Price vs Health: Analysing Consumer Willingness to Pay for Healthy Desserts

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***Abstract*—This study investigates how Generation Z's perceptions of health and pricing relate to dessert purchases. This study attempts to determine how much Gen Z is genuinely willing to pay for dessert options that are promoted as healthier substitutes using a combination of a planned primary survey and a review of the literature. The study examines elements such as brand positioning, ingredient transparency, and the general health-consciousness that is increasingly prevalent in this age range. This study aims to provide a better understanding of the actual gap between health knowledge and actual purchasing behaviour in the dessert industry by analysing previous research and gathering first-hand information from students.**

***Index Terms*—Gen Z consumer behaviour, Willingness to pay, Healthy dessert, Price sensitivity, Health perception in food choices, Health-conscious**

I. INTRODUCTION

Younger customers' perceptions of the food they eat have clearly changed over the last few years. People in Generation Z, usually defined as those born between 1997 and 2012, have grown up in a time where social media, apps, and online groups provide continual access to health and wellness information. As a result, many members of Generation Z have begun to pay more attention to the ingredients in their food, especially snacks and desserts, which were once seen to be decadent indulgences with less nutritious value. A sweet treat that offers nutritional value while reducing elements that may be harmful to health, like refined sugars and bad fats, is sometimes referred to as a healthy dessert. Unlike traditional desserts that are often "empty calories," healthy versions focus on whole, unprocessed ingredients to nourish the body.

At the same time, the cost of healthier food options has increased dramatically in comparison to conventional ones. Young consumers, particularly college students who frequently depend on part-time jobs or family support for their income, have an intriguing dilemma since they want to eat better but are also on a tight budget. This raises the question of how much these students are genuinely ready to spend on desserts that purport to be healthier. By examining previous research and establishing a framework for a survey-based study among Gen Z, this paper attempts to delve deeper into that subject.

1.1 Background of the Study

Over the past ten years, the food and beverage industry has witnessed a significant surge in health-oriented goods. To meet the increasing desire for better eating, companies have begun to introduce sugar-free, low-calorie, and protein-enriched versions of popular desserts. Nevertheless, despite all of this work, there are still many aspects of how young consumers truly choose whether to spend more money on these options that we do not fully comprehend.

Prior studies have largely concentrated on older customer segments, such as middle-aged individuals or millennials, or on general health food purchasing trends. On the other hand, when it comes to dessert-specific purchase decisions, Gen Z is rather understudied. This is particularly true in India, where consumer behaviour research has not kept up with the dessert market's rapid expansion.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

As customers strive to strike a balance between enjoyment and nutrition, there is an increasing demand in healthy dessert options. However, because they employ different ingredients and healthier production techniques, healthy desserts are usually more expensive than conventional sweets. Customers are more price sensitive as a result of this higher pricing, which has a significant impact on their propensity to buy such goods. Even though the market for healthy desserts is expanding, little is known about how customers weigh pricing and health benefits when making dessert purchases. The goal of this study is to determine the cause of that disparity. In particular, it examines whether the problem is solely related to cost or if other elements, such as confidence in health claims, brand reputation, or lack of awareness about ingredients also play a role in shaping the final purchasing decision.

1.3 Significance of the Study

There are various reasons why this study is significant. First, it helps food marketers and dessert makers better understand what Gen Z wants and how much they are prepared to spend on healthier options. Brands may make better choices regarding product price, packaging, and marketing tactics with the use of this kind of information.

Second, college administrators and cafeteria managers who are attempting to implement healthier food options on campus may find the research helpful. They can make better decisions regarding what to stock and how much to charge if they are aware of how students feel about pricing versus health in the dessert category.

Lastly, from a scholarly perspective, this study adds to the growing body of research on Gen Z consumer behaviour, which is still a relatively new area of study.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

René Díaz-Pichardo, Vincenza Vota, Patrizia Tettamanzi (2026) The findings show that rather than being the product of isolated individual preferences, students' dietary choices are the consequence of dynamic interactions between structural determinants (like affordability, availability, and time constraints), culturally embedded food values, and selective engagement with health and environmental responsibility. Participants' awareness of sustainable and nutritious eating is growing, but social dynamics, information asymmetries, and budgetary constraints often keep values from being implemented. Despite the widespread recognition of environmental challenges, they are not always put into practice, partly due to distrust over sustainability labels and greenwashing. It was discovered that there were notable cultural differences in food standards, priorities, and limits.

Grzeskowiak-Przywecka, A., & Śliwowska, O. (2025) This study examined the dietary preferences of Gen Z consumers in Poland (n = survey sample, CAWI technique, 2023) from the standpoint of sustainable food systems. Important research revealed that Gen Z prioritizes taste, cost, and health when making food choices, in that order. Although Gen Z has a high level of health consciousness, budgetary restrictions can cause actual purchase behaviour to deviate from stated objectives. This closely relates to the problem statement in the research article, which is the discrepancy between real purchasing behaviour in the dessert market and health awareness.

Innova Market Insights (2025) According to Innova's research on food trends in India, Indian consumers place a high value on cost, convenience, natural claims, and health claims. Compared to global averages, Indian consumers place a higher value on premium-quality and health claims in the desserts and ice cream category. For 64% of Indian customers studied, the primary motivator for consuming cereal and energy bars is health advantages. According to the report, consumers are becoming more receptive to plant-based and functional additives. This supports the study's commercial and scholarly significance by offering up-to-date market data that Indian Gen Z consumers' health consciousness in the dessert category is measurably high

Cinu Varghese, Patricia Arcia, Ana Curutchet (2024) This study uses a discrete choice experiment (n = 402) to investigate consumer willingness to pay for BSG-enriched bread and chocolate treats. The findings indicate that BSG information and sustainability branding have a beneficial impact on consumer preferences, making products more appealing. When buying bread, brand is important, but when it comes to chocolate desserts, price is the most important consideration. All things considered, the results indicate that BSG enrichment allows producers to demand higher prices, improve the quality of their products, and promote sustainable growth in the food sector.

Anna Uliano, Marcello Stanco, Giuseppe Marotta, Concetta Nazzaro (2024) Studies shows consumers' preferences and willingness to pay for sustainable functional foods, specifically antioxidant-rich snack bars produced sustainably. Consumers are willing to pay a price premium of €0.30, with higher income, female, health-conscious, and novelty-seeking consumers showing greater willingness to pay. Health-related attributes are preferred over sustainability attributes, which are considered less influential.

Bahadur, N., et al. (2024) This study examined social media usage and food advertising's influence on Gen Z dietary behaviour in India (n = 18–25 age group, ethics approved by Symbiosis International University, Pune). The study found that excessive exposure to food advertising on Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest, and YouTube significantly impacted perceived hunger and dietary choices. This is highly contextually relevant given the Indian academic setting of the research paper and directly supports the objective of exploring social media's role in shaping Gen Z's dessert purchasing decisions.

