

From consumer signals to social buzz:

# How Chili's turns insights into brand momentum

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# Today's speakers



**Sarah  
Houghton,**

Senior Manager,  
Consumer Insights  
Brinker International



**Ashley  
Brown,**

Senior Account Director  
YouGov

# The evolution of Chili's audience

In 2023, Chili's new leadership put the brand back on national TV and introduced a new, data-driven marketing strategy



Reaching older consumers through value-oriented messaging



Reaching Gen Z through relevant, buzz-worthy social content and viral moments



“It all starts with Marg”



## Gen Z (13–28)

# “Make it relevant”

Gen Z is selective with attention and engagement due to the endless products, services and content options that are aimed at them.

- Mindfulness
- Social promotion
- Trend adherence
- Personal values



Now with higher spend power than Boomers



54%

Living with parents

87%

Single/unmarried

12%

Have children



## Millennials (29–44)

# “Make it worth it”

Millennials are trying to juggle career, family, and personal goals while weathering global crises, influencing how, what and why they purchase.

- Quality
- Experiences
- Value
- Escapism



Generation with the highest spend power currently



54%

Living with parents

53%

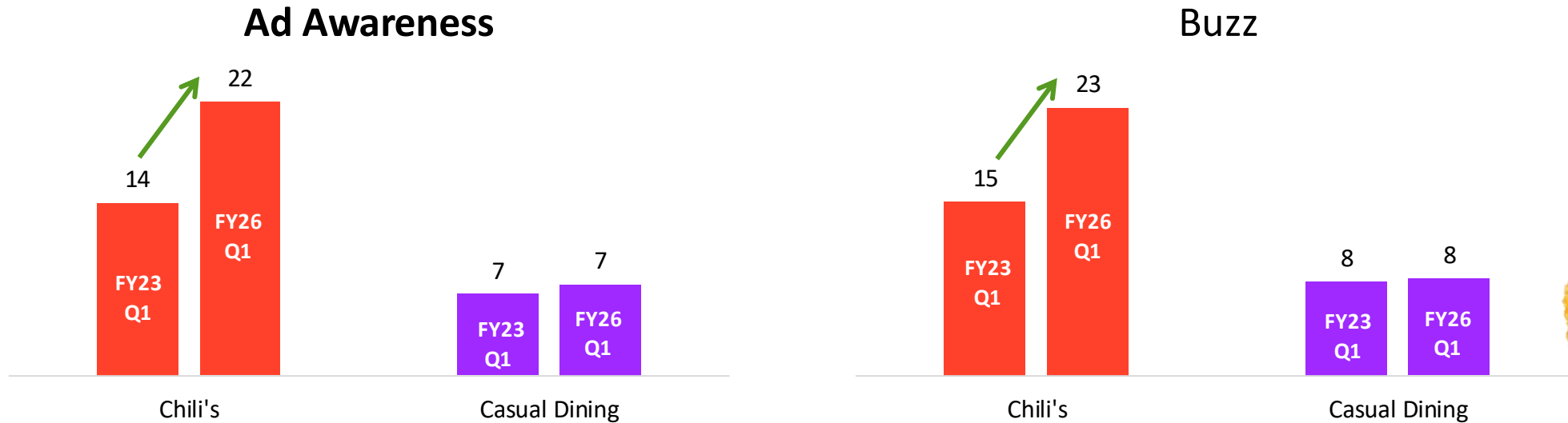
Single/unmarried

44%

Have children



# Meeting distinct generational needs



**Older generations** are more likely to see ads on traditional TV, where Chili's reaches them with "3 For Me" value messaging.

**Younger generations** are more likely to be talking about brands and driving buzz online (looking at you, cheese pull!).

