

# Immunity

## consumer perceptions and credible claims

Functional ingredients highlight new opportunities within the beverage market, reports Mike Hughes.

Over the last twelve months, consumers have placed more emphasis on their health than ever before, and will continue to do so for some time to come. While initial concerns were about their vulnerability to COVID-19, consumers are now taking a broader approach to health and questioning whether current diets and lifestyles are something that are increasing the risk of serious health problems later in life.

As consumers place more urgency on addressing their health, they are seeking out products with functional ingredients that are associated with helping aid overall health and wellbeing. This is something that creates new opportunities within the beverage market, especially in categories where previously consumers were looking to moderate consumption.

### Consumers are more conscious about their immunity

Across the globe, consumers are not overly satisfied with their immune health. Although this is something that has undoubtedly been impacted by COVID-19, it is important to stress that even before the pandemic, consumers were not confident with their health. In 2020, a total of 49% of consumers said that they were confident with their immune health, which was a decline compared to the 54% who said this in 2019.

In addition, a total of 65% of consumers said in 2021 that they have become more conscious



about their immunity as a result of the pandemic. The research serves to highlight how consumers of all ages have become more conscious about their overall wellbeing, with concerns not restricted to those associated with more vulnerable demographics, such as the elderly.

### Re-evaluating health and wellness

However, the research shows that even before the pandemic, consumers were not satisfied with their immune health. This is something that can be attributed to modern living, with a significant proportion of consumers believing that their diets are unhealthy, that they do not do enough exercise and that they spend more time in doors on digital devices. COVID-19 is merely something that has accelerated the urgency in which consumers are wanting to address health issues.

Indeed, over the last twelve months, consumers have had chance to re-evaluate their health and wellness. Initially concerns were focused around vulnerability to the virus. However, as time has progressed, focus has been broader, with consumers evaluating their vulnerability to other long-term health problems, such as cancer, because of their current diets and lifestyles.

This is something that is having a significant impact on eating and drinking habits. For instance, research conducted in 2021 shows that 66% of consumers say that they are now making attempts to eat and drink more healthily as a result of COVID-19. In addition, 47% of consumers said that they have sought out functional beverages that boost immune health. This shows that ingredient claims are having a significant influence on beverage choice. Given that 19% believe that the virus is something that will continue to impact daily lives for several years, the reality is that demand for such functional beverages will continue for some time.





### New opportunities

The demand for functional ingredients to help boost immune health is something that creates new opportunities within the beverage market, especially categories where previously, consumers were more likely to be associated with trying to moderate intake.

For instance, FMCG Gurus research conducted in 2019 shows that across the globe, 37% of consumers who drink carbonates and 38% who drink juice say that they have looked to moderate intake. This is because these categories are associated with high sugar levels and in the case of carbonates, a lack of nutritional ingredients. However, if products are positioned around containing functional ingredients – either natural or fortified ingredients – this is something that could help change perceptions. As such, where possible, beverage brands should look to promote functional ingredients that aid immune health.

These products will appeal to consumers who want a convenient health boost; however, it is important to factor in several considerations when launching such products. Firstly, avoidance and moderation of bad ingredients is just as important to consumers as intake of functional ingredients when looking to boost immune health. This means sugar content will also be an issue. In addition, it is also important that such products are not seen to be making misleading claims around health, have too high a price, or seen to be of poor taste.

However, the reality is that dietary habits will continue to evolve amongst consumers as they look to minimize their vulnerability to disease and illness. This creates a genuine opportunity for beverage brands to help reinvigorate product categories and change consumer perceptions by promoting functional ingredients and making credible claims relating to the associated health benefits. ■

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