The Study of Technology-Based Restaurants And Generation Y

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Abstract

This research study determines the consumer interest in technology-based restaurants (TBR), due to the impact of the Generation Y. This research examines the association between consumer behavior preferences using two variables, technology and food, for an adolescent segment (ages 14-18) in Western Washington (U.S.A), rural Generation Y youth. A TBR is defined as a restaurant that utilizes entertainment technology as a service to the customers. The technological equipment could be Video gaming, the Internet, and/or MP3 docking stations. A non-TBR would utilize more traditional forms of entertainment such as pool, darts and ping-pong. Questionnaire results from a sample of 53 respondents yielded data relating technology-based entertainment to the restaurant industry. The questionnaire included factors such as; already owned technological equipment, preferred entertainment activities, location, price, frequency and menu. Results indicated an association between technology and food related to the TBR. Discussion and implications address how current restaurant owners or future owners might interpret the consumer profile results according to both age and cohort perspectives.

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An Overview of Technology Based Restaurants and Entertainment

A Technology Based Restaurant (TBR) is defined as a restaurant that utilizes entertainment technology as a service to its customers. The technological equipment for entertainment is among others, Video gaming, Internet, and/or MP3 docking stations. A non-TBR would utilize more traditional forms of entertainment such as pool, darts and ping-pong and standard television. With technology continuing to change and remain relevant moving into new venues it will be necessary for restaurants to keep up with the demand. Technological entertainment is continually making progress in coffee shops and restaurants without a true direction in consumer wants and needs. The establishments that have started implementation of the technological entertainment are already penetrating a new market by providing CD burners. MP3 stations and wireless connections. Unfortunately, their efforts to keep ahead of the digital world can have high operational costs associated with it. Investing in market analysis to determine demands of TBR's would help minimize mistakes and cut costs so restaurants can capture the spending power that Generation Y consumers are producing. According to the National Restaurant Association (2006) 15% of Echo Boomers (Generation Y, born between 1977 and 1994) have placed restaurant orders directly from self-service terminals, and 51% have used credit cards to pay for fast food. Though the Echo Boomer generation lags in spending, (mainly due to their age), what restaurant owners should be looking at is the percent of income spent at restaurants and the frequency of visits. As stated in the Generation Y and the Restaurant Business section of this document, the Echo Boomer spends 7.3% of their income on food away from home. This is an estimated 75 million dollars on average a year (Brooks, 2005). The world is rapidly changing with masses of the largest generation (Baby Boomers, generally Generation Y's parents) retiring and consumer trends changing from fast food to casual dinning

and greasy food consumption to healthy eating habits. The National Restaurant Association (2006) suggests that the restaurant industry continually review the changing trends. The growth of the Generation Y consumer demands are flourishing as the Baby Boomer Generation hits retirement. The digital demands of consumers are sweeping across the world bringing efficiency and immediate satisfaction to the TBRs.

The National Restaurant Association research shows that the \$511 billion dollar restaurant industry has grown rapidly from \$42.8 billion in the 1970's to \$185.1 billion in 1986, to \$308.2 billion in 1996. A growth rate of 5.1%, according to the National Restaurant Association, will have a lot to do with the Generation Y demand for integrating entertainment and fast food services.

Literature Review

Defining Generation Y

Generation Y is the largest generation since the Baby-Boomers at nearly 80 million, having one of the largest impacts on the entire segment of the economy across the world (CBS News, 2005). At three times the size of its Generation X predecessor, Generation Y represents a highly valued youth market (Koranteg, 2001). They have been called the Millennials, Generation Y, or most often the Echo Boomers, yet their title does not effect what they spend on consumer goods. For being the youngest generation they are spending nearly \$170 billion a year of their own money and their parents money (CBS News, 2005). The Echo Boomers are the first to grow up with a computer in the home, frequent online shopping and having the Internet as their main way to get news and entertainment (Goldenberg, 2005). Generally defined as youth born between 1977 and 1994, Generation Y can be divided into three age segments. Paul (2001) indicated that 30% of the demographic segment fell between the ages of 7 and 11 years and are known as the "tweens," 34% were between the ages of 12 and 17 years, known as the teens; and 36% were between the ages of 18 and 24 year known as the young adults. Bronson (2000) stated that this demographic is expected to grow to approximately \$300 billion. In 2005 Generation Y spent \$170 billion. The Echo Boomer generation is known to spend the majority of their budget on food. "They love places where they can wire up or plug in. They hate bland food and slow services. Whatever they want, they want it now" (Brooks, 2005).

