Quick Pulse: Is Home Cooking A Lost Art?

Contributed by Euromonitor International
Monday, 27 August 2012
Last Updated Monday, 27 August 2012

To better understand habits regarding home cookingâ€"who people cook for, what meals they prepare, and how much time it takesâ€"Passport Survey reached out to Euromonitor International's global network of analysts from 80+ countries.

Before fast food and gourmet grocery stores, cooking was often time consuming, but an essential part of life. People spent hours dicing vegetables, making homemade chicken broth, and ensuring a well-balanced meal full of meats, vegetables, starches. Nowadays, the fast pace of modern life, as well as an increasing focus on healthy living, has altered the way people prepare and eat meals.

Still, the vast majority of Quick Pulse survey respondents worldwide indicated that they frequently cook meals at home, with only an average of 6% of people claiming to eat every meal out. Additionally, over half of respondents worldwide indicated that they use both fresh and processed or packaged food, but they tend to use more fresh products.

There are also notable differences between emerging and developed markets in their views and habits regarding food preparation.

The landscape of home dining, including whom respondents cook for, which meals they prepare at home, and how much time it takes to do so, is clearly shifting around the world. This article explores those shifts in more detail using results from 70+ countries surveyed in Euromonitor International's Quick Pulse analyst survey in May 2012.

COOKING CULTURES

Respondents usually cook for themselves and their partners

While the current economic situation has actively affected the way people think about and spend money, respondents across the globe did not alter their dining habits much within the last year. Over half of respondents indicated that they prepare and eat food at home nearly as much as they did a year ago. However, incomes did seem to shift for some, with one quarter of respondents reporting that they prepare food at home more often now than they did a year ago.

Cost-cutting aside, conceiving and cooking meals often takes time. It requires a plan, a trip to the grocery store, and potentially hours in the kitchen. Respondents worldwide generally limit their homemade meals to those who are really worth the trouble, like themselves or their families. Respondents are most likely to cook for themselves, for themselves and their partners, or for themselves and their immediate family. Significantly less likely scenarios include cooking meals for an extended family, roommates, or friends.

Emerging market respondents and females are most likely to cook for whole family

Whether one cooks for oneself only or for oneself and one's family depends on one's household and lifestyle, which vary not only at the individual level but also between emerging and developed markets. Respondents from developed markets, who may be more likely to live alone or cohabit before having children, are more likely to cook meals for themselves or for themselves and their partners. Respondents in emerging markets may live at home until they have families of their own, and marriage often takes place at an earlier age than it does in developed markets. Thus, this group of respondents is more likely to cook for themselves and their families.

In addition to the make-up of households, which definitely contributes to whom respondents cook for, males and female also present significantly different outlooks on cooking. Males are far more likely to cook only for themselves than females (44% vs. 29%), while females are much more likely than males to cook a meal for their entire family (38% vs. 23%).This discrepancy may be due to the fact that historically and in many instances, culturally, females are considered to be more domestically inclined and/or skilled, and therefore more likely to cook do the cooking for their family/household.

When preparing meals, fresh ingredients edge out packaged ones

Although packaged foods can make cooking easier, especially when preparing meals for large families, respondents report using more fresh than packaged ingredients. Women, in particular, prefer fresh ingredients, and developing market respondents were also more likely to say they use more or exclusively fresh ingredients when cooking. Whether due to health, taste, or â€œIron Chefâ€• ambitions, these social cooksâ€"and others who prepare meals at home at least weeklyâ€"are the most likely to seek out fresh ingredients for meals. Meanwhile, men and those living in developed markets are more likely to use packaged ingredients for part, most, or all of a meal.

Among educated professionals like our Quick Pulse respondents, recognizing an overall preference for fresh ingredients is important for food manufacturers and marketers. While few people cook meals wholly from fresh ingredients, mixed meals that combine packaged staples with fresh vegetables, fruits, fish, and meats are quite common. Such combinations are reflected in the historic recent growth in volume and retail value of packaged food categories such as pasta, noodles, bread, and sauces, dressings, and condiments, which all lend themselves easily to mixing with fresh ingredients. Suggesting innovative ingredient combinations or bundling together all necessary packaged ingredients for a substantial lunch or dinner meal (see below) are two ways to help consumers create tasty 'semi-homemade' meals for their families and partners, as well as themselves.