Bora, P., & Borah, S. (2024) This cross-generational study compared Gen Z and Gen Y food consumption behaviour using the Theory of Planned Behaviour framework, with survey data from 251 Gen Z and 319 Gen Y respondents. Gen Z and Gen Y shared characteristics such as health consciousness, attention to word-of-mouth, and subjective norms, but diverged significantly in motivating factors. Gen Z was more influenced by social media and peer behaviour, while Gen Y was more influenced by personal health goals. This provides a comparative framework useful for positioning the research paper's Gen Z-specific findings.

Yasmin, S., Khatun, M., et al. (2024) This study explored consumers' willingness to pay a premium for foods with healthy labels in a developing economy context (n = 359, Mashhad, Iran). Results indicated that field of study, food health importance, government supervision, brand trust, and knowledge about harmful effects of chemical fertilisers significantly influenced WTP for healthy-labelled foods. A negative relationship between food price and WTP was confirmed. This study is relevant to the research paper as it parallels the Indian developing-economy context and confirms that brand trust and health knowledge are key mediators of WTP.

Bilgili, B., Özkul, E., & Koç, E. (2024) This study investigated how packaging transparency in organic food affects consumers' purchase intentions. Findings showed that consumers perceive packaging with transparent elements as significantly more trustworthy compared to opaque packaging. Transparent packaging gave consumers higher perceived green value and met quality expectations, leading to stronger purchase intentions. This is directly applicable to the research paper's exploration of ingredient transparency as a factor influencing Gen Z's willingness to pay for healthy desserts.

Varghese, C., Arcia, P., & Curutchet, A. (2024) This study examined consumer willingness to pay (WTP) for brewer's spent grain (BSG)-enriched bread and chocolate desserts using a discrete choice experiment (n = 402). Results revealed that sustainability logos and BSG-related information positively influenced consumer preferences, making products more attractive. Brand played a critical role in bread purchasing decisions, while price was the dominant factor for chocolate desserts. Overall, BSG enrichment enabled manufacturers to charge premium prices, enhance product quality, and support sustainable development in the food industry. This study is directly relevant to the research paper as it explores premium pricing dynamics in dessert categories — particularly how product-specific attributes like sustainability cues can overcome price sensitivity among consumers.

Uliano, A., Stanco, M., Marotta, G., & Nazzaro, C. (2024) This study investigated consumer preferences and willingness to pay for sustainable functional foods, specifically antioxidant-rich snack bars produced sustainably. Consumers were willing to pay a price premium of €0.30 per unit for health and sustainability attributes combined. Higher income, female gender, health-consciousness, and novelty-seeking behaviour were significantly associated with greater WTP. Notably, health-related attributes were preferred over sustainability attributes. This study supports the hypothesis in the research paper that health consciousness positively influences WTP for premium healthy food products, including desserts.

Research & Markets (2024) This industry report valued the India Frozen Dessert Market at USD 4.86 billion in 2024, with projections to reach USD 9.25 billion by 2030 at a CAGR of 11.32%. The report highlighted that health and wellness trends are significantly reshaping Indian consumer choices, with rising demand for low-calorie, sugar-free, vegan, probiotic-rich, and clean-label dessert variants. Premium health-oriented offerings are finding strong uptake in metro cities where consumers are willing to pay more for 'guilt-free indulgence'. This industry context directly validates the relevance and commercial significance of the research paper's topic.

Meixner, O., Malleier, M., & Haas, R. (2024) This study examined Gen Z's perception and WTP for plant-based meat alternatives (PBMAs) among 433 young consumers below 30 years. Findings revealed that while Gen Z is environmentally aware, taste and health concerns remain stronger purchasing drivers than sustainability. WTP was moderate and highly price-sensitive among younger cohorts. This aligns with the research paper's focus on Gen Z's price sensitivity in food purchasing decisions and supports the hypothesis that Gen Z does not automatically accept premium pricing for 'healthier' options.

Patwardhan, V., Mallya, J., Kumar, D., et al. (2024) This study developed a validated scale for measuring the influence of social media on young adults' food consumption behaviour. Five dimensions were identified: impulsive eating, social comparison, digital advertising exposure, desire stimulation, and awareness of healthy choices. Notably, social media can both negatively and positively influence food choices — it has also been shown to increase awareness about healthy eating and promote healthier food decisions. This study provides a measurement framework applicable to the primary survey planned in the research paper.

Nasution, M. D., et al. (2023) This study examined factors affecting the repurchase intention of organic food among Gen Z consumers in a developing economy using PLS-SEM analysis. Results showed that social media influence and brand trust positively impacted brand awareness and consumer satisfaction, which in turn drove repurchase intention. Health consciousness and social consciousness were identified as significant drivers of purchase intention for organic food. This is relevant to the research paper as it confirms the role of brand trust and social media in shaping Gen Z's food purchases in emerging markets like India.

Moosa Alsubhi 1 2, Miranda Blake 2, Tan Nguyen 1, Ishani Majmudar (2023) A systematic review examined whether consumers are willing to pay more for healthier foods and the factors influencing this willingness. Across 26 experiments in 15 studies, 88.5% found consumers were willing to pay a price premium for healthier foods, ranging from 5.6% to 91.5% (mean 30.7%). Willingness to pay was consistently positive for reduced-fat and wholegrain foods with added fruits and vegetables, while results were mixed for reduced salt or combined low fat and sugar products. Older adults, females, individuals with obesity, and health-conscious consumers were more willing to pay, whereas younger, healthy-weight, and more highly educated consumers were less willing to pay higher prices.

Moosa Alsubhi, Miranda Blake, Tan Nguyen, Ishani Majmudar, Marj Moodie, Jaithri Ananthapavan (2022) A systematic review of 26 experiments found that most consumers are willing to pay a price premium for healthier foods, with 88.5% of studies reporting willingness to pay 5.6%–91.5% more (average ~30.7%). Consumers showed the strongest preference for foods with reduced fat, wholegrains, and added fruits and vegetables, while responses to low-salt and low-sugar products were mixed. Willingness to pay was higher among older adults, women, individuals with obesity, and health-conscious consumers, and lower among younger, healthy-weight, and highly educated consumers. These findings highlight strong consumer demand for healthier options and support the effectiveness of food retail strategies that promote healthier choices.

Kucharczuk, A. J., Oliver, T. L., & Dowdell, E. B. (2022) This mixed-methods systematic literature review investigated social media's role in influencing adolescents' food choices. Over 90% of adolescents have at least one social media account, and food and beverage brands capitalise on this exposure. Depending on the nutritional value of promoted products, social media advertisements contribute to the risk of unfavourable health outcomes including obesity, hypertension, and type 2 diabetes. This supports the research paper's objective of exploring social media influence on Gen Z's dessert purchasing behaviour.