Generation Y and the Restaurant Business

The restaurant industry is predicted to formulate \$511.1 billion in revenue during 2006 (National Restaurant Association, 2006). The Echo Boomer spends 7.4% of their food budget away from home, where as Generation X spends about 5.8%, and the Baby Boomers spend about 5.6% (Brooks, 2005). The global food industry has taken hold of the "better-for-you" menu options,

fresh fast fixin's and the heart-friendly foods (Sloan, 2005). In 2004, the majority of the food market was embracing the ideas such as Fair-trade coffee, nitrite/nitrate-free meats and "wildcaught" fish as a push in satisfying the new organic frenzy in the market. During this push to satisfy Baby Boomers, Generation Y is being forgotten by the food industry. According to Sloan (2005), working women with children are driving the quick fix meal the quick fix meal and the Generation Y are pushing the Drive and Go market to increase the speed of service. Generation Y spends the majority of their time on the go, getting value food quickly and access to e-mail. This trend provides a dilemma for restaurant owners who invest in technology that may become out dated before they can turn a profit. Sloan stated that four in ten Echo Boomers agree in rewarding themselves from a hard days work by eating away from home. Of the respondents in this study, 32% stated that they eat away from home because they felt overwhelmed by their everyday responsibilities, therefore they would pick something to take home resulting in a large increase to an average of 28 more restaurant visits per person per month. Sloan (2005) analyzed the products purchased based on specified health-related claims on the packaging. The study showed that even though the Generation Y exhibits some health conscience concerns, other generations cared more about eating healthy. Freidman (2005) stated "I liked going to coffee shops occasionally, but now that Starbucks is here, I need my coffee" (p. 231). Companies like Starbucks and McDonalds have capitalized on to the extreme need for a quick bite or cup of coffee to their advantage and increased their speed of service and quality. Companies are continuing to add new wireless connections, CD and MP3 stations and other new technology to attract Generation Y.

Generation Y Consumer

Prior to 1978 there were numerous studies conducted on the teenage response to retail stimuli via television viewing preferences, newspaper readership, and peer information. Moschis (1978) and Moschis and More (1979) and Ward (1974) established different trends in consumer "buy in" and parent influence. It was discovered that mothers reported a gain in influence in almost every stage of the decision-making processes while the father's influence had significantly decreased in all areas (Belch, 2001). Ward (1974) hypothesized that the patterns were based on life-span specifications (age segments) and/or varied by generation (known as birth cohorts). In 1981, Moschis furthered Wards research by conducting a number of studies that examined the consumer skills and learning processes of adolescents. Through studies Moschis saw a trend in the importance of social self. In 1985, Moschis continued his research by identifying the important role of parents in the consumer socialization of their offspring. Through various studies it became obvious that communication about consumption with the male child happened more often then with the female child. The female child demonstrated more independence in purchasing products such as health-care items, whereas male children showed more independence and confidence purchasing things such as sports equipment. When it comes to the "when" and "where" of food consumption Sloan stated that in 2004 the Generation Y market chose to eat out more, preferring convenience over healthiness, while the older generations (Generation X and Baby Boomers) were choosing healthier options. In Sloan's study (2005) both male and female youth had consumer independence and confidence while selecting a place to eat.