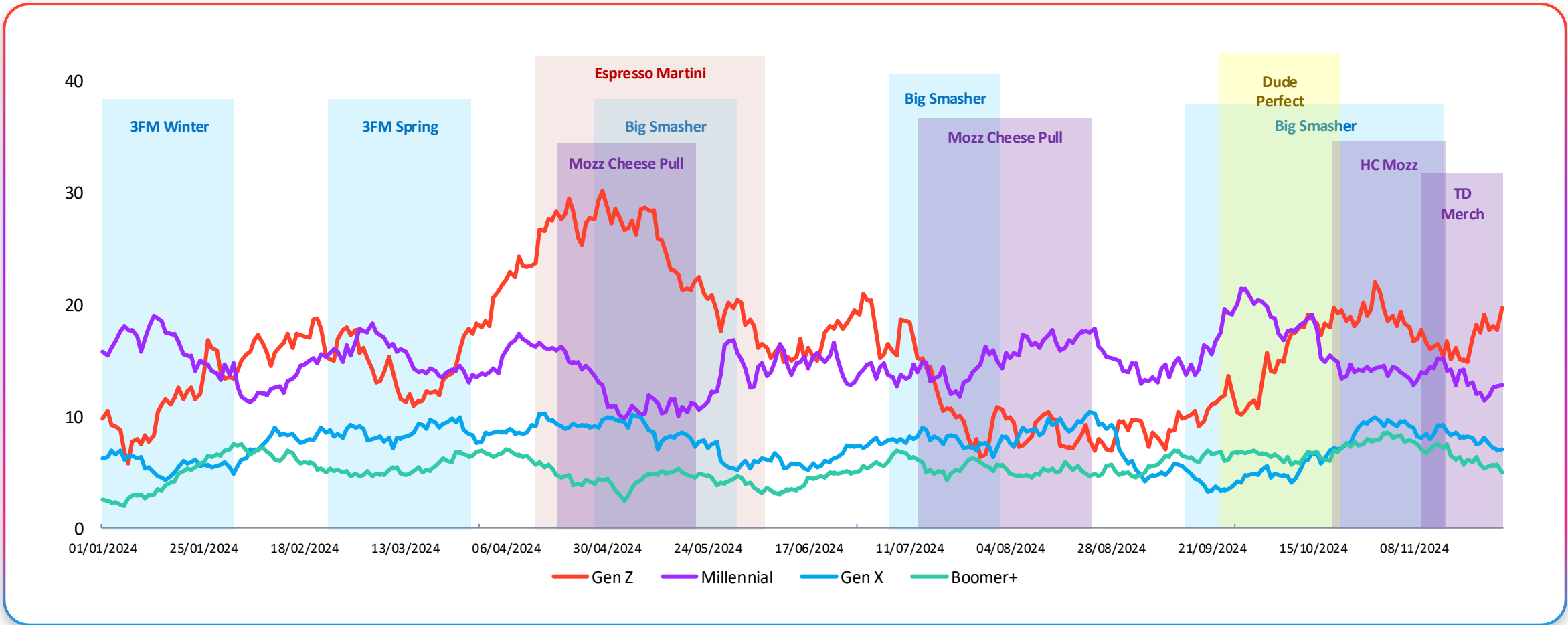
Source: YouGov BrandIndex

**Ad Awareness** – Gauging the recognition of a brand's advertising: Which of the following brands have you seen an advertisement for in the past two weeks?

**Buzz** – Net of Positive and Negative Buzz: Over the PAST TWO WEEKS, which of the following brands have you heard something POSITIVE/NEGATIVE about (whether in the news, through advertising, or talking to friends and family)?



# Mapping Buzz to key campaigns



SOURCE: YouGov; n> 200 daily survey respondents per age group

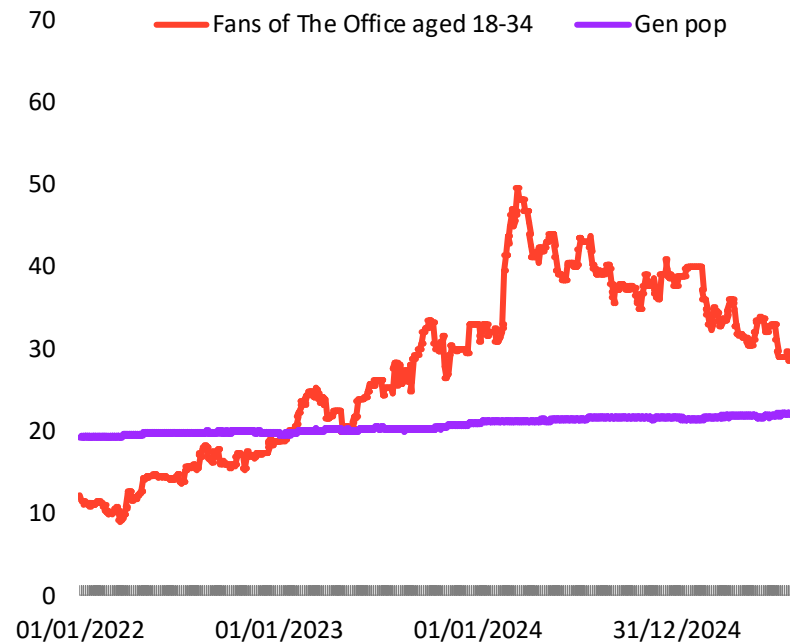
BUZZ: Over the past two weeks, which of the following restaurant chains have you heard something positive/negative about? (Net: Positive-Negative)