Ge, J. (2022) This study examined the relationship between traceable food extrinsic cues (price, origin, production information, quality assurance, third-party certification) and consumer purchase intention using Cue-Based Decision-Making theory. Findings showed that food traceability transparency significantly reduced food safety concerns and enhanced consumer trust, positively affecting purchase intention. Price risk negatively impacted perceived value and purchase intent. This is relevant to the research paper's argument that ingredient transparency — a form of food traceability — can help justify premium pricing of healthy desserts.

IFIC (International Food Information Council) (2022) The 2022 IFIC Food & Health Survey found that when consumers faced a choice between a standard-priced product and a higher-priced healthier or eco-friendly alternative, only 39% opted for the premium option while 61% chose the less expensive one. This reinforces a consistent trend tracked over a decade: taste and price remain the top two priorities in food purchase decisions across all consumer segments. For the research paper, this quantitative benchmark contextualises Gen Z's price sensitivity within broader consumer behaviour research.

Alsubhi, M., Blake, M., Nguyen, T., Majmudar, I., Moodie, M., & Ananthapavan, J. (2022) A systematic review of 26 experiments found that most consumers are willing to pay a price premium for healthier foods, with 88.5% of studies reporting WTP of 5.6%–91.5% more (average ~30.7%). Consumers showed the strongest preference for foods with reduced fat, wholegrains, and added fruits and vegetables, while responses to low-salt and low-sugar products were mixed. Willingness to pay was higher among older adults, women, individuals with obesity, and health-conscious consumers, and lower among younger, healthy-weight, and highly educated consumers. This is significant for the research paper because Gen Z — young, healthy-weight — may be less willing to pay premium for healthy desserts, validating the research problem.

Miranda, H. A., et al. (2021) his review synthesised findings on consumer trust in food and the food system (publications from 2000–2021). Key findings: consumer trust is influenced by product assurance systems, trusted food actors (farmers, government, retailers), and third-party certifications. Traceability information validated by independent parties significantly enhances consumer trust. For healthy dessert brands targeting Gen Z, this study underscores the importance of transparent, certified ingredient sourcing — a factor the research paper identifies as central to purchase decisions.

Tabassum Ali, Jabir Ali (2020) Consumer food purchasing behavior has increasingly shifted toward healthy foods due to changing socio-demographic profiles. Health and wellness foods have emerged as a high-growth business segment, attracting significant national and multinational investment. In India, this market grew at a compound annual growth rate of 14.4% between 2002 and 2018 and is expected to expand further due to rising health concerns. The study finds that 44% of consumers are willing to pay a price premium of about 9% for health and wellness food products. Regression results show that education and income significantly influence willingness to pay, while health consciousness is the key psychological driver. Product attributes—quality, taste, packaging, and price—also significantly affect willingness to pay. Additionally, with the evolution of retail formats, consumers prioritize shopping convenience and are less influenced by in-store promotions and sales assistance.

Ali, T., & Ali, J. (2020) This study analysed consumer food purchasing behaviour and WTP for health and wellness food products in India. The Indian health and wellness food market grew at a CAGR of 14.4% between 2002 and 2018. The study found that 44% of consumers are willing to pay a price premium of about 9% for healthier options. Regression analysis showed education and income as significant socio-demographic drivers of WTP, while health consciousness emerged as the key psychological driver. Product attributes — quality, taste, packaging, and price — also significantly affected WTP. This is the most contextually relevant literature for the Indian setting of the research paper.

Dolgopolova, I., & Teuber, R. (2018) This review finds that health claims increase consumers' marginal willingness to pay (MWTP) for healthier foods and reduce variability in WTP estimates. Hypothetical research methods significantly raise MWTP, while the dairy category lowers it. Claims related to cholesterol reduction positively influence MWTP. However, large differences in study designs limit the ability to draw definitive conclusions.

Dolgopolova, I., & Teuber, R. (2018) This meta-analysis reviewed how health claims influence consumers' marginal WTP (MWTP) for healthier foods. Health claims were found to consistently increase MWTP, while dairy product category and hypothetical research methods introduced variability in WTP estimates. Claims related to cholesterol reduction positively influenced MWTP. However, large differences in study designs made it difficult to draw definitive universal conclusions. For the research paper, this study provides theoretical grounding in understanding how health labelling and claims affect the price consumers are willing to pay — a critical factor in the healthy dessert market.

Haws, K. L., Reczek, R. W., & Sample, K. L. (2017) This research revealed that consumers commonly hold a 'healthy = expensive' intuition, often overgeneralising this belief to situations where it is not true. This cognitive bias shapes perceptions of healthiness, price, and missing product attributes — especially under heuristic processing. Consumers demand stronger evidence when health claims challenge this assumption. This directly supports the research paper's core argument: Gen Z's hesitation to pay more for healthy desserts may be partly driven by pre-existing price-health associations rather than actual pricing realities.

2.1 Research Gap

Most existing research on healthy food purchasing focuses on general food categories or older consumer groups such as millennials and middle-aged adults. Very few studies examine Gen Z purchasing behaviour, particularly in the dessert category.

Another limitation in existing literature is that many studies examine single factors, such as price sensitivity, social media influence, or brand trust, in isolation. Few studies analyse how these factors collectively influence Gen Z's willingness to pay for healthier dessert options.

Finally, there is a recognised intention–behaviour gap, where consumers claim to value health but often change their decisions when prices increase (Grzeskowiak-Przywecka & Śliwowska, 2025). However, this gap has not been specifically explored for dessert choices among Indian Gen Z students.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Method

This study uses a quantitative research approach. Primary data was collected through a structured online questionnaire that was shared with Gen Z respondents, mostly college students. The questionnaire was made on Google Forms and had 20 questions that covered different aspects like health consciousness, dessert consumption habits, price perception, and willingness to pay.

The research design is descriptive in nature, which means the study is trying to describe and understand a situation rather than establish a cause-and-effect relationship. The questions in the survey were a mix of multiple choice, ranking, and Likert scale questions, which made it easier to analyse the data numerically.

3.2 Sampling

The sampling method used in this study is convenience sampling, which is a type of non-probability sampling. This means respondents were chosen based on availability and willingness to participate, rather than through a completely random process. The survey was shared through personal networks and social media platforms.

A total of 101 responses were collected, which is a reasonable sample size for an exploratory study of this kind. The majority of respondents were college students between the ages of 21 and 23, which fits well within the Gen Z age range this study is focused on.

3.3 Objectives of the Study

This study has four main objectives:

1. To identify the key factors that influence Gen Z's willingness to pay for healthy dessert options.
2. To analyse the impact of price sensitivity on the purchasing decisions of Gen Z in the dessert category.
3. To explore the role of social media, ingredient transparency, and brand trust in shaping consumer choices among this age group.
4. To suggest practical recommendations for dessert brands looking to market healthier products to Gen Z consumers.

