As a nation, we’re expressing ourselves through food as never before. Food is today’s hottest social currency.
2016: food as self-expression

Food is no longer solely about nourishment. The latest research from Waitrose has identified four key trends that highlight how we’re increasingly expressing our way through and about what we eat and do.

S elf-expression comes in many forms. The clothes we wear, the car we drive and the music we listen to all tell us a little about who we are. The Waitrose Food and Drink Report 2016 has uncovered a new trend: we’re now expressing ourselves through food too. It’s a healthy eating and the eating of food that’s often seen as mundane, and food that is being used to express ourselves. The latest research into the year’s top food and drink trends makes an intriguing insight and, right now, it’s clear things are shifting trends to achieve this. Our report always provides us with a lowdown: what we’re seeing and what’s been happening over the past year. But perhaps the greatest forum in ‘self-expression Britain’ has uncovered is the previous week, and the previous month. This increases to a third of people who picture their food on social media – or sent a picture to a friend – in the past month. This has been sipping in 2016: predictions for 2017. Sales of this Brazilian rump steak have become a storecupboard staple. It is high in fibre and protein, and has become a hot topic on social media. It was launched earlier this year. The new coconut water, this time by the Waitrose Easy to Bake range, has been a huge hit. Martha Collison’s recipe for porridge is now a bestseller. Sales of this Brazilian rump steak have become a storecupboard staple. It is high in fibre and protein, and has become a hot topic on social media. It was launched earlier this year. The new coconut water, this time by the Waitrose Easy to Bake range, has been a huge hit. Martha Collison’s recipe for porridge is now a bestseller.

For an increasing number of us, eating and living well is central to our identity. According to Waitrose research, almost three-quarters of British food shoppers feel cooking for themselves is part of their identity. If so, it’s no surprise that they’re increasingly expressing their style. In the rocketing popularity of seeds and grains, seaweed and smoothie-making, we’re increasingly expressing our style.

Health is a way of life. It’s an integral part of the way we celebrate and experience ourselves. To today’s consumers, living well is something to celebrate, and to many, it’s an integral part of who we are. And, with more than three-quarters of us regarding healthy eating as part of our identity, it’s no longer something to be coy about, as the rocketing popularity of seeds and grains, seaweed and smoothie-making demonstrates. Living well is something to celebrate, and experience ourselves. To today’s consumers, living well is something to celebrate, and experience ourselves.
In the past month alone, one in five Britons – that’s an estimated 17.5 million adults – has posted a photograph of their food on social media or sent a snap to a friend. It’s not just the younger generation, but all age groups. In contrast, 15% of over-55s have posted a picture of food in the past month – a figure that falls to one in 14 among the over-55s.

The rise of social media has changed our relationship with food. Almost 44% of us make a bit of effort with our cooking if we think anyone might be posted on social media, our survey found. We’ve become a nation of food enthusiasts, telling the world about who we are via our food choices through the lens of social media. But it’s not all about aesthetics – our survey also discovered a good looking place of food can make eating infinitely more pleasurable.

‘It’s about experience and emotions,’ says Natalie Mitchell, Waitrose’s head of brand development. And to a connected world, people want to share.

Restaurant are getting it on the act, too, according to Rachel Ventures, editor of the Good Food Guide. Restaurants today need to have a dish that is more than just a serviceable, really Instagrammable and people often go to a specific restaurant just to say it’s ‘Instagrammable’ simply.

But there are downsides of all this sharing. A quarter of us (45-54 year olds) are concerned that social media prevents us from living in the moment and engaging with our eating companions.

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THE LUNCHEON LOWDOWN

Waitrose research and sales data have revealed that what shoppers buy for lunch and where they eat it are influenced by many factors, including the job they do, their age and where they live. Take a look to see how your lunchtime rituals fit with the trends we’ve spotted across the nation.

What’s for lunch?

SAVOURY SNACKS: The Midlands have also seen salad sales leap by 10% as workers from the region seek nutritious and convenient lunch options. This is likely to extend to other regions, but most popular in the Midlands, with workers from the region most likely to pick up a leafy salad for lunch. The East Anglia and the West Midlands regions have also seen salad sales up by 20% and 10% respectively.

SANDWICH SALES INCREASED BY 10% NATIONWIDE THIS YEAR: The most popular sandwich flavours are prawn and smoked ham, with lemon sorbet and cream cheese smoked salmon among the top 10%. Sandwich sales increased by 5% nationwide this year as workers in the South West, South East and the Midlands were the most likely to pick up a sarnie for lunch. The East Anglia region was the least likely to do so.

ALFRESCO VS. ALDESKO: Lunching in front of a screen, or on the go, has increasingly become part of British work culture, as our research confirms.

**JUNE**

GAME ON: It’s another opportunity to back back with friends. The UEFA European Championships and Rugby union internationals saw beer sales up almost 9%.

ENGLISH WINE: It’s good to see shoppers supporting this brilliant industry. Sales of English wine increased by 21%.