Advertising to Generation Y

The Media and Entertainment market has been characterized by two words: diversity and competition (Ernst & Young, 2006). Entertainment has many sectors ranging from advertising to music, from filmed entertainment to sports. All sectors are competitive and have their own business challenges. As Fast Forward, Thought Leadership Study (Ernst & Young, 2006) stated, "Digital technology is advancing at an ever-increasing pace. Technology affects media and entertainment companies more than other sectors (p. 2)." Unfortunately the use of digital technology has affected the entertainment industry in such an extreme way that it is also affecting the other industries that use entertainment as a source of consumer interest. Leaving its ripple effect on other areas, such as the TBR industry.

According to CBS News (2005), Generation Y is not listening to the typical stream of advertisement. They are purchasing "commercial free" XM Satellite radio and blocking pop up advertisements on their computers. They are watching fewer TV advertisements and have stepped into a digital world where everything is immediate and fulfilling. Advertisers jump through hoops to find new ways to reach this mass market.

Automakers have reached this new market of consumers through event sponsorship such as, extreme sporting events and basketball competitions (Scion, 2006). The automobile industry is trying to stay ahead in the expensive technological world, by gaining market share utilizing technological entertainment as a means for marketing to the Generation Y. Scion's marketing team has chosen to take their product to the consumer, where in traditional markets the consumer would come to them. The consumer would approach the car dealership with what they had in mind, listen to the sales pitch, choose a car, haggle a price, and hopefully in five to eight hours later drive away in a new car. Scion is bringing test-driving to local events, with possibilities to

sign leases or have a purchase options, and ability to log on-line and order their vehicle right there. This requires no hassling, no haggling prices, just simple, honest and to the point (CBS News, 2005).

Generation Y and the Baby Boomer Generation want their food fast, fresh, and cheap, the main difference is the *need* for access to the web, music and other technologies that can make life convenient and fun. The cohort does not want to stop at five different places to accomplish their tasks and they do not want to listen to an advertisement to draw them into the establishment. "They favor wireless Internet service, which allows them to play while they cat...My 12-year-old son with his Sony Play station portable goes to hot zones, so he can sit and play games with people around the world. At age 12, he's conscious of which restaurants offer hot zones and which don't" (Brooks, 2005 p.34-36). Even at the age of 12 they young Generation Y has started combining his tasks by gamming and being online at the same time "cating" with fellow online gamers through the "hot spot" or "hot zone" wireless accesses. Another area for attracting consumers is the idea of a large corporation having an intimate feeling. The consumer feels that their individual needs are meet even if it is mass-produced. As Friedman (2005) stated:

The way that big companies act small is not by targeting each individual consumer and trying to serve that customer individually. That would be impossible and impossibly expensive. They do it by making their business, as much as possible, into a buffet. These companies create a platform that allows individual customers to *serve themselves* in their own way, at their own pace, in their own time, according to their own tastes. They are actually making their customers their employees and having them pay the company for that pleasure at the same time! (p. 350).

It is also important to look at peer interaction, though this research study did measure peer

interaction and influence, it is something that food service/TBR of which there should be aware. Funk, Mahony, and Havitz (2003) stated that it is important for research to explore multiple aspect of consumer decision-making process, whereas Ward (1974) identified the need to understand what kinds of consumer behaviors are transmitted across generations, it does not take into count the peer interaction and influence.

Research Methodology

Participants

In this study, a 14-18 years old population from Western Washington was targeted. The sample represented a population of youth from the rural Olympia area. Two schools were used in the study: W.F. West High School (Chehalis, WA) and Adna High School (Adna, WA). Both schools chosen were public. The goal in choosing public schools was to increase the diversity of opinion in filling out the survey and avoiding as much groupthink as possible. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to youth between grades 9 and 12. Cluster Sampling was used to help identify which schools would participate in the survey (Stangor, 2004).

W.F. West High School is located in a small town, population in July 2004: 7,181 (city data, 2004) where there are many restaurants, community activities and more of a suburban lifestyle. The Adna High School is located in a smaller rural community, population close to 700 (city data, 2004), where students have to commute into town to purchase products, eat out and seek entertainment.

