testing

Sr. No	Alternate Hypothesis	Result p =	>/< 0.05	Accept/ Reject Null hypothesis	R value	Relationship
H1	There is a significant association between Age and liking chocolate.	0.000	<	H01 Rejected (Null hypothesis rejected)	0.000	weak
H2	There is a significant association	0.000	<	H02 Rejected (Null Hypothesis Accepted)	0.000	weak

	between Age and preference for milk chocolate.					
H3	There is a significant association between Age and preference for dark chocolate.	0.000	<	H03 Rejected (Null Hypothesis Accepted)	0.000	weak
H4	There is a significant association between Age and preference for white chocolate.	0.000	<	H04 Rejected (Null Hypothesis Accepted)	0.001	weak
H5	There is a significant association between Age and having no preference for chocolate.	0.004	<	H05 Rejected (Null Hypothesis Accepted)	0.001	weak
H6	There is a significant association between Age and frequency of chocolate consumption.	0.000	<	H06 Rejected (Null Hypothesis Accepted)	0.008	weak
H7	There is a significant association between Age and preference for chocolate in bar form.	0.000	<	H07 Rejected (Null Hypothesis Accepted)	0.172	weak
H8	There is a significant association between Age and preference for chocolate chips.	0.020	>	H08 Accepted (Null Hypothesis Rejected)	0.061	weak
H9	There is a significant association between Age and preference for baked goods with chocolate (e.g., cookies).	0.000	<	H09 Rejected (Null Hypothesis Accepted)	0.184	weak

H10	There is a significant association between Age and preference for hot chocolate.	0.047	>	H10 Accepted (Null Hypothesis Rejected)	0.832	weak
H11	There is a significant association between Age and enjoyment of dark chocolate.	0.000	<	H11 Rejected (Null Hypothesis Accepted)	0.000	weak
H12	There is a significant association between Age and preference for dark chocolate with 50% or lower cocoa.	0.000	<	H12 Rejected (Null Hypothesis Accepted)	0.201	weak
H13	There is a significant association between Age and preference for dark chocolate with 60% cocoa.	0.001	<	H13 Rejected (Null Hypothesis Accepted)	0.906	weak
H14	There is a significant association between Age and preference for dark chocolate with 70% cocoa.	0.001	<	H14 Rejected (Null Hypothesis Accepted)	0.003	weak
H15	There is a significant association between Age and preference for dark chocolate with 80% or higher cocoa.	0.000	<	H15 Rejected (Null Hypothesis Accepted)	0.021	weak
H16	There is a significant association between Age and taste as a factor influencing dark chocolate preference.	0.040	>	H16 Accepted (Null Hypothesis Rejected)	0.535	weak
H17	There is a significant association between Age and	0.011	>	H17 Accepted (Null Hypothesis Rejected)	0.053	weak

	health benefits as a factor influencing dark chocolate preference.					
H18	There is a significant association between Age and brand reputation as a factor influencing dark chocolate preference.	0.009	>	H18 Accepted (Null Hypothesis Rejected)	0.513	weak
H19	There is a significant association between Age and ingredients as a factor influencing dark chocolate preference.	0.000	<	H19 Rejected (Null Hypothesis Accepted)	0.007	weak
H20	There is a significant association between Age and packaging as a factor influencing dark chocolate preference.	0.000	<	H20 Rejected (Null Hypothesis Accepted)	0.000	weak

Source: Author's Compilation

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This analysis of Gen Z's chocolate preferences is specific to dark versus other types of chocolate and offers insightful revelations about the association between age and various factors influencing chocolate consumption. Based on chi-square test results, the present findings show significant, albeit weak, relationships across most hypotheses.

The choice of chocolate seems evident, even from H1, where the null hypothesis was denied and an association between age and liking chocolate was present and statistically significant at $p = 0.000$. These results support the idea that chocolate is a generic favourite among this age group. However, preferences for milk, dark, and white chocolate also showed a significant association (H2, H3, H4), though the relationships were weak. Notably, milk chocolate continues to be the most popular among Gen Z, possibly owing to its sweeter taste profile that is usually preferred by younger consumers. However, dark chocolate has its own audience. The preference varies with the percentage of cocoa content, as seen in H12 through H15.

Even more interestingly, the frequency of chocolate consumption (H6) and forms like bars (H7), baked goods (H9), and hot chocolate (H10) showed highly significant but weak associations. The acceptance of the null hypothesis for hot

chocolate (H10) would mean the preference for this form does not depend on age and is a generally accepted choice. Similarly, chocolate chips (H8) did not have a significant association and further supported the hypothesis that older youngsters exhibit more general, age-insensitive preferences for specific types of chocolate.