**JULY**

MORE FUN AND GAMES: Wimbledon and the UEFA finals saw sales of Champagne up by 19%, and a rise in prosecco and cocktails. Sparkling wine as a whole is up 27%.

**FESTIVAL SEASON**

AND IT’S A WET ONE, BUT WE’RE NOT A NATION TO BE EASILY DETERRED: Umbrellas and poncho sales are up by 150%.

SPARKLING WINE: Sales of sparkling wine are up 27%.

**AUGUST**

THE HEAT IS ON: It seems that the drink of choice this summer - sales of iced tea are up a massive 104%, led by the ‘frosé’ trend. That's a frozen cocktail of rosé, lemon juice and sugar - if you didn’t know.

VIVA BRAZIL: The nation embraces the carnival flavours of Brazil as the opening ceremony of the Rio 2016 Olympic Games kicks off. The classic Brazilian cocktail is clearly a winning choice, as Leblon Cachaça - the go-to spirit if you’re making a caipirinha - outsells pernod 60%. And the opening ceremony of the Games will see the opening of the ‘frosé’ bar, with sales up by 104%.

**SEPTEMBER**

INDIAN SUMMER: Summers scorching weather can be recorded levels - 34ºC in Gravesend, Kent, in an impressive attempt to make the most of alfresco eating. Barbecues across the country are fired up, and sales of grill-worthy halloumi and Mediterranean fava, avocados, both are up by 25%.

DEDICATED FOLKS IN YORKSHIRE AND THE HUMBER ARE LEAST LIKELY TO STOP FOR LUNCH: Over 1 in 3 workers choose to eat lunch at their desks, while workers in the East Anglia region are Twice as likely to stop for lunch. They eat lunch in front of a screen, or on the go, has increasingly become part of British work culture, as our research confirms.
When it comes to the environment, doing the right thing has become second nature to many. More aware of issues concerning our food and lifestyle choices, we’re even defining ourselves by our ‘conscious consumption’.

According to our poll, 46% of us discard less food than we did five years ago. In fact, batch cooking has helped 34% of people trim down on waste. What’s more, small stores are becoming more frequent shopping trips for a smaller percentage of people (never more likely to forget a bag). The feeling that it’s the right thing to do.

WHAT THEY’RE SAYING

People are ‘reducing or re-using’ food. They’re more conscious of waste. They’re less likely to over-buying. They’re more aware of the environmental impact of their shopping habits and more likely to consider how or where our food is sourced. It’s the right thing to do.”

In the bag

We’ve come full circle with our shopping bag habit, from our grandparents bringing their own to the convenience of disposables to reusing bags again.

THE GREAT PLASTIC BAG SURVEY

Recent research found that plastic bag usage has plummeted since the Government introduced a 5p charge for bags in England in October 2015, bringing it in line with the rest of the UK. But our survey discovered that one in five Britons still forgets to bring their bags with them most times they shop.

WHILE THE OVER-55s ARE THE MOST LIABLE TO LEAVE A SHOP HOME LOOSE IN THEIR ARMS IF THEY FORGET A BAG (22% VS 15%)

OVER THE PAST YEAR, HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN YOUR SHOPPING BAGS?

OVERALL 18-24 YEAR-OLDS ARE FIVE TIMES MORE LIKELY TO FORGET A BAG EVERY TIME OR NEARLY EVERY TIME THAN THOSE OVER 55

31% leave their supermarket bag empty-handed, due to forgetting a bag

42% of us freeze more food than we did five years ago

85% of us are set to take home six carriers in 2016, compared with four out of five people sometimes in 2015.

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PAGES 8 | 9

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the lines between eating out and in are blurring. We’re learning to make a night in an occasion, when we’re in charge of the ambiance, as well as the food, and nobody has to do extra homework.

The trend away from noise-reducing furnishings towards an industrial aesthetic and hard surfaces has made for better restaurant experiences all round. ‘The Good Food Guide’ editor, Carol DiNeiman, says, ‘we know this information is important to many diners’. See also:岩石/stone/industrial.

You can experiment a bit more when you’re cooking at home. It doesn’t matter if it goes wrong. Workshop chef Henry Firth describes the impact of technology on home cooking, saying, ‘I eat out two to three times a week. The rise in affordable and healthier casual dining is great, as a family sees more variety and indulgence. At home, we can set the atmosphere, be creative, and have our usual kitchen tools out. In the past year, four in 10 of us have either been to or hosted a special meal at home, and 22% say that the majority of partners are still in charge of the meal they’re going to eat. As eating out has become more widespread, we’ve become more used to it, and don’t always stick to our usual order. Some may even see us ordering more than we normally would, seem to be rising in demand. Indulgent ‘chill nights’, when we stay in and spend a bit more on food than we normally would, seem to be rising in popularity. Chilling at home. We can decompress with partners or family, bringing the family together or indulging a loved one. Our friends, bring the family together or indulging a loved one. Our friends, bring the family together or indulging a loved one. Our friends, bring the family together or indulging a loved one. Our friends, bring the family together or indulging a loved one. Our friends, bring the family together or indulging a loved one. Our friends, bring the family together or indulging a loved one. Our friends, bring the family together or indulging a loved one. Our friends, bring the family together or indulging a loved one.

