

When did taste stop
being enough?

Menu Matters

ESTB



2015

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Maeve Webster

President



Data-driven, human-focused insights for the F&B industry.

Drawing on 20+ years in the restaurant, retail, food manufacturing and agriculture sectors, Menu Matters specializes in providing thoughtful, actionable analysis of industry-specific shifts and broader social trends. Our data-informed approach is complemented by a deeper understanding of consumer psychology, developing comprehensive strategies that align with our clients' business and brand goals.



A close-up photograph of a person's face and hands as they eat spaghetti. The person has a wide-eyed, open-mouthed expression of surprise or delight. They are holding two forks, one in each hand, lifting a portion of spaghetti from a plate. The spaghetti is topped with a red sauce, melted cheese, and some green vegetables. The background is blurred, showing a blue patterned cloth. The overall lighting is warm and slightly dim, creating a cozy atmosphere.

2025 CONSUMER NEED STATE

GIVE ME SOMETHING NEW



Gen Z wants 57% of their food experiences to feature new and unique foods, ingredients and dishes.



54% of Gen Z try new, unusual (to them) foods always or often – higher than any other generation

CONSUMER STAT

87% of Gen Z
consumers say they
are interested in
seeing more food
trends on menus in
2025

45% are extremely or very
interested

slightly more than Boomers and
well below Millennials and Gen X



LIFESTYLE

What's on the table in 2025? Some predicted trends in food

Top 5 food trends of 2025: Sourdough beyond bread, protein, upcycled ingredients and more

Stefani Sassos from the Good Housekeeping Institute weighs in.

Food Network predicts the biggest food trends of 2025

Global Food Trends Redefining How We Wine and Dine in 2025

From flame-cooked feasts to reimagined Chinese classics, here's what our MICHELIN Guide Inspectors predict will shape restaurant menus this year.

Restaurant Trends to Look Forward to in 2025, According to Chefs

Dessert caviar, dynamic pricing, A.I. and African grains – here's what the experts foresee will dominate restaurants next year.

Whole Foods Market Forecasts the Top 10 Food and Beverage Trends for 2025

Industry experts share the trends set to transform our plates in this 10th annual report from the world's leading natural and organic foods retailer

Food Trends Are Going to Get Pretty Weird in 2025 If These Experts Are Correct

7 fast-food trends that will be everywhere in 2025, from chicken tenders to dipping sauces

The 11 biggest food trends for 2025

From clarified cocktails to specialist seaweed, here are the culinary trends to watch for the coming year.

Top 100 Food Trends in March

From Expansive Easter Candy Ranges to Hot Honey-Themed Menus



CONSUMER STAT

1 IN 5 GEN Z CONSUMERS
SAY THERE ARE TOO MANY
VERSIONS OF THE SAME
PRODUCT ON STORE
SHELVES





“Why does everything have to have hot honey on it?”

“My smile dropped when I saw the hot honey.”

“So sick of hot honey.”

“I love the vodka sauce but why does everything have to have hot honey on it these days?”

“Hot honey is an epidemic.”

“Always with the hot honey.”



The image features a bronze sculpture of 'The Thinker' by Auguste Rodin, positioned centrally. The figure is seated on a rectangular base, leaning forward with his chin resting on his hand in a contemplative pose. The sculpture is set against a background of a grey wall with a faint, repeating geometric pattern. Overlaid on the lower half of the image is the text 'WHAT DO CONSUMERS NEED?' in a large, white, serif font.

WHAT DO CONSUMERS NEED?

What information do you want in menu descriptions when dining away from home?

How it tastes, 50%

How it smells, 42%

How it looks, 42%

How it feels, 39%

How it sounds, 29%

RANKED 1, 2



GIVE ME NEW
SENSORY
EXPERIENCES



We unexpectedly uncovered something...

WHICH SENSE DO YOU PRIORITIZE WHEN
HAVING A FOOD EXPERIENCE?