Questionnaires where distributed in two different ways, at W.F. West High School they were distributed in a class of a pre-selected teacher, during the school day; therefore all in this class were provided an opportunity to complete the survey. At Adna High School a student distributed the surveys to as many students as possible; therefore allowing for a variety of students to fill out the survey.

Survey and Data Management

A total of 121 questionnaires were distributed and 53 were returned (43% response rate). All returned questionnaires were included in the analysis. The questionnaire consisted of 12 questions including multiple choices and ranking (see appendix A), designed to find out Generation Y consumer interest in entertainment and technology-based restaurants.

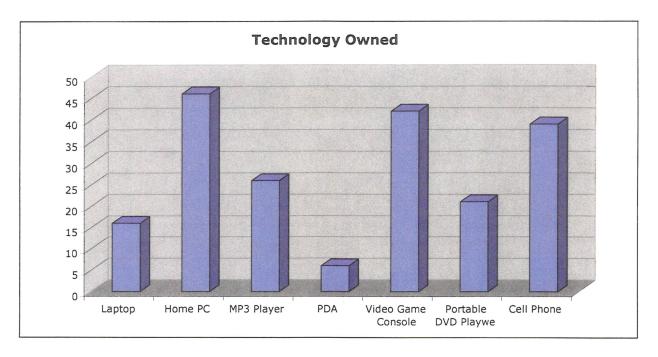
Related to decision-making (menu, price, location) and purchase preference (price, frequency, location, features) were collected.



Defining the Respondents

The respondents range from 14-18 with a fairly even distribution between male and female respondents. As stated previously there were 12 questions, two of the questions measured the gender and age of the participants and one question was to indicate technological equipment accessible at home. The survey indicated a profile of 50% female, 42% male and 8% unanswered. Respondents averaged 15 years of age with the majority owning at least three forms of technological equipment. Laptop computers were owned by 30% and 86% has a home PC. MP3 players were comparable to Portable DVD Players, 49% owned an MP3 player where 39% owned a portable DVD player. PDA's were at a low 11% in contrast to the cell phone and video game consoles that were in the top three owned technological equipment. The cell phone was owned by 73% of the respondents and the video game console was at 79%. Figure 1 has a break out of all the technology devices and how many respondents owned each piece.

Figure 1



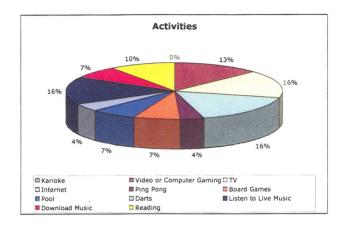
Consumer Preference Factors

Results from the total sample indicated specific consumer preferences for TBR. Six questions of what youth would rather do; there was a significant gap between technology and non-technology activities, at 80% preference towards technology-based activities. The researcher paired the technology items together to determine if there would be larger preferences of one technology over another. For example, in the survey, question #6 stated "If you went to a TBR gathering place with your friends, which of the following would you do?" Then there were six responses such as down load music or check e-mail. The research compared groupings that had a technology-based activity with a non-technology based activity to determine what the preferences would indicate (For example: Play Pool or Play Video Games). The research indicated that when it came to activities with friends they would choose a social activity, when it was something that they perhaps would do alone, they chose something that they could concentrate on. Respondents preferred to socialize at 66% to watching a movie, 49% chose to down load music over checking their e-mail. When it came to eating food or drinking coffee, 75% preferred to eat food at a restaurant. In choosing activities, playing video games and playing pool were close in numbers, video gamming was at 49%, but when it came to choosing between two non-technological activities, playing air hockey won out by a 81% versus the 15% who would play darts. The final question was about listening to a comedian or Karaoke, to the researchers surprise, the youth chose to listen to a comedian by 66% over Karaoke and an 8% no answer rate.

