



Four Impactful Consumer Trends for 2015

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Looking ahead, Mintel's trends analysts Stacy Glasgow and Jenny Zegler discuss the four key US consumer trends identified by Mintel as the most impactful for 2015 — and what this will mean for both consumers and brands in the year ahead. Read on to learn how Get Smart, My Wallet, My Way, Fight for Your Rights and Gender Agenda will impact consumers and brands alike in the coming year.

Get Smart

The world of synced devices, including wearable technology and smart home appliances, will mainstream as trusted retailers and manufacturers satisfy consumer appetite for collecting data and controlling devices.

Smart devices — from watches to ceiling fans — appeal to consumers because they save time and money but they also promise convenience and control. Connected devices are broadening the horizons of our digital narcissistic culture by increasing self-knowledge and creating more opportunities for analysis.

"Smart innovations are no longer the domain of start-ups," says Stacy Glasgow, Mintel's consumer trends consultant. "Major players, such as Amazon, Apple, Google and Samsung, as well as retailers are embracing the trend and raising consumer confidence in it."

Mintel's research finds that interest is high since 59 percent of US consumers are interested in using an app or website to control their home. Yet, savvy consumers are recognizing that there should be synergy between these smart services. Four in 10 US consumers would like to buy technology products that easily connect to products they already have. Compatibility also should be a concern, since 22 percent of all US consumers have already purchased a wearable device like a smart watch or Fitbit.

"In 2015 and beyond, we'll see smart devices advancing into new annexes," Glasgow adds.

"Consumers will demand that wearable technology offer more than the convenience of connectivity and provide personal devices that are secure and fashionable. Style matters in the smart home, too, where systems will go beyond economizing utilities by embracing ambience and blending in with the decor, which we've already seen from Philips 'Hue' LED lighting systems and iPhone fragrance diffusers."

Smart devices also go beyond health and home economics, with telematic devices that monitor driving habits. Going forward, data-collecting device manufacturers will invite companies to become analysis providers. The next stage will be for banks, grocers and doctors to do more to develop data relationships. Consumers are so hungry for analysis, we may see that data analysis software develops more quickly than the actual data-collecting hardware.



My Wallet, My Way

Consumers' expectations for on-demand convenience are blurring the lines between digital and brick-and-mortar retail, driving immediacy not just in shopping, but also expanding it into any consumer interactions with businesses.

The internet has disrupted traditional approaches to shopping, setting up an expectation not just for convenience, but for immediacy. Brick-and-mortar retailers have melded with the digital as more locations offer in-store pick-up for online orders, and on the other side, virtual-only services open physical stores.

"The ability to get hands-on with what was formerly only virtual could gain more customers for these e-commerce retailers," says Glasgow. "Companies are also bridging the customer relationship gap left by online-only interactions with unique service approaches like creating community spaces, as insurance provider State Farm did with its Next Door Cafe."

Expanded Wi-Fi plans for trains, planes and even Uber-mobiles will ease the ability to shop while in transit, and thus encourage more "click-and-collect" services, such as the grocery pick-up service being tested by Walmart. Shoppers also are open to new formats, with 32 percent of US facial skincare users interested in products that can be purchased on the go, such as through a vending machine or kiosk. There's even opportunity in financial services, where 20 percent of Americans say they would engage with such companies on social media to get assistance with their account, and 17 percent say they would get on social media to gain access to a financial advisor.

"At the heart of this trend is that our on-demand, instant gratification culture is spreading," Glasgow adds. "These conveniences also are not only for city-dwellers as more business models, including in-store pick-up or subscription services, bring the benefits of modern life to suburban and rural residents. This 'at-your-convenience' expectation is likely to influence other customer service-based industries, and we predict that consumers will want to see more customized, on-demand access to financial services, healthcare and more."

Fight for Your Rights

Growing awareness of customer rights and corporate misbehavior will see consumers demand more fairness and justice from companies, with consumer input becoming almost integral.

Technology has transformed protests from organized marches to a bare minimum of "clicktivism," or the ability to express one's opinion, support or dislike through online petitions, viral video views and social media posts. Consumers are now demanding openness from companies — more information, responsibility and accountability. In the event that people do not feel that companies are forthcoming, they are willing to organize, even if it is just behind a hashtag.

"The desire to sit-down-and-click to share one's thoughts will likely continue because consumers have begun to see the power these viral revolts can have," says Jenny Zegler, Mintel's trends analyst. "In 2014, 'clicktivism' forced companies to revise marketing campaigns, to reformulate ingredient statements or to simply acknowledge consumer sentiment."

Consumers also can exercise their rights at the cash register, purchasing only brands that align with their ideals on marriage equality, minimum wage or political party affiliations. In the US, 18 percent



of 19-to-36-year olds go out of their way to buy from companies or brands that support LGBT issues, according to Mintel data. Corporate policies also influence restaurant choice, with Mintel research finding that 82 percent of US adults who visited a restaurant in the past month say a restaurant that treats its employees fairly influences their choice. In addition, 63 percent of US adults choose a restaurant because it actively supports humane treatment of animals.

"For those companies that are not proactive or are seen as insincere, we expect to see a continuation of protests against these real — and perceived — transgressions," Zegler explains. "In 2015, companies globally will increasingly be forced to apologize, admit their mistakes and show a human face. Companies also may find themselves more eager to consult potential customers on their products, promotional campaigns and company policies."

Gender Agenda

People are questioning traditional notions of gender, rejecting the restraints of stereotypes and embracing the freedom to be themselves and do what they want.

Globally, conversations about female empowerment, modern manhood and gender expression are growing louder. People are dispelling the constraints of gender expectations and empowering each other to express their genuine selves. In 2015, the United Nations and European Union will issue new goals regarding gender equality and empowerment, laying the groundwork for global conversation.

"With the world's focus on gender this coming year, we expect to see much more conversation — and controversy — about equality in the professional, political and social spheres," says Zegler. "People will speak louder and clearer about progress on the part of governments, businesses and brands that shape the opportunities and social expectations that they face in their daily lives."

Mintel data show shifts in consumer behavior that reflect attitudinal changes to traditional gender stereotypes. Nearly three-quarters of US men say they feel more attractive and 70 percent say they get a confidence boost when they are well-groomed. Meanwhile, US women ages 18 to 34 are more likely than men in the same age range to buy tickets to live sporting events (35% vs. 28%) and branded merchandise related to their favorite sports (22% vs. 16%).

Marketers need to show that they understand consumers' modern perceptions of gender, namely that consumers are much more complex than the social constraints built around them. Brands from beauty and personal care to financial services must recognize consumers' individuality or prepare for consumer backlash if they stick to age-old archetypes. Retailers will need to take note that men are doing more shopping and spending more time on their personal appearance. And manufacturers will need to wise up and see that many parents don't want their daughters to receive the same perpetually pink messaging of the past.

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