(ranked 1, 2)

TASTE



65%

SMELL



55%

TASTE



22%

SMELL



19%

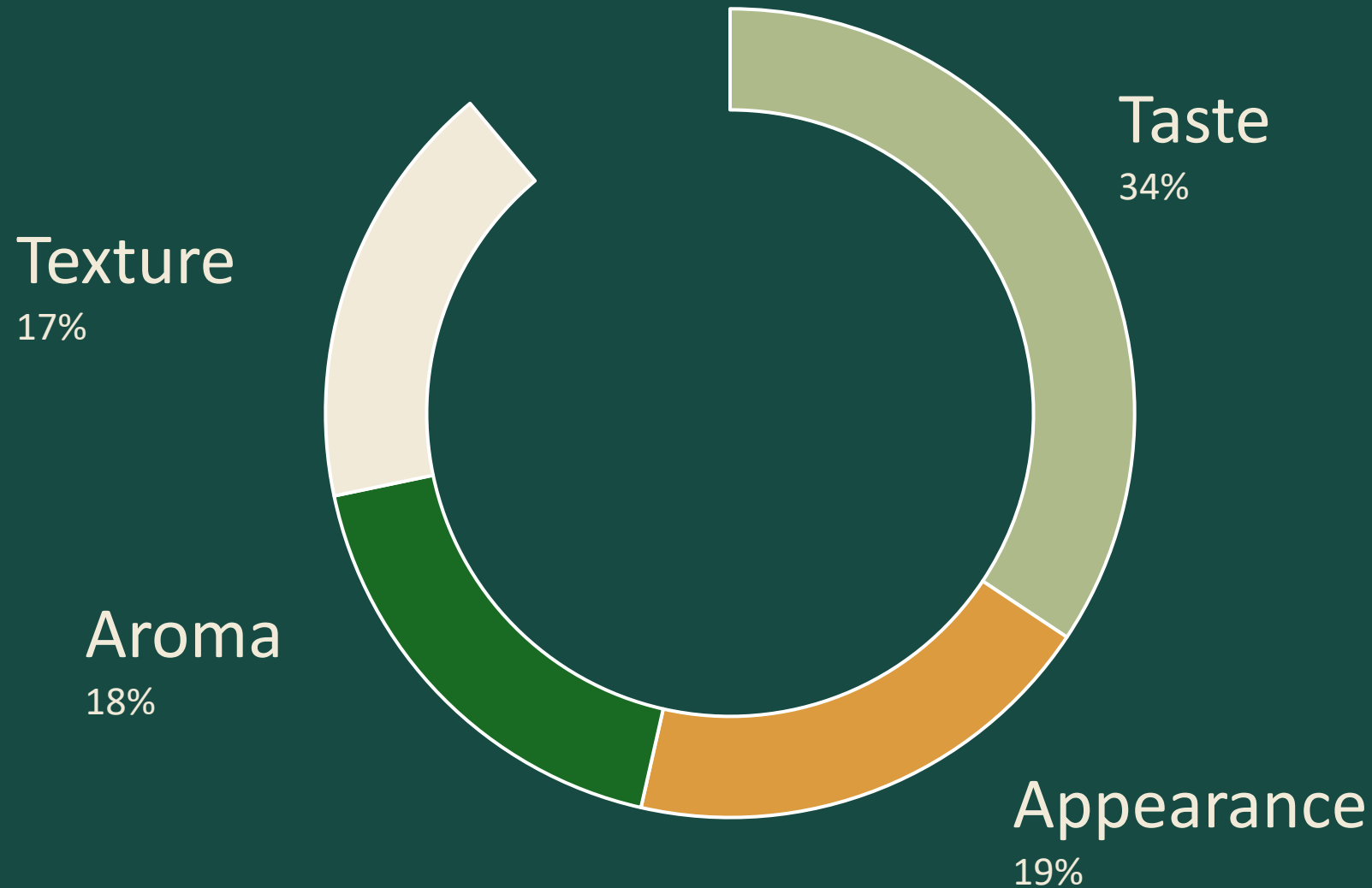
CONSUMER STAT

OF THE CONSUMERS WHO ARE
EXTREMELY, VERY INTERESTED IN
SEEING MORE TRENDS AT
RESTAURANTS, 34% WOULD GIVE UP
THEIR SENSE OF TASTE...THE TOP
RESPONSE