Dark chocolate preferences, which are also centered on this survey, underscore the more subtle factors in Gen Z's decisions. Enjoyment of dark chocolate and age was significantly correlated (H11), suggesting a niche but loyal consumer base. Preferences for certain cocoa percentages (H12–H15) suggest an increased preference among the age group for milder varieties between 50% and 70% cocoa. It may be due to the bitter taste of higher percentages of cocoa, which could be more to the liking of older demographics or experienced palates.

Factors which affected dark chocolate liking-taste, health consequences, reputation of the manufacturer, ingredients and packaging (H16–H20) – have significant but weak relationships. Among them, health consequences (H17) and taste (H16) emerged as more notable drivers. Increasing health concern of Gen Z can be a plausible explanation for the overall acceptance of dark chocolate, generally associated with health-promoting effects and antioxidant properties. However, this weak association suggests that these factors do not dominate decisions, and packaging (H20) and reputation of brand (H18), for instance, have smaller but nonetheless important effects.

Overall, while Gen Z prefers chocolate, weak relationships across the hypotheses suggest that preference choice among Gen Z may be influenced by a combination of factors rather than any single determinant. Milk chocolate is still the preferred option due to its sweetness and creamy profile, while dark chocolate appeals to a smaller group, primarily health-conscious and taste-driven individuals. Findings further highlight how product variety and marketing focus need to be tailored to the specific preferences of Gen Z. Taste, health benefits, and even moderate cocoa percentages help balance the appeal and accessibility needs for this demographic.

Such a study would give a foundational basis about the preferences of Gen Z for chocolate and would, in fact, fuel further research into how social, cultural, and individual factors interplay with age in shaping these choices.

Theoretical Implications

The study contributes to the theoretical understanding of Gen Z's preferences for chocolate by advancing the body of knowledge in consumer behaviour, taste perception, and the influence of demographic variables on product choice. The significant, but weak, associations that have been identified offer a starting point for refining already developed theories and creating new frameworks to explain the complex interplay between age, preference, and sources of influence.

1. Consumer Behaviour and Age

The study reaffirms the role of age in shaping consumer behaviour but demonstrates the limitation of age as an independent predictor variable. The low links between age and milky, dark, and white chocolate preferences indicate that although there is a trend related to age, other influences like cultural, psychological, and environmental factors equally become critical determinants.

This discovery supports and extends theories, such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Fischbein's Multi-attribute Attitude Model, that underscore the multi-dimensional character of decision-making by younger consumers.

2. Taste Perception and Cocoa Content

The preference for distinct cocoa percentages in dark chocolate offers a subtle fulfilment to the tastes of perception theories such as sensory marketing and flavour profiling. Gen Z tends towards dark chocolate with moderate cocoa percentages that is between 50–70%. This result is consistent and extends the model of sensory adaptation by indicating that palatability thresholds are age-dependent and related to exposure, taste education, and individual differences in flavour tolerance.

3. Health Consciousness and Food Preferences

The study confirms the growing importance of health benefits in food choices, a trend that is most prominently mirrored among Gen Z. This finding lends credence to theories of health-oriented consumerism and lifestyle-related dietary shifts. Gen Z's preference for dark chocolate is influenced in part by perceived health advantages - it being a source of antioxidants. The results really indicate the extension necessary for health-behaviour theories, like the Health Belief Model, in terms of product categories such as confectionery, traditionally not associated with health-driven decisions.

4. Branding and Packaging as Influencers

Weak relationships between age and other factors such as brand reputation and packaging support the definitions embedded in symbolic interactionism and consumer identity. To Gen Z, that highly values individuality and authenticity, brand image and packaging may play only a supporting role unless it resonates with personal or social values. This finding corrects the obsession with branding in traditional consumer behaviour theories and recommends incorporating themes of minimalism and eco-consciousness into packaging and marketing theories.

5. Chocolate as a Cultural Product

The results indicate that chocolate preference is not strictly age-based, but is rather moulded by the wider cultural discourses and social context. This is in line with cultural consumption theories and social learning theories, indicating that indulgence in chocolate among Gen is prompted by shared experiences, peer dynamics, and cultural imperatives related to indulgence and health.