# Themes to inform strategy & targeting

 Watching TV	 Watching Movies	 Playing/Listening to Music	 Browsing the Internet	 Reading/Books	 Video Games	 Cooking/Baking
Activities While Watching TV	Attitudes toward Movies	Concert/Festival Attendance	Attitudes toward Browsing	Audiobook Interest	E-Sports Franchise followed	Cooking with Others
Devices Used	Devices Used	Devices Used	Devices Used	Book Format	Frequency/Recency	Food Concerns
Genres	Frequency/Recency	Frequency/Recency	Frequency/Recency	Book Genres	Genres	Frequency of Cooking from Scratch
Method of Discovery	Genres	Genres	Influencers	Frequency/Recency	Method of Discovery	Frequency of Baking
Networks	Methods Used to Watch	Importance of Music	Internet Activities	Magazine Interest	Platforms	Importance of Healthy Diet
Streaming Services	Top Actors	Method of Discovery	Networks	Reasons for Reading	Reasons for Playing	Meal Kit Usage/Provider
Time Spent	Top Movies	Time Spent	Posting Frequency	Top Books	Streaming Frequency	Recipe Usage
Top Actors/TV Personalities	Watching Location	Top Podcasts	Reasons for Using Social	Top Authors	Top Games	Source of Recipes
Top Shows		Top Artists by Genre	Types of Websites/Apps	Ways to Discover New Authors	Top Streamers/Broadcasters	

# Chili's Scranton Branch

Consideration of Chili's among fans of The Office aged 18-34



Source: YouGov BrandIndex. Consideration for Chili's, Jan. 1, 2022 to July 31, 2025. 52 week rolling average.