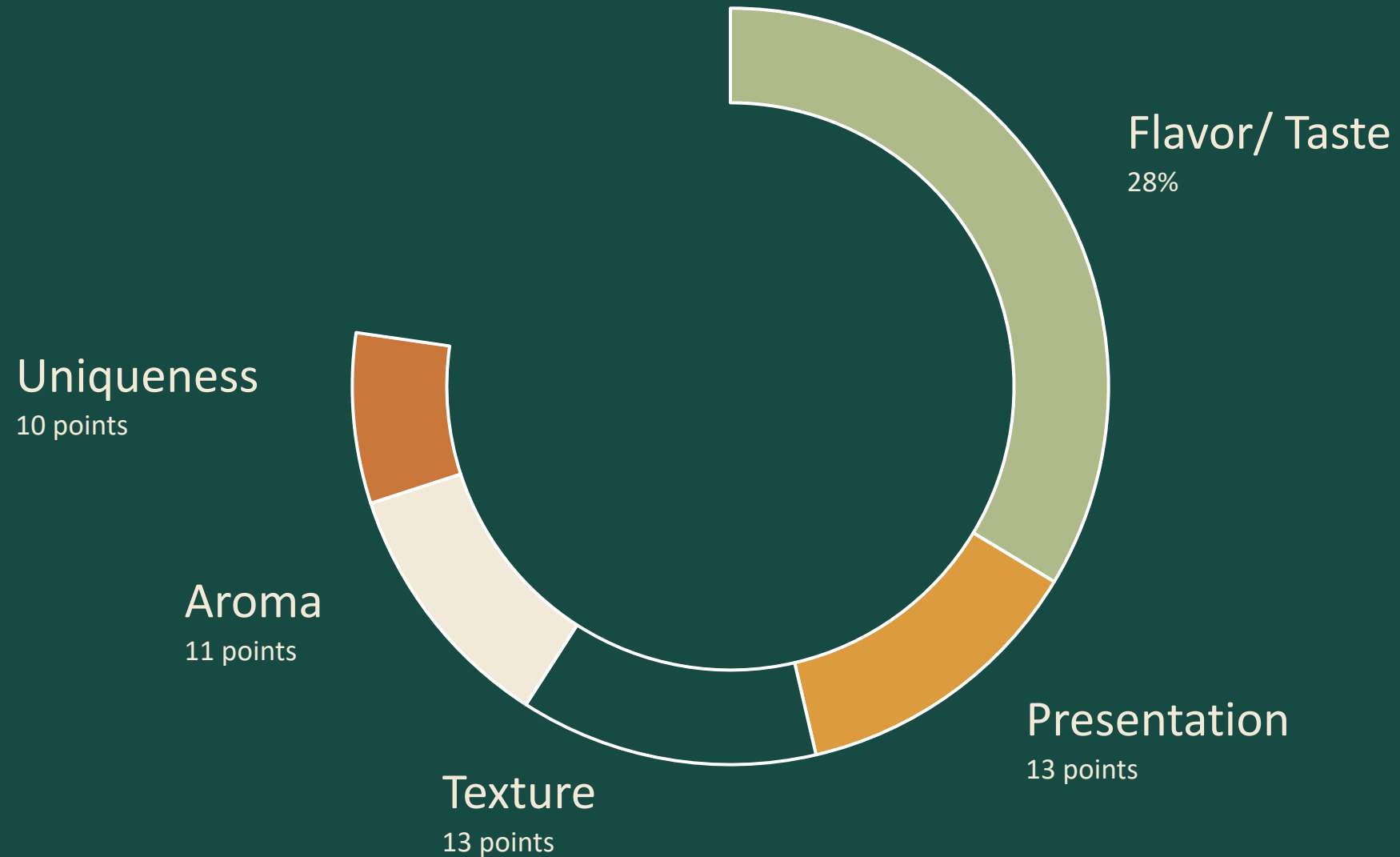


When did taste stop being enough?