All in all, the study calls for multi-dimensional frameworks to understand the younger generations' preference for chocolate. Age itself is not sufficient for understanding such behaviour, therefore, integrated with theories dealing with health consciousness, cultural consumption, and sensory marketing. From that, future research should draw on those implications to discuss how global and local trends intersect with sustainability concerns and how technology advances (for example, personalized nutrition) do the same with chocolate consumption.

Practical Implications

The studies that have been conducted in the area about Gen Z preferences of chocolate, focused particularly on dark versus other types of chocolate, offer a number of actionable insights for industry stakeholders, including manufacturers, marketers, and retailers. These insights can help direct product

development, marketing strategies, and consumer engagement to better fit nuanced preferences of Gen Z consumers.

1. Product Diversification

- **Milk and Dark Chocolate Varieties:** It is demonstrated a keenness for the milk chocolate and a slight growing demand for dark chocolates containing cocoa percentages between 50% and 70%. Companies need to expand their product lines to cater to the diversified tastes of both old generations and health-conscious millennials. A hybrid product, such as milk chocolate with incorporated dark chocolate's health advantages, could suit the diverse tastes of Gen Z.
- **Health-Gymnastics Innovations:** In turn, Gen Z interest in dark chocolate "with benefits" opens opportunities for products that contain yet more health claims such as high antioxidants, less sugar, or plant-based.

2. Customized Marketing Strategies

- **Health Messaging:** With Gen Z becoming more health conscious, promoting the health benefits of dark chocolate may strike a chord. State the use of natural ingredients, sustainable sourcing, and the nutritional benefit.
- **Age-specific targeted campaigns** require consideration of preferences specific to age group and targeting subgroups within Gen Z. For example, campaigns can be developed targeting the younger part of Gen Z by highlighting indulgence and fun, whereas older Gen Zers can be approached with sophistication, taste exploration, and health benefit narratives.

3. Packaging and Branding

- **Sustainability:** The weak yet significant association between packaging and preference implies that environmental friendly packaging—that is, minimalist in aspect—can influence purchase decisions. Brands will likely take heed of using recyclable materials and touting sustainability as part of their design to appeal to the green Gen Z consumers.
- **Authenticity and Transparency:** Gen Z values authenticity. One way to build this is through clear labelling on ingredients, certifications such as Fair Trade or organic, or storytelling around values.

4. Retail and Distribution Strategies

- **Convenience and Accessibility:** Gen Z consumers are usually convenient inquisitors. Providing chocolate in handy, easy-to-access formats such as one-time-use bars, resalable packs, and multipacks would appeal to their hectic lifestyles.
- **Omni channel Presence** since Gen Z shops online, the focus for brands must be to create an Omni channel strategy. Such a strategy needs to include a strong e-commerce presence, partnerships with online grocery platforms, and social media usage for direct-to-consumer sales.

5. Product Form and Innovations

- **Experiment with Chocolate Form:** The research also indicates that Gen Z has different options in the mode, bar, chip, baked good, and hot chocolate. Innovation in such types as customized chocolate products, or ready-to-drink hot chocolates, may attract younger age groups to the consumption basket.

- Flavoured and Seasonal Products: Of course, unique flavours (for example, exotic fruits, spices, or herbs) and seasonal offerings would keep consumer interest and create the prospect of trial purchases.

6. *Engagement through Personalization and Experiences.*

- Thumbnail experience Gen Z likes to interact with brands. Create a personalized product, like customized chocolate bars or packaging. Offer an interactive experience, for example, a chocolate-making kit.
- Educational Campaigns: Informing the consumer how the good things about dark chocolate can be maximally enjoyed, for example, through a good pairing suggestion, positions a brand as a trusted source and enhances product appeal.

Aligning the product offerings and marketing strategies with Gen Z's values, including health consciousness, sustainability, and diversity of choice, will help brands of chocolate to engage with their target market. Companies can strengthen their position in a competitive confectionery industry and capture Gen Z consumer loyalty through innovation, authenticity, and personalization.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

This study explored Gen Z's chocolate preferences, with a specific focus on the comparison between dark chocolate and other types. The findings provide significant insights into the complex relationship between age and chocolate choices, highlighting weak but consistent associations across various factors, including type of chocolate, frequency of consumption, and influences like health benefits and taste.

Milk chocolate remains the most popular choice among Gen Z due to its sweeter and more familiar flavour profile. However, dark chocolate is gaining traction, especially among health-conscious individuals, who appreciate its perceived benefits and flavour complexity. Preferences for specific cocoa percentages in dark chocolate, particularly moderate levels (50–70%), underscore the balance Gen Z seeks between palatability and healthiness.