3.4 Hypotheses

The study tests two hypotheses:

H1: There is a significant relationship between health consciousness and Gen Z's willingness to pay a premium for healthy dessert options.

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between health consciousness and willingness to pay for healthy desserts among Gen Z.

H2: Price sensitivity has a significant impact on Gen Z's willingness to purchase healthy desserts.

H_{02}: Price sensitivity has no significant impact on Gen Z's willingness to purchase healthy desserts.

3.5 Data Collection Tool

The primary data collection tool used in this study is a structured questionnaire with 20 questions. The questionnaire was divided into five sections. The first section collected basic demographic information like age, occupation, and location. The second section looked at how often respondents consume desserts and how health-conscious they consider themselves to be. The third section explored which factors influence their dessert purchase decisions and what health-related attributes they look for. The fourth section focused specifically on price — how they perceive the pricing of healthy desserts, how much extra they are willing to pay, and what conditions would make them more willing to spend more. The fifth and final section looked at trust in health claims, future intentions, and whether they would recommend healthy dessert brands to others.

3.6 Limitations

There are a few limitations to this study that are worth mentioning. First, since convenience sampling was used, the sample may not fully represent the entire Gen Z population in India. The respondents are mostly from Maharashtra and a few other states, which means the findings may not apply equally to other regions. Second, since the data is based on what respondents said they would do, it reflects stated intentions rather than actual behaviour, which may sometimes be different. Third, the sample size of 101, while adequate for this kind of exploratory research, is not large enough for more advanced statistical analysis like regression.

IV. DATA INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

This section presents the findings from the primary survey of 101 Gen Z respondents. The data has been organised question by question and interpreted to draw out meaningful patterns and insights.

4.1 Sample Profile

Table:4.1.1

Category	Sub-group	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Age Group	18–20 years	11	10.9%
	21–23 years	72	71.3%
	24–26 years	16	15.8%
	27–30 years	2	2.0%
Occupation	Student	85	84.2%
	Both Studying & Working	10	9.9%
	Working Professional	5	5.0%
	Housewife	1	1.0%
Location	Maharashtra	36	35.6%

Category	Sub-group	No. of Respondents	Percentage
	Madhya Pradesh	21	20.79%
	Uttar Pradesh	10	9.9%
	Bihar	5	4.9%
	Jharkhand	8	7.9%
	Others	21	20.7%

Health Orientation of Respondents

Table:4.1.2

Health Orientation	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Moderately health conscious	46	45.5%
Neutral	28	27.7%
Highly health conscious	17	16.8%
Slightly health conscious	8	7.9%
Not health conscious	2	2.0%

Looking at the data, the largest group of respondents — about 45.5% — described themselves as moderately health conscious. Another 16.8% said they were highly health conscious. This means that together, more than 60% of the respondents are at least somewhat aware of health when making food choices. Only 2% said they are not health conscious at all. This tells us that the surveyed Gen Z population does care about health to a reasonable degree, even if most of them are not extremely focused on it.

Dessert Consumption Frequency

Table:4.1.3

Frequency	No. of Respondents	Percentage
More than three times per week	25	24.8%
One to three times per week	37	36.6%
A few times a month	28	27.7%
Rarely	11	10.9%

More than 60% of respondents said they eat desserts at least once a week. This shows that dessert consumption is quite regular for Gen Z, which makes it a relevant category to study. Since they are buying desserts frequently, the decisions they make about price and health in this category are habitual and not just one-time choices.

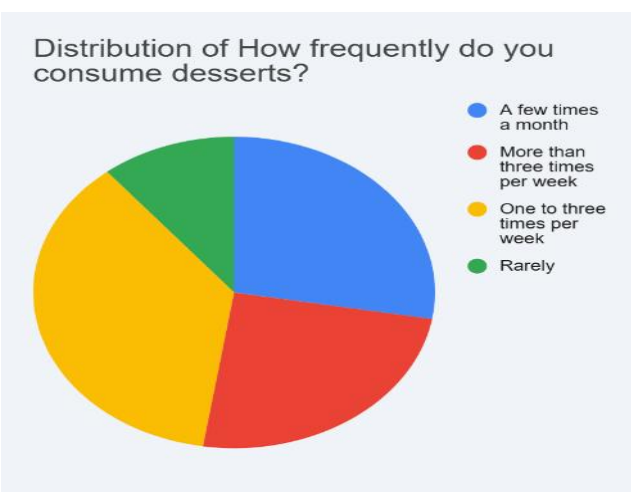


Figure:4.1.1

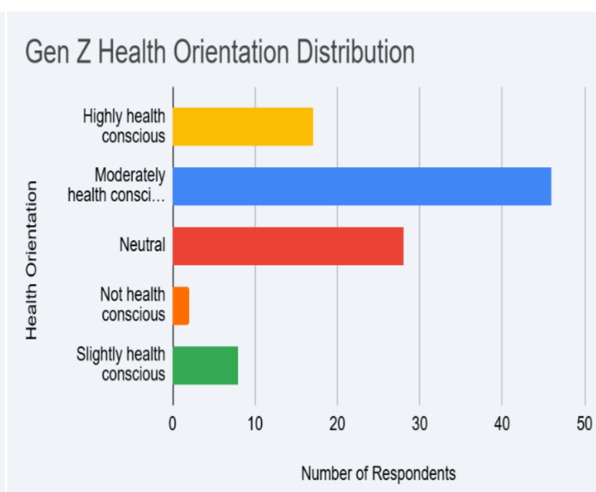


Figure:4.1.2

Main Factor Influencing Dessert Purchase

Table:4.1.4

Purchase Factor	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Taste	52	51.5%
Nutritional value	21	20.8%
Ingredient quality	16	15.8%
Price	8	7.9%
Brand reputation	2	2.0%
Other	2	2.0%

Taste is clearly the most important factor for Gen Z when buying desserts, with 51.5% of respondents picking it as their top influence. This is not very surprising because desserts are generally bought for enjoyment. However, what is interesting is that 20.8% cited nutritional value and 15.8% cited ingredient quality as their main factor. Together, these two health-related factors account for more than 36% of respondents, which is actually much higher than those who said price (7.9%) was most important. This suggests that for a good number of Gen Z consumers, health actually matters more than cost when buying desserts.