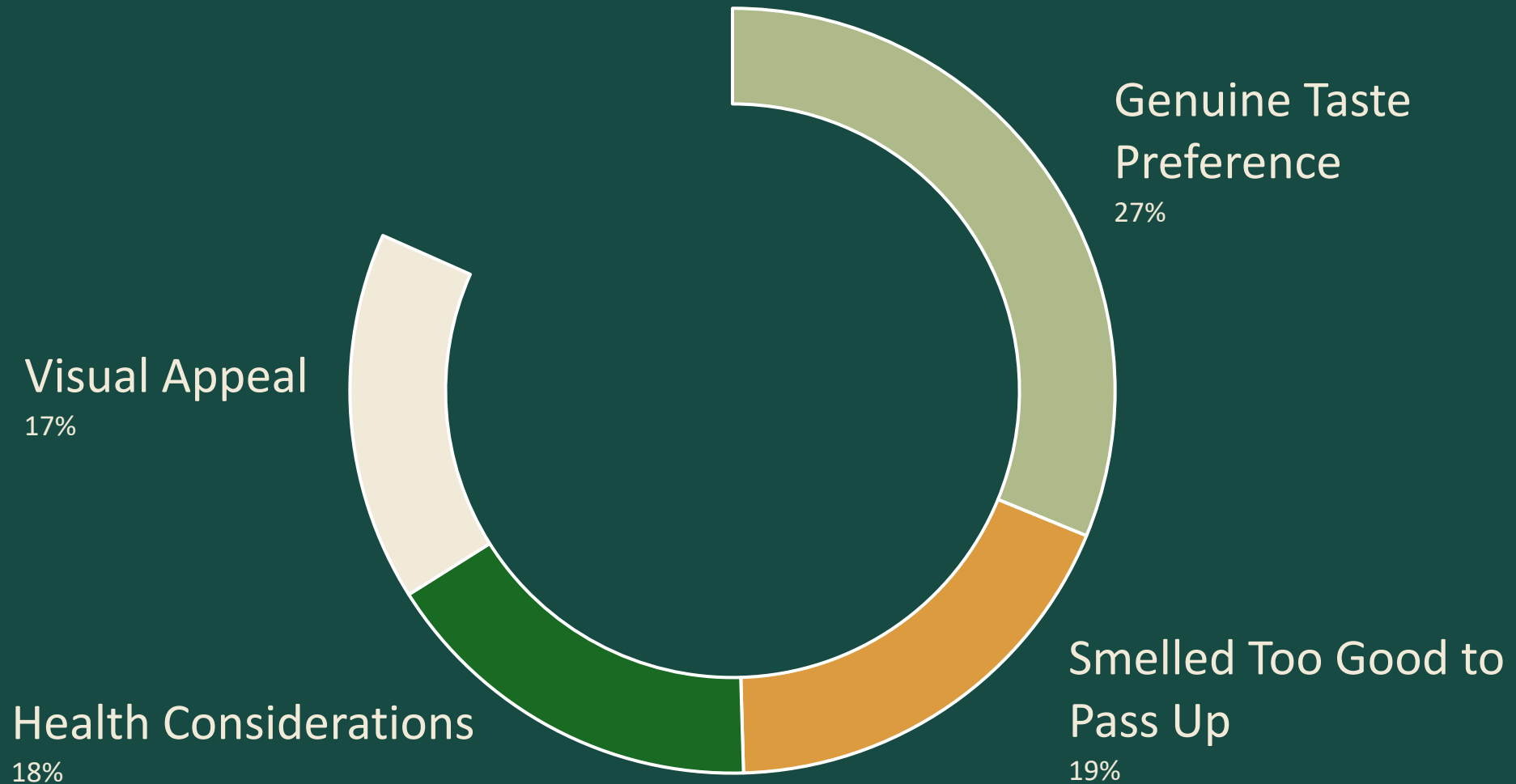
When you eat, what share of your attention is on each sense?



Design your ideal food experience...