Even with the above analysis stating that the respondents prefer social interaction, the following study indicated that the activities preferred were ones that could be done individually. The following figure 2 shows the preferred activities. It indicates the top four activities to be

watching TV, playing on the Internet, listening to live music and play video or computer games.

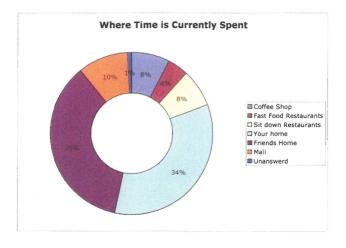
Figure 2



The sample of Generation Y youth opted for a TBR that they could frequent at least once a week on a Saturday (1st Choice) or Friday (2nd Choice) between the times of 5pm to 7pm and spend on average between five to ten dollars a week. The majority of the respondents wanted to travel between one and five miles but were willing to travel six to fifteen miles.

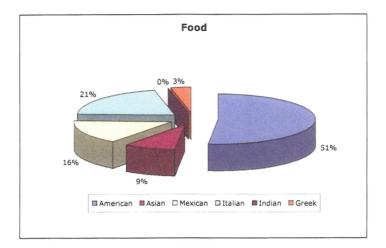
81% of the Generation Y participants spend of their time at a friend's house or at their own home. Going out to a coffee shop or restaurant was 4th on the list of preferences, where going to the mall was a bit higher and received a 22% response rate. Figure 3 shows where Generation Y time is currently spent.

Figure 3



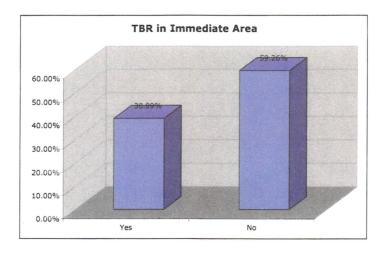
When asked what type of food Generation Y would most likely order, the majority indicated American as their first choice at 51% and 21% chose Italian as their second choice followed by Mexican as the third choice at 16%.

Figure 4



The final question was to determine if in fact there was a TBR in their immediate area and if so what they liked about it. Figure 5 shows that 59% of the respondents indicated that there was not a TBR in their area, the 20% that responded that there was a TBR stated that Starbuck was in the area and provided wireless Internet connections.

Figure 5





Recommendations

The results of this study provide information about the consumer preferences of Generation Y. Regarding technology-based restaurants, it appears that there is a market in the rural areas of Washington. Due to technology advancing at an accelerated rate the Y Generation cohort is looking for a place to socialize as well as a place to enjoy what the virtual world has to offer and set in a familiar and comfortable setting. As indicated by the results, Starbucks was the only TBR in the respondent's area. Starbucks Corporation is not a restaurant, but a coffee shop that has wireless Internet access, compact disc burning station (in select stores), coffee and light meals, such as sandwiches and bakery items. The Starbucks business model is not to do everything, but to provide a setting that allows for the individual to have access to the things they need or desire.

If Generation Y continues the spending 7.5% of their income on food away from home, when they become adults they will spend more dollars on food away from home than any other generation. Investments in TBR need to be creative to attract Generation Y into establishments and create a brand loyalty that includes speed of service, quality and convenience. From the research the following recommendations are derived: 1) Build an establishment close to where the Generation Y works, lives or attends school. The building needs to be large enough for social events (a live band), yet small enough to have the feeling of intimacy and privacy. 2) Use a menu with diverse variety of foods, varying from American to Mexican and Italian. The way the menu is presented will show the understanding for technology. If the menu is listed online and can be ordered before arriving it shows technological advancement, efficiency and speed of service. If an order is taken in a traditional manner, with an older style menu, it may lose the attention of the desired Generation Y consumer. 3) TBR should understand that technology is a new form of socializing at restaurants and home, Generation Y use instant messaging, personal

web pages, chat rooms and live journals to keep in touch and informed. A TBR should have someone available to troubleshoot issues that may arrive. A technology guru may help bring in more customers to the establishment.