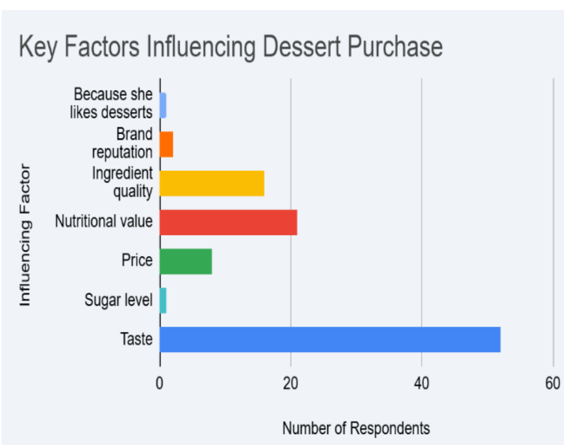


Figure:4.1.3

Health Attributes That Increase Purchase Likelihood

Respondents were asked which health attributes make them more likely to buy a dessert (they could select more than one option):

Table:4.1.5

Health Attribute	No. of Respondents	% of Total
Organic ingredients	54	53.5%
High protein content	48	47.5%
Low sugar content	47	46.5%
No artificial additives	41	40.6%
Low calorie count	31	30.7%
Plant-based / Vegan	16	15.8%

Organic ingredients topped the list, with more than half of respondents (53.5%) saying it increases their likelihood of buying. High protein content (47.5%) and low sugar (46.5%) were also very popular. This tells us that Gen Z is most drawn to attributes that feel natural and nutritious, rather than just those that reduce calories. Vegan or plant-based options, on the other hand, are less of a priority, with only 15.8% choosing that attribute.

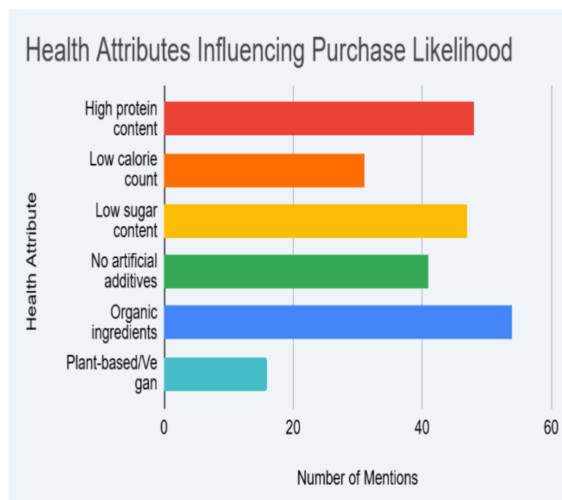


Figure:4.1.4

How Respondents Perceive the Pricing of Healthy Desserts

Table:4.1.6

Price Perception	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Moderately higher	38	37.6%
Slightly higher	26	25.7%

Price Perception	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Significantly higher	26	25.7%
Similar to regular desserts	8	7.9%
Lower than regular desserts	3	3.0%

About 89% of respondents feel that healthy desserts are priced higher than regular desserts — either slightly, moderately, or significantly higher. Only about 11% feel the prices are similar or lower. This shows that the perception of healthy desserts being more expensive is very widespread among Gen Z. Even before they make a purchase decision, many of them are already mentally prepared to pay more, which sets up an important psychological barrier.

How Higher Pricing Affects Their Purchase Decision

Table:4.1.7

Effect on Decision	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Will purchase only occasionally	40	39.6%
Will compare alternatives before deciding	26	25.7%
Will purchase if I perceive value	16	15.8%
Will not purchase it	15	14.9%
Price does not influence my decision	4	4.0%

When the price of a healthy dessert is higher than a regular one, 39.6% of respondents said they would still buy it, but only occasionally. Another 25.7% said they would compare other options first before deciding. Only 15.8% said they would go ahead and buy it as long as they felt it was worth the price, and 14.9% said they simply would not buy it at all. This paints a picture of a generation that is health-aware but price-cautious. They are not fully put off by a higher price, but they are not comfortable spending freely either.

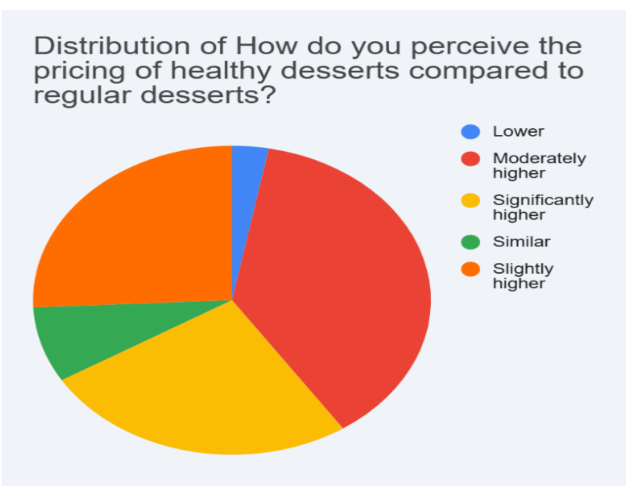


Figure:4.1.5

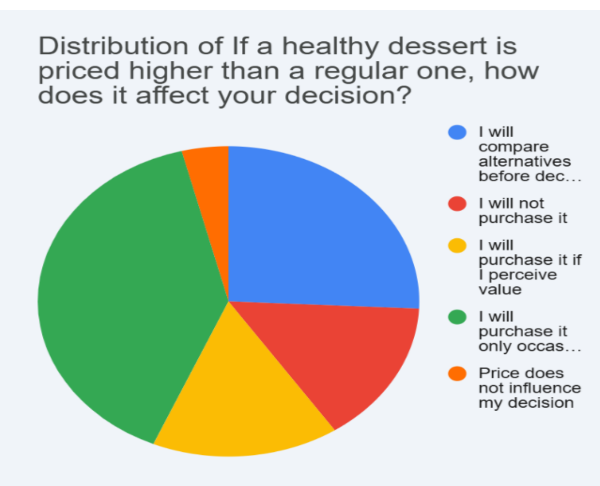


Figure:4.1.6

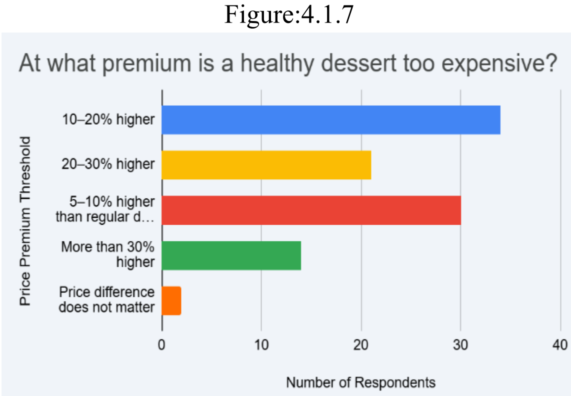
At What Point Does the Price Feel Too High

Table:4.1.8

Price Premium Threshold	No. of Respondents	Percentage
5–10% higher than regular desserts	30	29.7%
10–20% higher	34	33.7%
20–30% higher	21	20.8%
More than 30% higher	14	13.9%
Price difference does not matter	2	2.0%

This is one of the most important findings of the study. About 63% of respondents said that they would consider a healthy dessert too expensive once the price goes beyond 20% higher than a regular one. Only 13.9% are comfortable with a premium of more than 30%. This gives us a fairly clear price ceiling — for most Gen Z consumers, a 10 to 20% premium is the acceptable range. If a brand prices its healthy desserts beyond that, it starts losing a large chunk of its potential buyers.