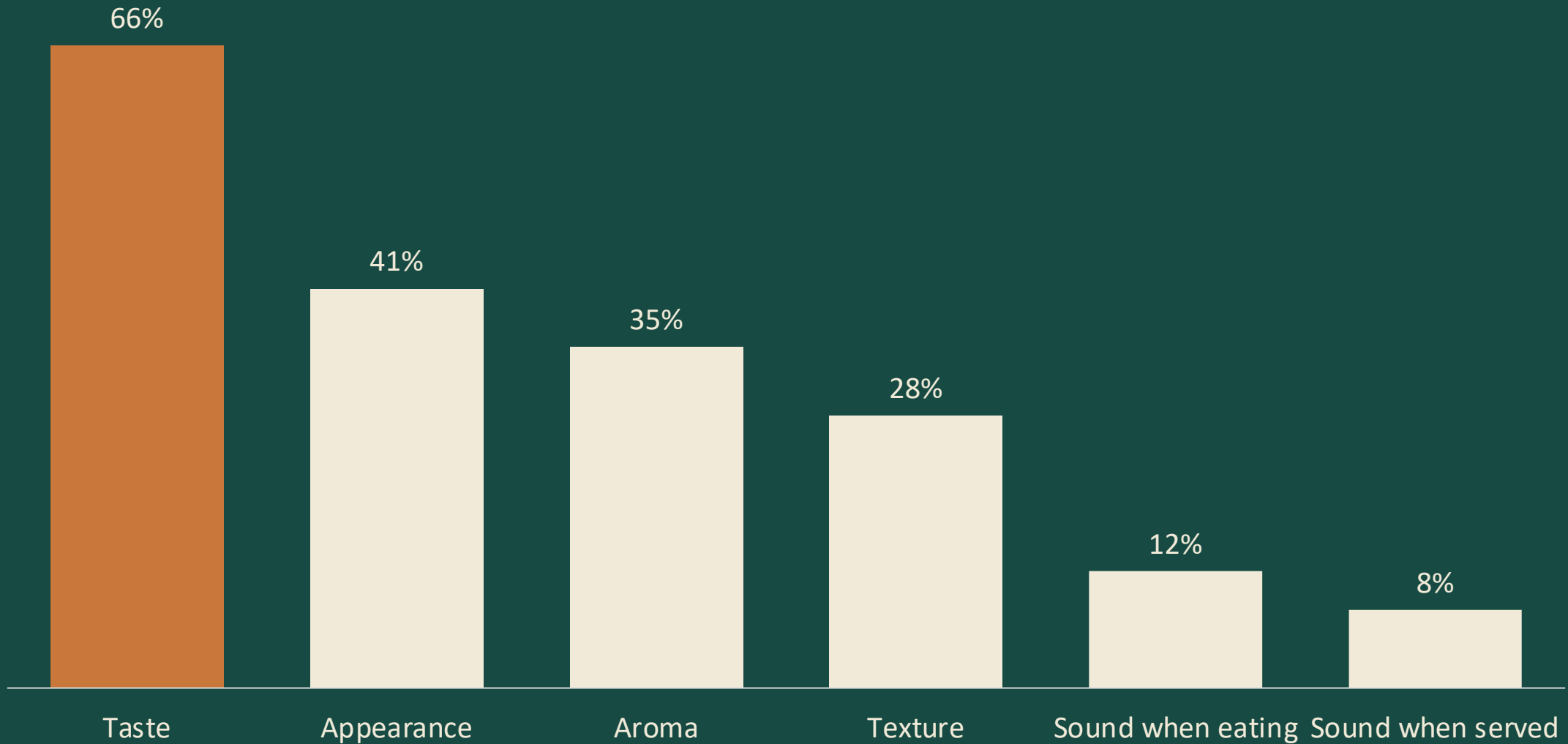


What share of your food/ beverage choices are driven by...



Senses can be occasion specific...

Rank senses when choosing a new food to try...