THE TIME IT TAKES TO PREPARE A MEAL

Emerging market respondents spend more time making lunch

While preparing and eating food at home using fresh and packaged ingredients is a common global practice, there are sizable differences in the amount of time that respondents in emerging and developed markets spend cooking. Respondents in emerging markets are more likely to savour and enjoy the ritual of eating, whereas respondents in developed markets often seem to eat out of necessity.

The meal that most signifies these cultural discrepancies is lunch, which is the biggest meal in many emerging countries. The time spent preparing meals is nearly inverse, as respondents in emerging markets are three times more likely to spend 30-60 minutes preparing lunch than those in developed markets.Most respondents in developed markets, where lunch is often eaten on the go, only spend 5-15 minutes preparing lunch. However, when it comes to dinner, a traditionally larger meal in the west, respondents from developed markets spend somewhat longer preparing.

MAKING MEALS

Breakfast and dinner are more likely to be prepared at home

Even with the fast pace of modern life, most respondents regularly prepare and/or cook meals at home. As many respondents work during the day, breakfast and dinner are more frequently cooked at home than lunch, which is presumably eaten on-the-go.

A good breakfast can make any day better, and many respondents start the day out right with a home-cookedâ€”or at least, home-preparedâ€”meal. Globally, over half of respondents prepare breakfast at home more than five days a week, and another quarter of respondents eat breakfast at home 2 to 5 times per week. However, there are some stark gender differences: nearly two-thirds as many females prepare breakfast at home over five times per week than males.Perhaps women simply eat breakfast more regularly than men, or possibly they prefer the consistency afforded by preparing one's own meal each day.

Lunch may be elaborate when it is prepared, but it is not prepared at home every day

Lunch, which falls during typical work hours, is less often prepared and eaten at home; only one-fifth of respondents prepare lunch at home more than five times a week. More respondents indicated that they prepare lunch at home 2 to 5 times per week, which could include preparing a meal at home and taking it to work. Even though lunch is a big family meal in many Latin American countries, notably fewer respondents from emerging markets prepare lunch at home more than five times a week versus those from developed markets.

Dinner, which is the most expensive and elaborate meal in certain markets, is also the most frequently prepared and eaten at home 2 to 5 times per week. In addition, another significant percentage of respondents claim to cook dinner at home over five times per week. Since dinner is typically the most family-centered meal and more females report cooking for their entire families, females are also more likely to prepare and eat dinner at home.

CONCLUSION

The biggest discrepancy in meal traditions is the way that emerging and developed markets approach their meals. More respondents in emerging markets cook for their entire family, and these respondents typically spend more time doing so, especially at lunch. Even though lunch is an elaborate meal in many emerging markets, breakfast and dinner are globally the most frequently prepared and eaten at home. While it may be more convenient and faster to eat meals out,

respondents still find the time to cook meals at home at least several days per week.

More on the Quick Pulse sample: our global analyst network
In Quick Pulse surveys, Passport Survey reaches out to Euromonitorâ€™s network of in-country analysts and in-house researchers around the world in order to find out more about current consumer attitudes and habits on a wide variety of topics, from economic outlook to daily activities. In May 2012, 237 researchers answered questions about their meal preparation habits.

Quick Pulse survey results differ from other survey data cited on Passport Survey and should be interpreted with some caution.Â Quick Pulse responses reflect the opinions and habits of several hundred of Euromonitor Internationalâ€™s in-country analysts and in-house researchers around the world.Â As such, results reflect a great degree of geographic, economic, and cultural diversity among educated consumers.Â On the other hand, Euromonitor Internationalâ€™s researchers do not constitute a random sample of consumers in a given country or across the globe, so their responses do not necessarily represent the opinions of a broader population of consumers.Â Passport Survey presents their attitudes and behaviours in order to provide starting points for potential further investigations and sparks of tactical insight.

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