Conclusion

This study specifically determined Generation Y's consumer interest in technology-based restaurants. Generation Y is going to change the way the restaurant industry functions. These establishments will need to become *Technology-Based Restaurants* to keep up with the changing demands of the Generation Y consumer. The cohort is largest generation since the baby-boomers at nearly 80 million, having one of the largest impacts on the entire segment of the economy across the world (CBS News, 2005). Generation Y is going to change the way America sees the world, the way food is consumed as well as the manner by which they entertain themselves. It will be important to invest in research to determine what the next food service innovation is going to be.

This study expanded the researchers understanding of the relationship between technology and entertainment. The results determine that growth in TBR in areas where there is a lack of entertainment is possible and advisable. There are many areas of further research that would shed light on consumer preference of Generation Y. Another study might determine changing trend in food consumption. Sklaroff (2005) stated, "Like people, nations are what they eat" (p. 34). If this is the case then the trend is changing quickly with the new growth rate and diversification rate.

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Appendix A

Chapter 1 The Survey

This survey is a study to determine your consumer interest in a Technology Based Restaurant (TBR) in Western Washington. A TBR is defined as a restaurant that utilizes entertainment technology as a service to the customers of the restaurant. The technological equipment could be Video gaming, Internet, and MP3 docking stations. A non-TBR could have more of a traditional for of entertainment such as pool, darts and ping-pong. The following survey consists of 12 questions; please mark your answers clearly and follow the directions given for each question. Thanks for participating.

Check t	he following that applies to	you:		
	Gender Male or Fen			
2)	Age 14 15 16 1	718		
3)	Do you have any of the following technology equipment? (Check all that apply)			
	Laptop computer			
	Home PC			
	MP3 Player			
	PDA			
	Video Game Console			
	Portable DVD player			
	Cell Phone			
4)	What activities do you enjoy? (Please put into rank order one being what you would do most often).			
	Karaoke			
	Video or Computer gaming			
	TV			
	Internet			
	Ping Pong			
	Board Games			
	Pool			
	Darts			
	Listen to live music			
	Download music			
5\	Reading	1	(1	
5)	Where do you currently spend time with your friends? (Please choose the top two choices)			
	Coffee Shops			
	Fast Food Restaurants			
	Sit down Restaurants			
	Your home Friends home			
	Friends nome Mall			
6)		oring pla	was with your friends, which of the following would you do? (Please	
6)	If you went to a TBR gathering place with your friends, which of the following would you do? (Please circle one choice for each grouping).			
	Socialize	or	Watch Movies	
	Socialize	O1	waten Movies	
	Down load music	or	Check e-mail	
	Drink Coffee	or	Eat food	
	Dlay Dool	0.11	Play video comes	
	Play Pool	or	Play video games	
	Listen to a comedian	or	Karaoke	
	Play Darts	or	Play Air hockey	

7)	How far would you travel to a TBR? (Please check one).
	1-5 miles
	6-10 miles
	11-15 miles
	16+ miles
8)	How much would you be likely to spend per week at a TBR? (Please check one)
	\$5-\$10
	\$11 - \$15
	
	
9)	When would you likely visit a TBR? (Please check your first choice)
	3pm-5pm
	5pm-7pm
	7pm-9pm
	9pm-11pm
10)	What days of the Week are you most likely to visit a TBR? (Please put in rank order one being your first
	choice)
	Monday
	Tuesday
	Wednesday
	Thursday
	Friday
	Saturday
	Sunday
11)	What Food Types would you most likely order? (Rank your choices 1 being your first choice)
	American (burgers, fries, hotdogs, chicken etc.)
	Asian
	Mexican
	Italian (pizza and pastas)
	Indian
	Greek
12)	Does a technology-based restaurant exist in your immediate area?
	Yes
	No
	If yes, what is its name and location?
	What do you like most about it?