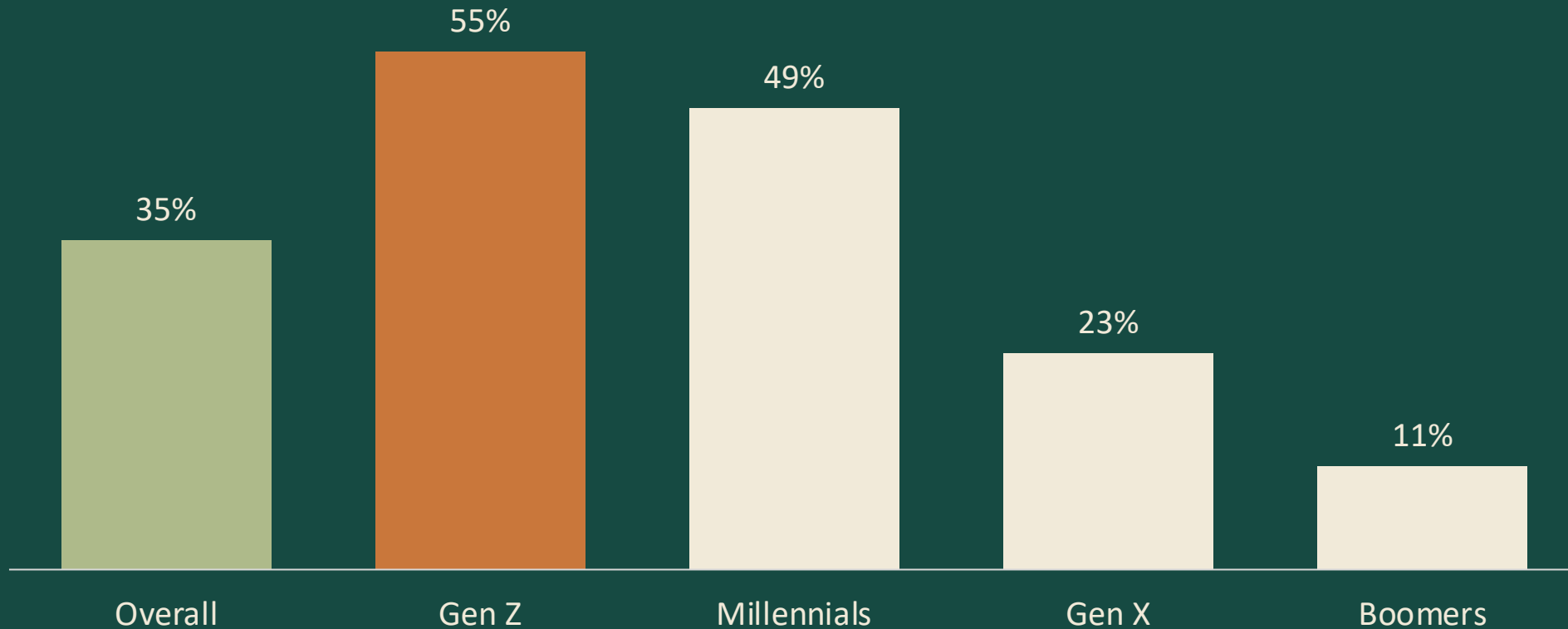


When you're particularly hungry, which sense becomes heightened or distorted?

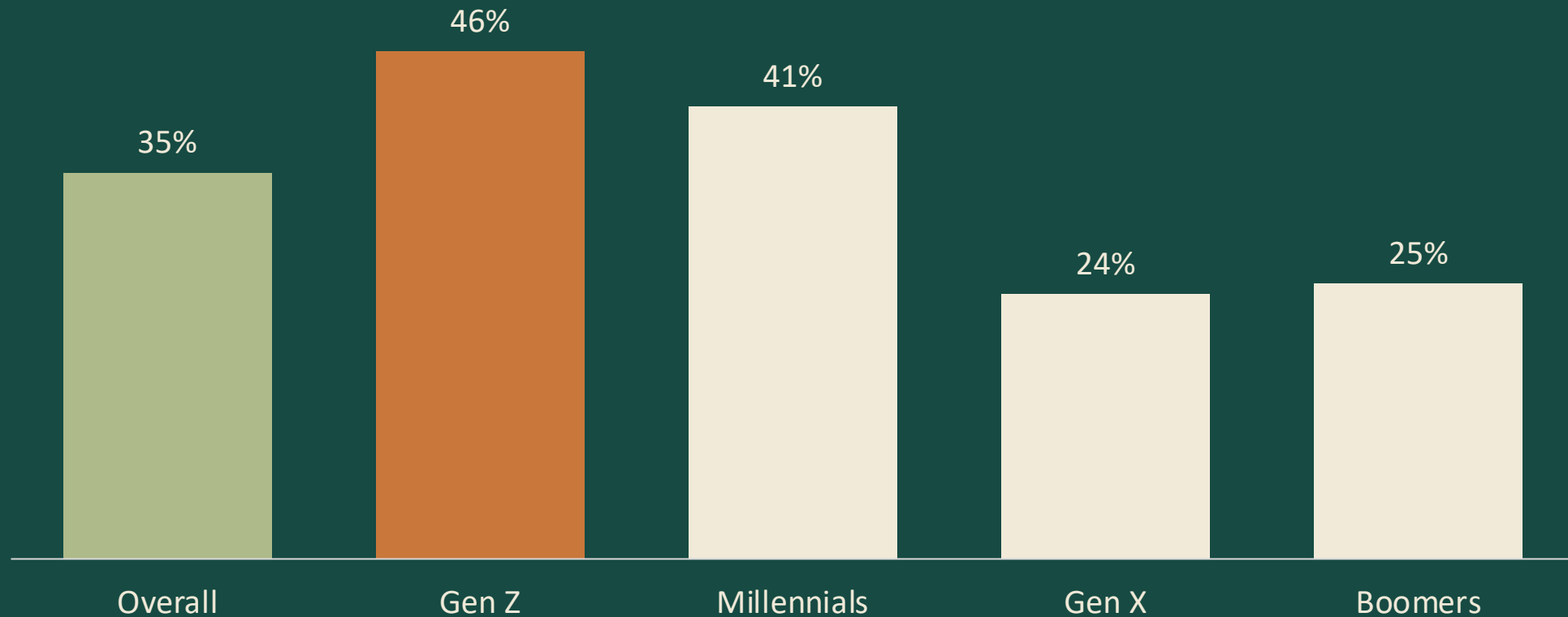


Gen Z's relationship with trends may be
skewing their relationship with their senses...

