

I'm not even awake. Vision is blurred and breathing still steady. I reach for my phone and open the Insta, sad story. The scroll commences; steady and reassuring like the passing days. Reassuring like the flowing of the...WHAM! Tater-tot-breakfast-waffle-cone-pulled-pork-melted-cheese-sauce-bacon-oozing-egg-yolk smacks me in the face. Is that an onion ring on top? Is heartburn even a thing?

I resume my scrolling – peace ensues. But WHAM! That sugarless-chia-seed-coconut milk-pudding-with-blueberries and a sprinkle of almonds for good protein measure hits back at me. Was this even a food two months ago? Before I even exit my REM cycle, I am faced with that red-pill blue-pill dilemma. The devil on my left shoulder speaks to me, saying waffle = life. But that little angel on the right is holding onto that blue pill with the conviction of an Instagram model with a waist the size of my wrist and a six pack as legit as my trusted beer. What is this bipolar madness?

The numbers speak for themselves: consumer reports show a simultaneous rise of healthy foods and decadent foods. The Nielsen global health and wellness report points out that both healthy and indulgent food categories grew over the past two years, with healthy food trends growing by 5% and indulgent foods trends growing by 2%. Of course there are varying regional impacts, but globally, we are facing two seemingly contradictory and competing food trends.

Why is this happening? The most compelling argument suggests that the duality is derived from an overarching shift in the way people view food and dieting. With a focus on natural, fresh and minimally processed foods, consumers feel like they are gaining control over their life and looking at wellness as a long-term process as opposed to a quick-fix diet. The Food People (a global food trends agency) identifies four core values for consumer trends: Youthfulness, Transparency, Authenticity and Craftsmanship. These values suggest the impact of Millennial and Gen Z buyers in the market, with their desire to reconnect to the “essence” of food.

Given this long-term perspective, consumers are more willing to counterbalance with an occasional splurge. Depending who you follow on social media, you may think that healthy trends are gaining some traction; in fact, indulgent foods dominate the scene hands down. You thought #kale was a significant trend? Its 1.6 million shares are noteworthy, but this number pales in comparison to any indulgent food. Pizza alone dominates Instagram as the number one most posted food item globally with over 17.5 million shares, while grits dominate the US Twitter landscape by a landslide.

This dichotomy explains so much about the food aisle at the grocery store, and the reaction from food manufacturers. Organic low fat baked chia seed lentil chips? Or is today the day you finally go for that pack of turkey gravy gourmet crisps with Maldon sea salt? There is no middle ground – “ordinary” foods are taking a hit. If you're a regular old pack of crisps you're going down: UK crisp sales took an overall dive of 20% between mid 2014 and 2015. The 2015 Waitrose consumer trend report suggests the same, that white sugar is evil and ordinary – out with it! Date nectar and cocoa bars? All the rage. Foods that work well in a holistic approach to improved health now represent our daily choices.

The healthy food trend is here to stay, but from the looks of it, we're determined to minimise its effects as thoroughly as we can. Go ahead and have that kale salad with alfalfa sprouts and avocado; just make sure you wash it down with a Bloody Mary, garnished with a burger.

ALL OR NOTHING