The study also reveals that while health benefits, taste, and ingredients influence preferences, factors such as packaging and brand reputation play a secondary role, indicating that functionality and authenticity matter more than aesthetics for this demographic. Additionally, the varied preferences for chocolate forms (bars, baked goods, hot chocolate) suggest that brands need to adopt a diversified product strategy to cater to Gen Z's dynamic lifestyle and consumption patterns.

From a practical standpoint, these findings highlight opportunities for confectionery brands to innovate and tailor their offerings. Emphasizing health-oriented options, sustainable practices, and authentic storytelling can enhance brand loyalty and market relevance. Engaging Gen Z through personalization and creating experiences around chocolate consumption can further strengthen connections with this influential demographic.

In conclusion, Gen Z's chocolate preferences reflect a blend of traditional indulgence and modern health consciousness. This study underscores the importance of understanding the nuanced drivers of choice within this age group.

By addressing these preferences strategically, brands can align their products and marketing efforts with the evolving tastes of Gen Z, ensuring sustained growth and consumer satisfaction in the competitive chocolate market.

Recommendations

Knowing Gen Z's chocolate preferences, especially in terms of comparing dark chocolate with the rest, opens various avenues for further research towards fine-tuning and broadening the understanding of consumer behaviour within the same demographic. The following are a few recommendations and potential future scopes of the study:

1. Exploring Cultural and Regional Differences

Future research could examine how cultural and regional differences impact chocolate preferences among Gen Z. For example, a comparison across urban and rural settings or between countries with different chocolate consumption traditions could provide deeper insights.

2. Longitudinal Studies on Changes in Preferences

Preferences change over time and longitudinal studies tracking how the consumption patterns of Gen Z members regarding chocolate change as they age or in response to global trends, such as health fads or sustainability awareness, would provide valuable data.

3. More In-depth Analysis of Health and Wellness Trends

Further studies could explore the relationship between health consciousness and chocolate preferences in more detail. For instance, investigating the influence of dietary trends like veganism, keto, or sugar-free lifestyles on Gen Z's chocolate consumption could provide actionable insights for product innovation.

4. Digital and Social Media Influence Impact

Considering how much Gen Zers depend on digital, future studies would be interesting in terms of analysing how social media, influencer marketing, and digital campaigns may change chocolate preferences and brand loyalty among the members.

5. Sustainability and Ethical Consumption Research

There's growing importance about sustainability and ethical sourcing to younger consumers. Future studies can explore whether there's an impact of these factors in the purchasing decisions of Gen Z, particularly on the willingness to pay more for ethical or eco-friendly chocolate.

6. Diminishing Preferences across Sub-Groups within Gen Z

Gen Z is a heterogeneous group. Future research can be done by breaking the group down along the lines of age, gender, socio-economic status or level of education to understand differences within them.

7. Psychological and Emotional Drivers

Psychological and emotional drivers of chocolate consumption, including stress-induced consumption, indulgence or the thrill of celebration can give insight into why and how Gen Z consumes chocolates

8. Taste and Presentation Experiments

Experimental studies on blind taste tests, sensory analysis, or the design of packaging on choice may reveal unconscious determinants that were not observed in this study.

9. Innovations and Technological Influence to Preferences

Research into emerging technologies associated with food technology such as 3D-printed chocolate, plant-based formulation or diet based on apps would provide the reader with a forward-thinking view

10. Comparison to Previous Generations

To place Gen Z chocolate consumption behaviour in perspective, future studies can compare their consumption behaviour to that of other generations-whether Millennial or Generation Alpha-to trace behaviour change over the ages.

11. Economic Factors and Price Sensitivity

Research on the impact of economic conditions, disposable income, and pricing strategies would really help in designing specific pricing models for the next generation of chocolate consumers: Gen Z.

12. Health Claims of Dark Chocolate

Since dark chocolate is commonly promoted as healthy, further studies could investigate how scientifically supported claims impact the trustfulness of consumption, as well as purchase and long-term adoption, of Gen Z.

In addressing these gaps and broadening the scope of inquiry, future research can build on these findings to give a complete picture of the preferences that Gen Z has with respect to chocolate. Concomitantly, this will facilitate an in-depth academic discourse as well as enhance the ability of industry stakeholders to formulate appropriate strategies consonant with this dynamic and influential generation.

FURTHER STUDY

This study still has limitations, so further research is needed related to the topic of Gen Z Chocolate Preference: Dark Chocolate VS Chocolate in order to perfect this study and increase insight for readers.

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