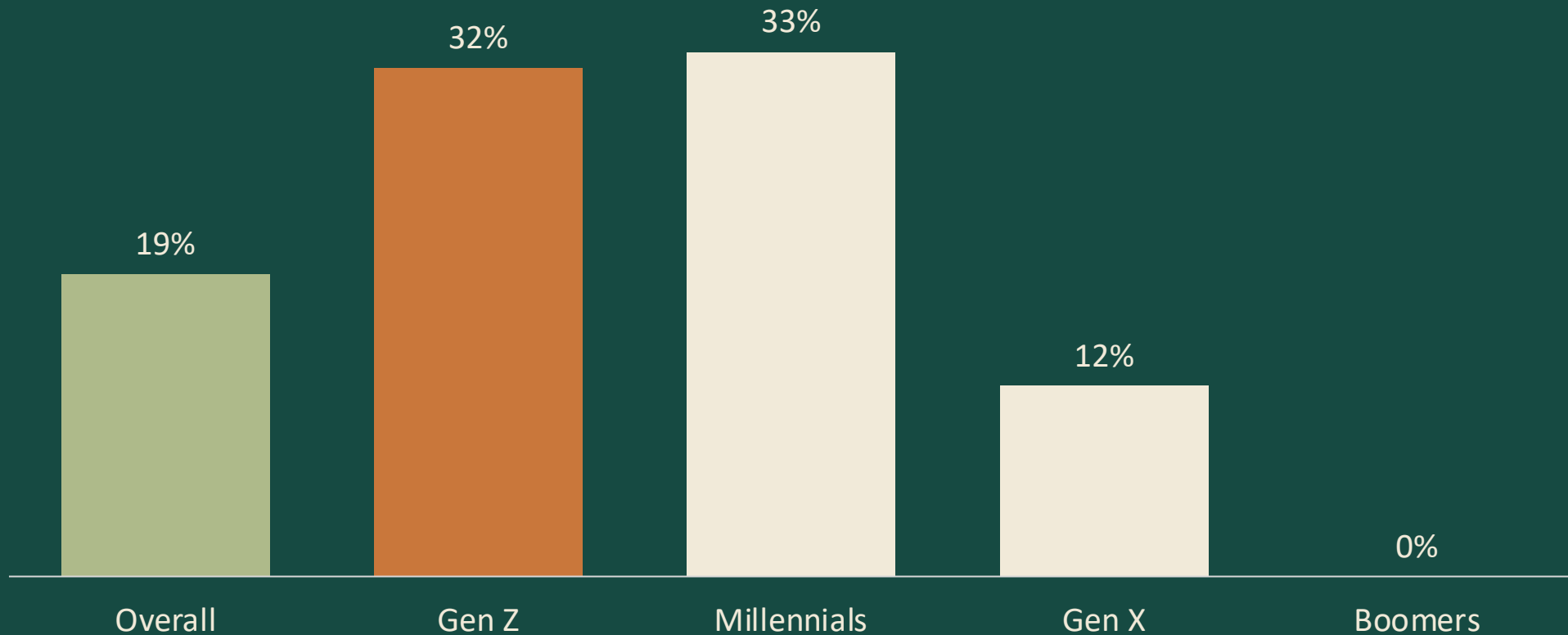
I sometimes feel pressure to enjoy trend foods, beverages, ingredients or flavors even when they don't appeal to me.



Have you ever continued to consume a trendy food/ beverage despite not enjoying the taste?



How often do you eat/ drink something primarily because it's trending even if you don't enjoy the taste?



47% of Gen Z has recommended a food trend or trendy flavor/item to someone despite personally finding it average/below average in taste



When trying a food trend/ trendy item, which disappoints you more?