Technology through the decades

1976 Waitrose introduces store in London.

1986 Small computers are introduced in stores to help with stock management. And while the majority of partners are still paid by cheque, some are paid electronically for the first time.

1996 ‘Call and collect’ and delivery to work: home shopping services are rolled out. In house magazine, The Gazette, publishes an article with the headline, ‘What is this internet, where did it come from, and how does it work? Rapping surfers should read this’.

2001 Launch of online shopping at Waitrose.

2002 QuickCheck, the scan-as-you-shop service introduced into stores.

2006 Shops across the country complete roll-out of chip and pin payment systems.

2016 All Waitrose stores offer contactless and mobile payments, including a new phone as you shop app on your mobile, and the first cashless store opens in 5x5 in east London.

The Waitrose Food and Drink Report 2016

2016 How has shopping changed in the past 20 years?

This is now

Today, our research shows that:

1. Most people shop two or three times per week (51%, with 35% of shoppers price compare in front of the shop and 27% every day)

2. A third of us don’t have a designated day to shop, but Friday and Saturday are the most popular with those who do (16% of shoppers)

According to Deloitte, in 2015, 12% of our household income is spent on food and drink.

What we’ll be eating and drinking in 2017

Polynesian Food

Hawaiian poke is becoming a must-try snack, as customers prepare to opt for home-cooked meals, the trend continues. In Hawaii, pikaleu, is often served with rice, seaweed, and flaked fish (hapa), served over ice. It can be made with any mix of ingredients.
Our favourite drinks
Customers are branching out, mixing and blending their drinks, and taking self-expression to new levels as they do so, says Pierpaolo Petrossi MW, Head of Buying, Beers, Wines and Spirits

This year in drinks, anything goes. Blending, experimenting and exploring are on the rise as customers rip up the rulebook in their quest for self-expression.

The choice of flavours and serving options available to people has never been greater. This trend is most visible in spirits. Drinks are no longer necessarily served in a tumbler over ice; people are creating their own signature cocktails with fresh fruit, garnish and herbs. It’s all pretty funky and it’s all absolutely acceptable. Whether people like Japanese whiskey, premium tequilas or niche bourbons, they are enjoying expressing themselves. There has been a real blending of flavours and categories. This year, we started selling Seedlip, a zero-alcohol spirit with a mellow botanical flavour.

Brewers of craft beer are discovering interesting new directions. Rather than simply adding bitterness, hops are now being used to add sweet fragrances. Again, people can choose the beer – or cider – that best reflects their personality. The growth of craft beer often comes with a community benefit: many small brewers are located close to stores in which their products are sold and are therefore engaged with their local communities. More than ever, people enjoy visiting and having a direct experience of the brewer, cider-maker, vineyard or distillery. This sense of place is central to their story-telling, and is an important part of their self-expression.

While people still enjoy classic wines, they are exploring new and different regions. Gavi, Grüner Veltliner and Albariño are growing in popularity. At the same time, old classics such as Côtes du Rhône remain strong, and dry rosés continue to increase in popularity.

As seen in the rest of this report, health plays a growing role in our drinking choices. People want to consume worthy calories, and they want to tell friends about who they are by their choice of drink. In short, people today want an experience that is about more than just buying a product from a supermarket. That’s why in September we held our inaugural Waitrose Drinks Festival, where thousands of our most loyal and engaged customers met our winemakers, distillers and brewers. The festival featured food, too. The aim was to reduce the distance between consumers and suppliers, to share incredible tastes with our customers and to allow Waitrose shoppers to learn more about where our products come from.

Raise a glass to G&T

When it comes to putting their own twist on a drink, more and more people are embracing gin. The spirit has become this year’s tipple of choice, with sales up by 34% compared to 2015. Premium varieties are particularly popular and, often handcrafted by small producers in niche distilleries, they each come with their own unique story to tell. Popular brands include Opihr Oriental Spiced Gin, which contains Indonesian cubeb berries and Moroccan coriander, Copper House Dry Gin, from coastal brewer Adnams, and Audemus’s Pink Pepper Gin, distilled in France.

One of the reasons for gin’s success is not only that it is deliciously gluggable, but it is also a blank slate for redressing. It is a spirit that lends itself to mixing. It is the perfect option for those who prefer a crisp, clean favourite with a hint of peach.

WAITROSE NOW SELL 43 DIFFERENT TYPES OF GIN

In December 2015, Mintel revealed that more than half of gin drinkers are under 35.

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Waitrose now sells 43 different types of gin, which accounted for 1/3 of all spirit sales.

People can choose the beer – or cider – that best reflects their personality.

The humble G&T is fast becoming the ultimate vehicle for self-expression.

The Waitrose Food and Drink Report 2016