

Food and Technology 2026: THE DIGITAL FOOD CULTURE GAP

How digital culture is reshaping food culture—and what marketers must do next

Digital technology now shapes every part of consumers' food lives—how they discover trends, plan meals, shop, cook, evaluate quality and engage with brands. Digital platforms serve both as tools for consumers to build their food lives and as powerful influences on food culture, consumer aspirations and values. But as digital influence accelerates, new tensions are emerging that marketers must understand to stay relevant.

This report unlocks a deeper understanding of the cultural, emotional and behavioral dynamics shaping today's digital food ecosystem, while identifying the strategic opportunities resulting from the tension between aspiration and everyday pragmatism.



Food and Technology 2026 explores:

- How digital culture is reshaping food behavior
- Why consumers feel both helped and hindered by technology
- The new gap between aspiration and everyday reality
- How digital platforms influence trust, expertise and decision-making
- Where technology enables consumer agency
- Digital signals that heighten engagement and premium perception

Report published: January 8, 2026

Report length: 69 slides

Format: PowerPoint, PDF and Excel data tables

Food and Technology 2026: The Digital Food Culture Gap decodes the cultural forces shaping food decisions today.

Consumers desire technology that empowers—not replaces—their decisions. The report discusses the emerging consumer standard for digital support: tools must guide without dictating, inspire without overwhelming and enable connection rather than diminish it.

This report provides a **clear roadmap for marketers** to strengthen brand relevance by aligning with how consumers truly use digital tools to navigate food choices.

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- Methodology
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- Digital Food Life: The Culture Gap
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Learn how to navigate the paradox reshaping Food & Technology



Key consumer needs & drivers of digital engagement



Inspire &
Discover



Research
& Learn



Share &
Connect



Track &
Measure



Plan &
Organize



Shop &
Source

This report helps industry leaders understand how digital platforms have become the primary engine driving macro-level cultural change in food.

Enhance your understanding of digital influence by exploring:

- How technology is redefining how consumers discover, plan, cook, evaluate and shop—and why these shifts are now central to category growth, competitive strategy and brand relevance.
- How consumers toggle between wanting help and wanting control—and how brands can design experiences that respect both.
- How algorithms surface trends, frame “quality” and accelerate premiumization, presenting category-specific opportunities.
- Where digital culture and the exploration of health, cuisine and dietary experimentation intersect.
- What tactics brands can use to design offerings that support everyday food decision-making.

Stand out by understanding how consumers want technology to empower—not replace—their decisions, and how these choices reflect broader cultural trends

RESEARCH AND LEARN

- Digital tools and social media foster experimentation with health and dietary approaches, helping redefine what constitutes health expertise and influence.
- This leads to **trust and credibility on social media being grounded in relationships**, not just facts, which results in reliability being the heart of authenticity.

49%

research or read reviews about a product or brand online

PLAN AND ORGANIZE

- Shoppers recognize grocery trip planning as an arena where technology has **improved their routines**, with inspiration increasingly sought from social media.
- Consumers' online activities lean primarily toward informing purchase decisions.

80%

use technology for grocery trip planning

SHOP AND SOURCE

- Consumers want technology that makes decisions easier—but not technology that makes decisions *for* them.
- As such, **tensions between automation and agency** will continue to shape future engagement with technology.

81%

use technology while grocery shopping

Gain powerful insights (qualitative and quantitative) with actionable guidance —without the cost or time of custom research

Robust integrated methodology

Quantitative: Online national survey fielded September 18–29, 2025, n=2,136 U.S. adults aged 18-79. (MOE) ± 2.1 pts at 95% confidence level.

Qualitative: Digital ethnographies: n=14 participants. Multi-day immersive engagement (journaling, prompts, photos and videos) via asynchronous virtual platform. Follow-up in-depth interviews: n=7 selected from digital ethnography participants for 60-minute follow-up 1-on-1 interviews.

Turning insights into action: Food and Technology Activation Sessions

A customized Activation Session helps clients take informed next steps with the insights from the *Food and Technology* report.

Please contact Melissa Abbott for more details or an example of a session agenda: melissa@hartman-group.com.

Report published January 7, 2026

Report Price: \$15,000

The in-depth PowerPoint report includes an executive summary, implications and strategic recommendations, plus a complete analysis of relevant data supported by robust charts and visuals.

Detailed Excel data tables accompany the report, allowing for flexible analysis with key demographic breakdowns.

A streamlined Executive Brief is also included with your purchase of the full report, highlighting the most critical insights for your C-suite.

Order the *Food and Technology* report today

Report price: \$15,000

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ABOUT HARTMAN GROUP

Our mission is to translate consumer behavior and food culture into strategic growth opportunities for our clients. Since 1989, Hartman Group's anthropologists, social scientists and business analysts have been immersed in the study of American food and beverage culture, using ethnographic observation, quantitative tracking surveys and deeply studying trends. What we have learned and continue to uncover allows us to upend many notions of our traditional American eating and drinking patterns, identifying unique opportunities and winning strategies for our clients.

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