Looks impressive – tastes ordinary, 49%

Smells great – tastes ordinary, 46%

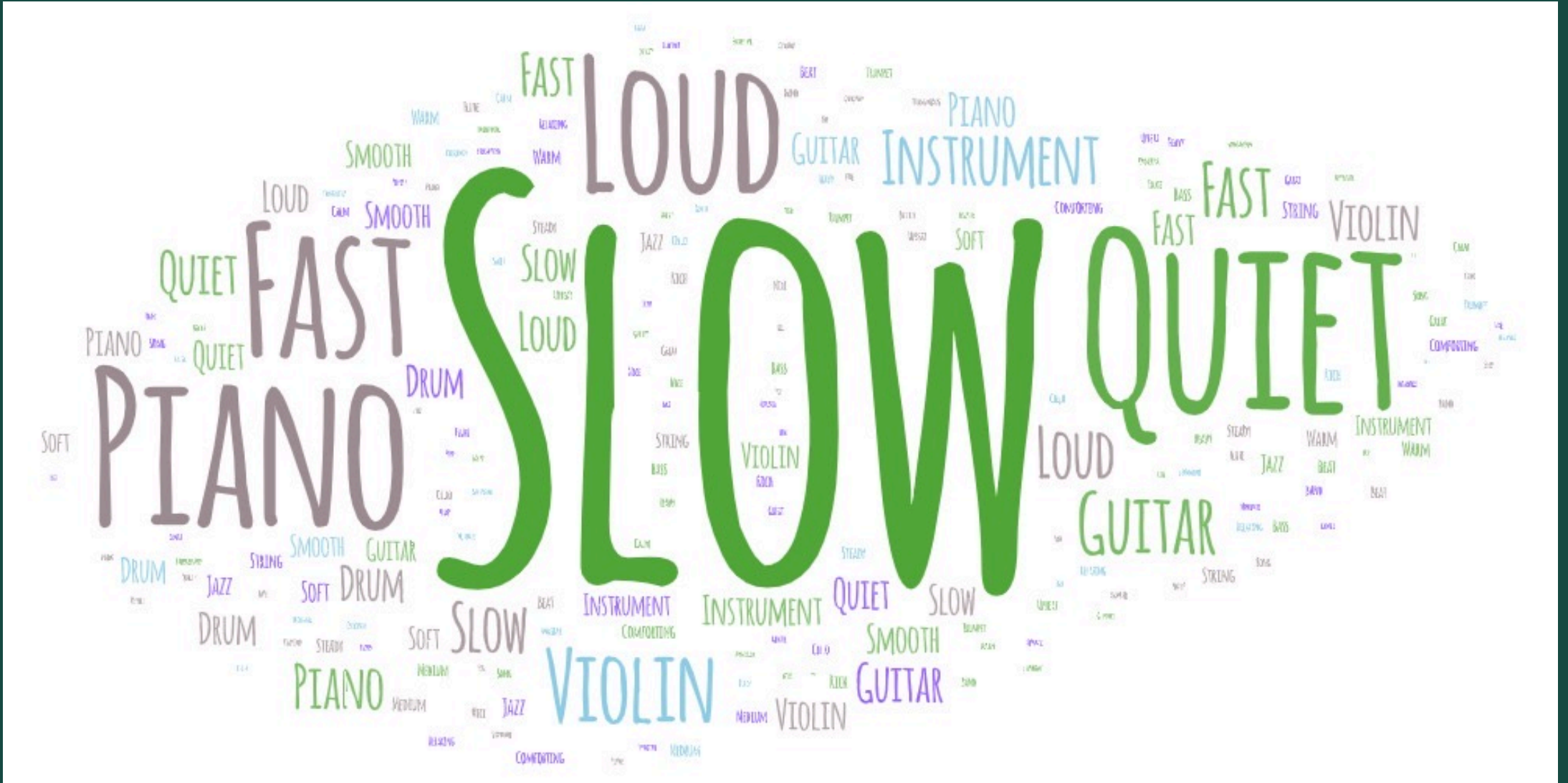
Looks great – gross to touch, 26%

Tastes great – looks ordinary, 25%

Sounds great – tastes ordinary, 20%

Our assumptions about Gen Z preferences
may skew our innovation for them...

If you could translate your favorite food's flavor into a piece of music, would it be fast or slow? Loud or quiet? What instruments would feature prominently?



Where would food taste best?

QUIET CAFÉ,
SOOTHING
MUSIC



36%

IN NATURE



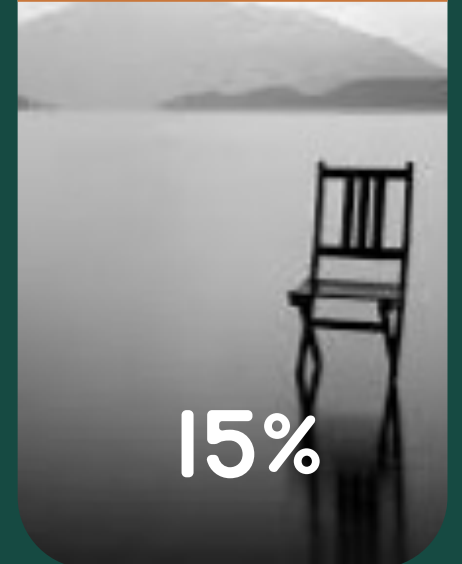
24%

BUSY
RESTAURANT



17%

IN COMPLETE
SILENCE



15%

LESS THAN 10% SELECTED "IN A LOUD BAR WITH LOTS OF DISTRACTIONS"

Which would you prefer?



Key Takeaways

Flavor is important, but other sense can have a significant impact on specific occasions, decisions

We can't assume flavor will override all other senses

Trends – and social media – are skewing the impact, role of senses


THANK YOU!

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Maeve Webster

 maeve@menumatters.com

 312-420-0724

 maevewebster