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2024 Global Restaurant Trends Forecast

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Korean Tteokbokki
Rice Cake stick
with spicy sauce

Image Source:
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With 2023 almost in the rearview and 2024 on the horizon, we are pleased to share our perspective on what's set to influence restaurant operations, marketing and menus around the globe in the coming year and beyond.

Industry headwinds moderated over the past year, and 2024 promises the hope of a more predictable atmosphere relative to labor, inflation and supply. But international conflicts, extreme weather and the many seen and unseen effects of the pandemic may still create newfound uncertainty that negatively impacts many aspects of the industry.

As much as ever, the need to perk up consumers weary of the past few years will be high on operators' to-do lists. Expect this to be expressed through restaurant experiences, marketing and menu development that are grounded in playful, whimsical and escapist themes.

Restaurant brands will also need to address shifting consumer attitudes, preferences and need states, particularly when it comes to balancing innovation with simplicity, healthfulness with indulgence, convenience with experience and trend with tradition.

With this as our context moving into 2024, here's Technomic's best glimpse into what will impact the restaurant industry internationally over the next year.

Innovation Acceleration

Streamlined menus and elevated operator

Image Source: Shutterstock

competition will make innovation more prevalent at major restaurant chains in 2024. Expect new products to roll out quicker than in the past but for shorter periods. Branded collabs at leading chains will continue to draw consumer attention but operators will need to elevate their creativity as products once considered wild are now closer to the norm. Watch for more restaurants to blend cuisine traditions with modern trends to create menu offerings that reach consumers in a playful and nostalgic way.

Hallyu Deja Vu

The next wave of Korean influence is set to wash over the restaurant world—a cultural and culinary soft power that's informing new product development as well as food and beverage trends on menus around the globe. With the mainstreaming of gochujang, chimaek and bulgogi over the past decade-plus, trendsetting independents, college canteens, food trucks and emerging concepts will introduce the broader world to less-familiar offerings such as K ramen, spicy tteokbokki rice cakes, army stew, spicy-cheesy buldak chicken, gimbap rice rolls (including no-carb alternatives) and gopchang. Kihap!



Gimbap rice roll



Green tea latte with coconut milk

Is the Plant-Based Trend Over?

With plant-based now a fixed menu influence globally, 2024 will be the year folks drop the fixation on whether it's a growing or dying trend and instead approach it as the matured category it has grown into. We will continue to see more attention paid to time-honored meatless proteins like tofu, cig kofte and tempeh—but the biggest development will be that large restaurant chains will start dropping the upcharge for milk alternatives in hot and cold coffees and teas. It's already happening among leading chains in places like Germany, the U.K. and South Africa.

Mainland Chains Mature

China is far and away the global market where restaurant chains are growing the most aggressively. Only on the mainland would a burger concept such as Tastien have ambitions to reach 10,000 locations within

its first five years of existence. Only there would an emerging chain like Nowwa Coffee boast of opening 120 outlets in a single day. Beverage brands, in particular, are popping up across China and growing like mushrooms seemingly overnight. But intensified competition and breakneck expansion on the mainland have become too fierce, despite rigid demand and opportunities in smaller cities. More and more brands from China will be growing their presences overseas in 2024—a year that may just mark the establishment of the mainland as one of the world’s leading exporters of restaurant brands, foundationally reshaping the global restaurant landscape for decades to come.

Things Get Personal

Big chains will accelerate development of personal meals to cater to growing demand for solo dining. This will be most pronounced at pizza restaurants, where pizza-adjacent handhelds have been trending for the past several years in the form of cheesy, pepperoni-packed melts, wraps, pockets and calzones intended for convenient single-person meals. Look for restaurants to start touting the ability to remember guests’ dietary restrictions and preferences for easier ordering and develop creative dine-in experiences that are more tailored to single-person occasions. One amenity operators will more aggressively market next year will be that availability of pet-friendly dining spaces and menus.

Catering to New Occasions

Operators will accelerate the expansion of menus and dayparts with creative and off-beat approaches made to attract a broader consumer demographic within a wider range of hours. Think doughnut operators adding pizza ranges, chef-made menus from build-your-own chains and, perhaps inspired by the success of China’s Mixue Ice Cream & Tea, coffee chains introducing ice cream lines. Look also for brands to add and expand on later-day, late-night and overnight menus with craveable classics as well as new daypart exclusives. Brunch will be a key occasion for sit-down restaurants—including all-day and nighttime-only iterations of the breakfast-lunch hybrid.

Spin to Win

Pivoting from the numerous virtual brands and delivery kitchen concepts launched in recent years, major regional chains will introduce and expand on spinoff concepts to broaden consumer interest and capitalize on existing regional recognition. Unlike their predecessors, these concepts will focus less on delivery and more on dine-in occasions. While many operators will likely develop stripped-down and/or specialty versions of existing menu lines, others will roll out fully fleshed-out concepts built around vegan or plant-based menus, nonalcohol beverages and dessert lines.

Other Trendlets to Watch

There’s a burgeoning category of new-style drinking yogurts in China and Southeast Asia that use the dairy standby as the base for mix-ins such as coffee and avocado—expect this category to grow. For many restaurants and suppliers, being halal-certified will be increasingly important in more and more parts of the world. Aged salts will be a thing. Expect Nikkei cuisine to grow in prominence, particularly in Europe, North America and the Middle East. Sweet corn, avocado and ube will get more widespread usage in desserts. Traditional Chinese Medicine will gain stronger influence on restaurant menus across Asia and beyond. Yakitori, satay and other meats served on sticks will get their rightful due on the international stage. High-end generic foods and beverages will slowly emerge, offering elevated experiences and products without the big-brand hype. Finally, the trend of using of AI to create new products will fade from its mid-2023 peak.



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cheese
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