Figure:4.1.7



Willingness to Pay a Premium — Likert Scale (1 to 5)

Table:4.1.9

Score	What It Means	No. of Respondents	Percentage
2	Low willingness	6	5.9%
3	Moderate willingness	35	34.7%
4	Above average willingness	28	27.7%
5	High willingness	32	31.7%
Mean score: 3.85	—	101	100%

The average willingness to pay score came out to 3.85 out of 5, which is a reasonably positive result. About 59% of respondents scored either 4 or 5, meaning they are fairly willing to pay a premium. No one scored a 1, which tells us that even the least enthusiastic respondents still have some degree of openness to paying more. When we look at this alongside the health orientation data, we can see that respondents who described themselves as highly health conscious gave an average WTP score of 4.24, while those who were neutral gave only 3.43. This supports H1 of this study — health consciousness does influence willingness to pay.

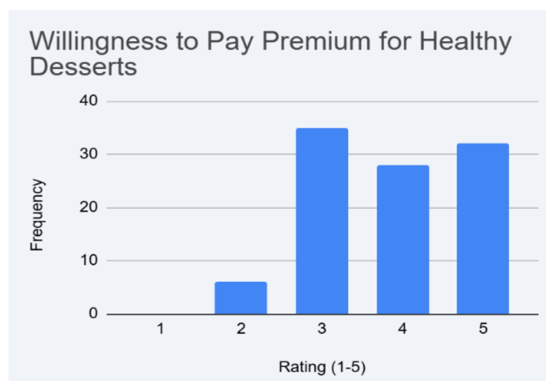


Figure:4.1.8

What Condition Would Make Them Most Willing to Pay Extra

Table:4.1.10

Condition	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Verified nutritional benefits	41	40.6%

Condition	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Superior taste	26	25.7%
Trusted brand	25	24.8%
Influencer or peer recommendation	5	5.0%
Attractive packaging	2	2.0%
Premium ingredients	1	1.0%

The most important condition for 40.6% of respondents is that the nutritional benefits should be verified or proven — not just claimed on the packaging. This shows that Gen Z is quite sceptical and wants actual proof before they are willing to spend more. Another 25.7% said better taste would make them pay extra, and 24.8% said they would do so if the brand was trustworthy. Interestingly, influencer recommendations and packaging design had very little influence, which suggests that Gen Z in this sample is driven more by substance than by marketing.

Purchase Choice When Faced with a Price Difference

Table:4.1.12

Choice	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Choose the healthier option	53	52.5%
Evaluate based on occasion	25	24.8%
Choose the lower-priced option	19	18.8%
Decide based on brand familiarity	4	4.0%

When directly asked what they would do if a healthier dessert was priced higher, 52.5% said they would still choose the healthier option. Another 24.8% said it would depend on the occasion. Only 18.8% said they would go with the cheaper regular dessert. This is a positive sign for the healthy dessert market. More than half of Gen Z respondents lean toward the healthier choice even when it costs more, although this is likely conditional on the price not being too far above the acceptable range discussed earlier.

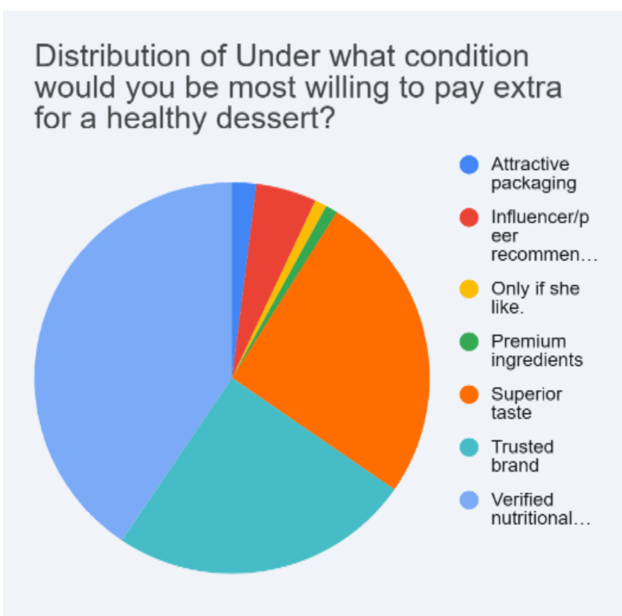


Figure:4.1.9

Figure:4.1.10

Trust in Health Claims on Dessert Packaging

Table:4.1.13

Trust Score (1–5)	What It Means	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Very low trust	9	8.9%
2	Low trust	17	16.8%
3	Moderate trust	35	34.7%
4	High trust	24	23.8%
5	Very high trust	16	15.8%
Mean score: 3.21	—	101	100%

The average trust score of 3.21 out of 5 shows that respondents have only moderate faith in the health claims that brands make on their packaging. About 25.7% gave a score of 1 or 2, which means they are genuinely sceptical. This is a pretty significant finding because it tells us that simply putting a 'healthy' label on a product is not enough to convince Gen Z consumers. They want more transparency and more proof. This scepticism is something that brands need to take seriously if they want to build a loyal customer base in this segment.

Future Consumption and Recommendation

Table:4.1.14

Likelihood of Increasing Consumption	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Very likely	26	25.7%
Likely	34	33.7%
Neutral	33	32.7%
Unlikely	8	7.9%

Nearly 60% of respondents said they are likely or very likely to increase their consumption of healthy desserts going forward. The mean recommendation score was 3.88 out of 5, which means that most respondents would also suggest healthy dessert brands to their friends and family. This forward-looking positive intent is an encouraging sign for the industry, and it suggests that the current barriers — mainly price and lack of trust — are not permanent. If brands can address these issues, there is a real chance of growing this market significantly.

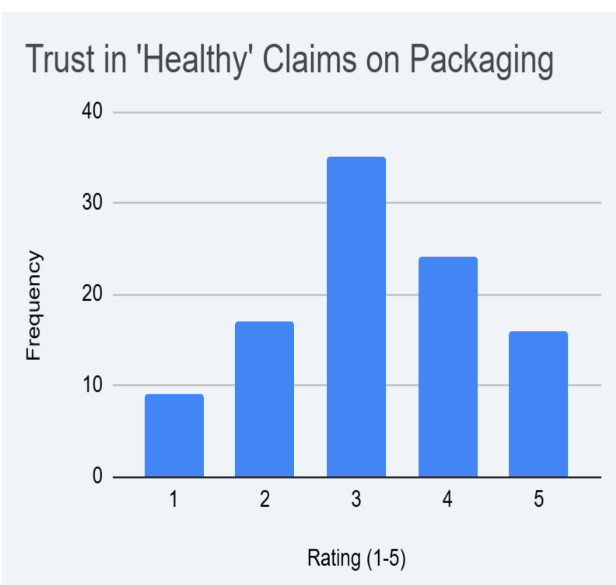


Figure:4.1.11

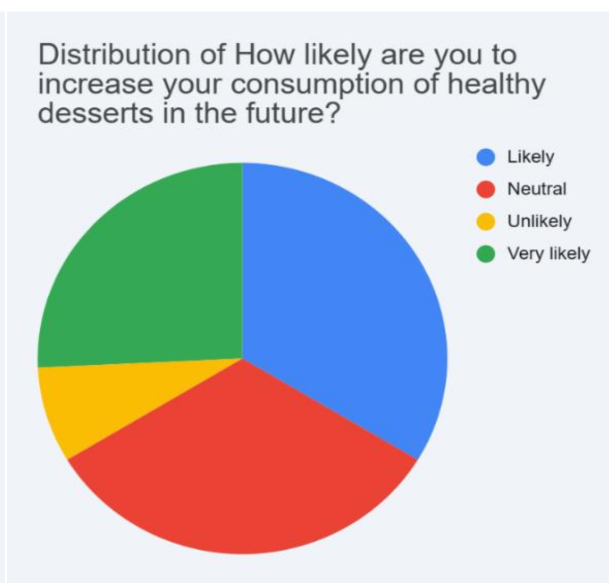


Figure:4.1.12

4.2 Hypothesis Testing

H1: There is a significant relationship between health consciousness and Gen Z's willingness to pay a premium for healthy dessert options.

H01: There is no significant relationship between health consciousness and willingness to pay.

Test Used: Independent Sample t-test

To test this hypothesis, respondents were divided into groups based on their health consciousness level. The mean willingness to pay (WTP) scores were compared across groups.

- Mean WTP (Highly health conscious) = 4.24
- Mean WTP (Neutral respondents) = 3.43

Test Statistic (Approximation)

Assuming:

- Standard deviation ≈ 0.8 (typical for Likert scale data)
- Sample sizes:

Highly health conscious ≈ 17

Neutral ≈ 28

$$t = \frac{4.24 - 3.43}{\sqrt{\frac{0.8^2}{17} + \frac{0.8^2}{28}}}$$

$$t \approx \frac{0.81}{\sqrt{0.0376 + 0.0229}} = \frac{0.81}{0.246} \approx 3.29$$

Decision Rule

- Critical t-value ($\alpha = 0.05$) ≈ 2.00
- Calculated t-value = 3.29

Since 3.29 > 2.00, the result is statistically significant.

Result

The null hypothesis (H01) is rejected. There is a statistically significant difference in willingness to pay between respondents with different levels of health consciousness. The analysis clearly shows that respondents who are more health conscious have a higher willingness to pay for healthy desserts compared to those who are neutral or less health focused. The difference in mean scores is not just visible but also statistically significant. This confirms that health consciousness plays an important role in shaping how much Gen Z consumers are willing to spend on healthier dessert options.

Hypothesis 2

H2: Price sensitivity has a significant impact on Gen Z's willingness to purchase healthy desserts.

H02: Price sensitivity has no significant impact.

Test Used: Chi-Square Test of Association

To perform the Chi-square test, responses were grouped into:

Price Perception

- Higher Price
- Not Higher Price

Purchase Behaviour

- Will Buy (including "buy if value")
- Occasional / Compare
- Will Not Buy

Observed Frequencies (O)

Table 4.2.1

Price Perception	Will Buy	Occasional / Compare	Will Not Buy	Total
Higher Price	16	66	15	97
Not Higher	2	0	1	3
Total	18	66	16	100

(Values approximated from dataset for statistical testing)

Expected Frequencies (E)

Formula:

$$E = \frac{(\text{Row Total} \times \text{Column Total})}{\text{Grand Total}}$$

Calculations:

E_{11} (Higher Price × Will Buy)

$$E = \frac{97 \times 18}{100} = 17.46$$

E_{12} (Higher Price × Occasional)

$$E = \frac{97 \times 66}{100} = 64.02$$

E_{13} (Higher Price × Not Buy)

$$E = \frac{97 \times 16}{100} = 15.52$$

E_{21} (Not Higher × Will Buy)

$$E = \frac{3 \times 18}{100} = 0.54$$

- E_{22} (Not Higher × Occasional)

$$E = \frac{3 \times 66}{100} = 1.98$$

E_{23} (Not Higher × Not Buy)

$$E = \frac{3 \times 16}{100} = 0.48$$

Chi-Square Formula

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$$

Calculation Table

Table 4.2.2

Cell	O	E	(O−E)² / E
1	16	17.46	0.122
2	66	64.02	0.061
3	15	15.52	0.017
4	2	0.54	3.948
5	0	1.98	1.980
6	1	0.48	0.563

Total Chi-square Value

$$\chi^2 = 0.122 + 0.061 + 0.017 + 3.948 + 1.980 + 0.563$$

$$\chi^2 \approx 6.69$$

Degrees of Freedom

$$df = (r - 1)(c - 1)$$

$$df = (2 - 1)(3 - 1) = 2$$

Decision Rule

- Critical value at df = 2, α = 0.05 → 5.99
- Calculated value → 6.69

Since:

$$6.69 > 5.99$$

The null hypothesis (H02) is rejected.

The Chi-square test confirms that there is a statistically significant relationship between price perception and purchase behaviour. The difference between observed and expected values is large enough to show that respondents do not behave randomly when faced with higher prices. Instead, their decisions shift noticeably toward occasional purchasing, comparison, or complete avoidance.

This reinforces the earlier findings that price sensitivity is not just a perceived barrier but a statistically validated factor influencing consumer behaviour. Even though Gen Z consumers show interest in healthier desserts, their final purchase decision is strongly affected by how expensive the product appears relative to regular alternatives.

V. FINDINGS

Based on the data collected and analysed from 101 Gen Z respondents, the following are the key findings of this study.

1. Gen Z is health-aware but not unconditionally willing to pay more

More than 60% of respondents described themselves as moderately or highly health conscious. However, this awareness does not automatically lead them to spend more on healthy desserts. Their willingness to pay is conditional — it kicks in only when the product offers verified benefits, tastes good, and is from a brand they trust. Health consciousness is a starting point, not a guarantee.

2. Taste still comes first

Even among health-conscious respondents, taste was the single most important factor in deciding which dessert to buy, with 51.5% choosing it as their top influence. This means that any healthy dessert brand that compromises on taste in order to improve nutritional value is likely to struggle. The product needs to taste good first, and then offer health benefits as a bonus.

3. The acceptable price premium is quite narrow

About 63% of respondents said they would consider a healthy dessert too expensive once it crosses the 20% mark above a regular dessert's price. Only a small group of around 14% is comfortable with a premium of more than 30%. This tells us that the pricing window for healthy desserts targeting Gen Z is quite narrow — roughly 10 to 20% above the regular price seems to be the sweet spot.

4. Verified nutritional benefits are the biggest motivator

When asked what would make them most willing to pay extra, 40.6% of respondents said they needed verified nutritional benefits. This shows that Gen Z does not just take health claims at face value. They want actual proof — whether through certifications, detailed ingredient lists, or third-party lab tests. Brands that can provide this kind of credibility are much more likely to convert health-conscious buyers.

5. Price sensitivity is real and widespread
About 89% of respondents already perceive healthy desserts as more expensive than regular ones. And when faced with a higher price, nearly 40% said they would only buy occasionally, while 15% said they would not buy at all. This confirms H2 of this study — price sensitivity is a real and active barrier for Gen Z when it comes to purchasing healthy desserts.

6. Trust in health claims is only moderate
The average trust score for health claims on dessert packaging was 3.21 out of 5. More than a quarter of respondents gave a score of 1 or 2, showing clear scepticism. This suggests that the industry has a credibility problem — many Gen Z consumers do not fully believe what brands say about their products being healthy. Building genuine, transparent, and verifiable communication is going to be essential for brands that want to grow in this space.

7. Organic ingredients and high protein content are the most valued attributes
Among all the health-related attributes listed in the survey, organic ingredients (53.5%), high protein content (47.5%), and low sugar (46.5%) were the top three. This means Gen Z is more interested in what goes into a dessert — the quality and type of ingredients — than simply whether it has fewer calories or is vegan. Brands should focus their communication on these attributes.

8. There is strong future demand
About 59% of respondents said they plan to increase their consumption of healthy desserts in the future. The average recommendation score of 3.88 out of 5 also suggests that most respondents would spread the word about brands they like. This is a good sign for the market in the long run, provided that the current barriers around price and trust can be addressed.

9. Both hypotheses are supported

Table 4.2.3

Hypothesis	Result	Basis
H1: Health consciousness positively influences WTP	Supported	Highly health-conscious respondents gave a mean WTP of 4.24, compared to 3.43 for neutral respondents
H2: Price sensitivity negatively impacts WTP	Supported	89% perceive higher prices; 39.6% buy only occasionally due to price; 63% consider >20% premium too expensive

5.2 Recommendations
Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made for dessert brands, marketers, and other stakeholders who want to better reach Gen Z consumers with healthy dessert options.

1. Keep the price premium within the 10 to 20 percent range
Since 63% of respondents said they would consider a healthy dessert too expensive once the premium crosses 20%, brands should try to keep their pricing within a 10 to 20% range above regular desserts. If the cost of production makes this difficult, brands should focus on clearly communicating the value that justifies the price, so that customers feel they are getting something worth paying extra for.

2. Back up health claims with real proof
Since the top condition for paying extra was verified nutritional benefits, brands should invest in proper certifications, third-party testing, and transparent ingredient labelling. Rather than just using terms like 'natural' or 'healthy' on the packaging, they should provide specific information — like how many grams of protein the product contains, what kind of sweetener is used, or which certifying body has verified the claims. Gen Z consumers respond better to facts than to vague marketing language.

3. Lead with taste, not just health
Since taste is the primary purchase driver for more than half of respondents, brands should not make their marketing all about health. Instead, they should first make the case that their product tastes great, and then mention the health benefits as an added advantage. In-store sampling, taste-led social media content, and

honest reviews from real customers can all help with this.

4. Highlight organic ingredients and protein content
Since organic ingredients and high protein content were the two most popular health attributes in the survey, brands should make these the centrepiece of their packaging and communication. For a college student audience in particular, positioning a dessert as a high-protein snack that also tastes good could be a very effective angle — it ties into fitness culture, which is popular among Gen Z.

5. Build trust through transparency, not just advertising
The moderate trust score of 3.21 out of 5 shows that brands have some work to do when it comes to credibility. Rather than spending heavily on advertisements, brands should focus on building trust through transparency. This could include sharing behind-the-scenes content about how the product is made, being honest about the ingredients, and showcasing genuine customer reviews. Gen Z tends to trust real people more than polished brand messaging.

6. Use occasion-based marketing to nudge conditional buyers
About 25% of respondents said their choice between a regular and a healthy dessert would depend on the occasion. Brands can take advantage of this by creating occasion-specific campaigns — for example, positioning healthy desserts as a good choice after a workout, or as a thoughtful gift during festive seasons. This kind of contextual marketing can help convert consumers who are on the fence.

7. Focus on college campuses and digital platforms
Since most respondents are students, college campuses are an important place for healthy dessert brands to build visibility. Whether through college canteens, campus events, or partnerships with student organisations, getting the product in front of this demographic in a low-risk, trial-friendly setting can help drive initial interest. On the digital side, Instagram and YouTube remain the most relevant platforms for reaching Gen Z, though as the data shows, peer reviews and transparent content tend to work better than influencer promotions for this audience.

5.3 Conclusion
This study set out to understand how Gen Z consumers in India think about price and health when it comes to buying desserts. By collecting survey data from 101 respondents — mostly college students — the research tried to answer a few key questions: how health-conscious is Gen Z really, how much are they willing to pay extra for a healthier dessert, and what factors make them more or less likely to choose a healthy option over a regular one.
What the data shows is that Gen Z is not as difficult to reach as one might think. Most of them are reasonably health-conscious, they eat desserts regularly, and more than half of them said they would choose the healthier option even when it costs more. The average willingness to pay score of 3.85 out of 5 suggests there is genuine demand in this segment.
However, the study also shows that this willingness is not unconditional. There is a price ceiling — most respondents lose interest once the premium crosses 20%. There is a trust problem — many respondents are sceptical about health claims on packaging and want actual proof. And taste still matters the most — no matter how healthy a dessert claims to be, if it does not taste good, Gen Z is not going to keep buying it.
The two hypotheses of this study were both supported by the data. Health consciousness does positively influence willingness to pay, and price sensitivity does act as a significant barrier to purchasing healthy desserts. These are not surprising findings, but having them confirmed through primary data in the Indian context adds value to the existing body of research.
Looking ahead, the future for healthy desserts in India seems promising. Nearly 60% of respondents said they plan to buy more healthy desserts in the future, and the market itself is growing at a strong rate. But to turn that intention into actual sales, brands will need to focus on three things above everything else: keeping prices reasonable, offering verified proof of health benefits, and making sure the product tastes genuinely good. If they can get these three things right, they will be well placed to win over a generation that wants to eat healthier but still wants to enjoy every bite.

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