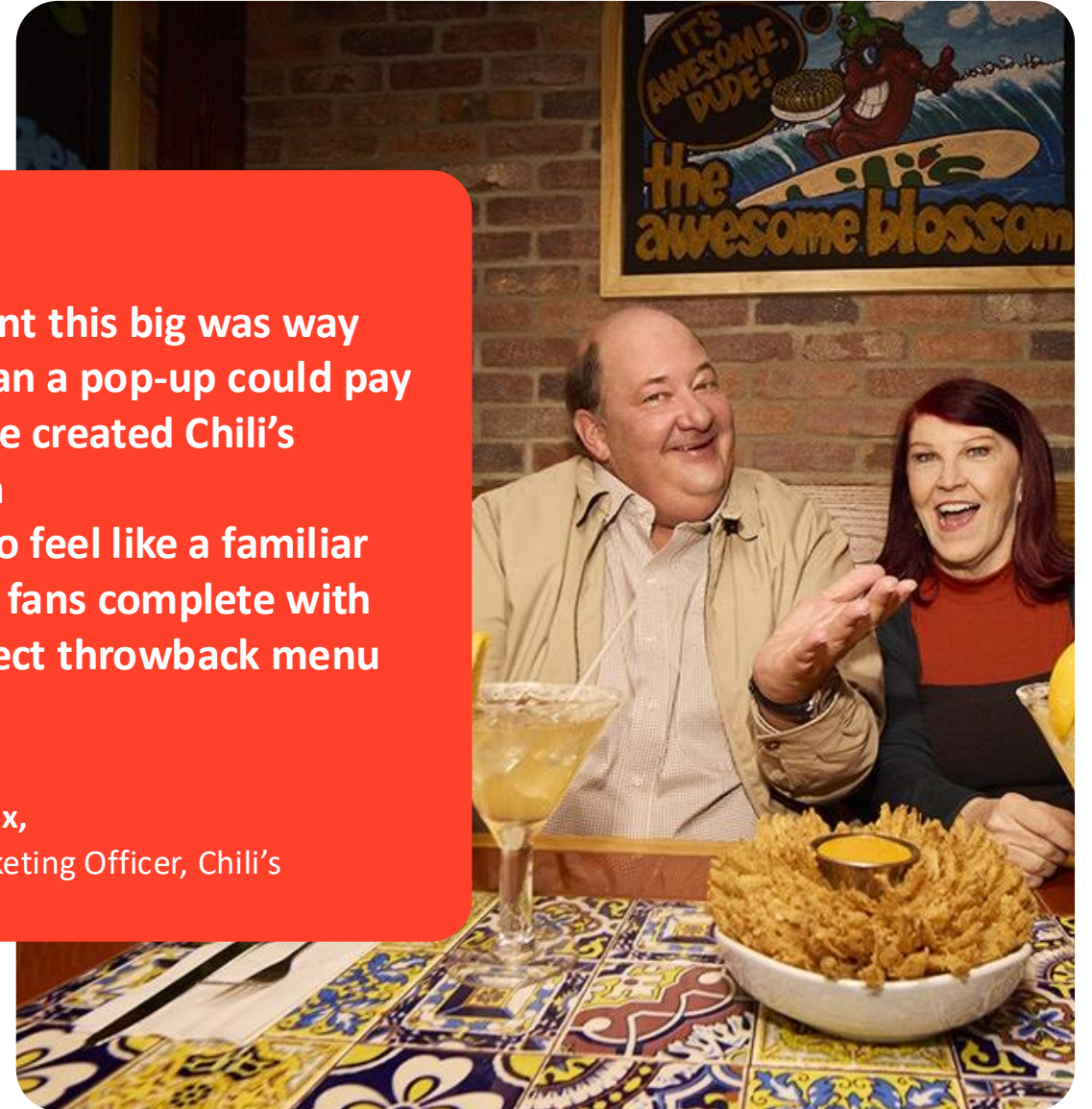
Fans of The Office aged 18-34, based on positive rating for show. n> 138

Gen pop n> 21,000

“

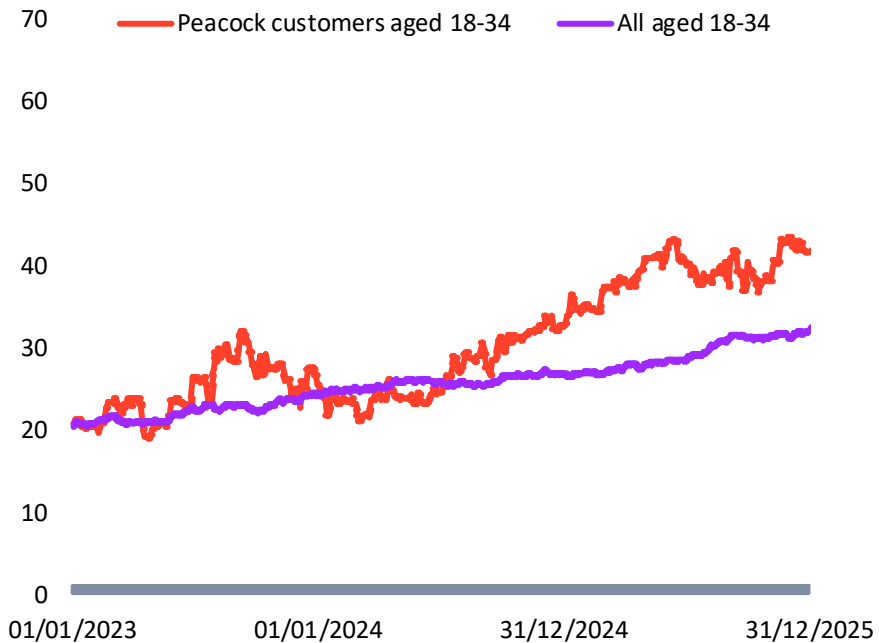
A moment this big was way more than a pop-up could pay off, so we created Chili's Scranton Branch to feel like a familiar home to fans complete with the perfect throwback menu item.”

George Felix,  
Chief Marketing Officer, Chili's

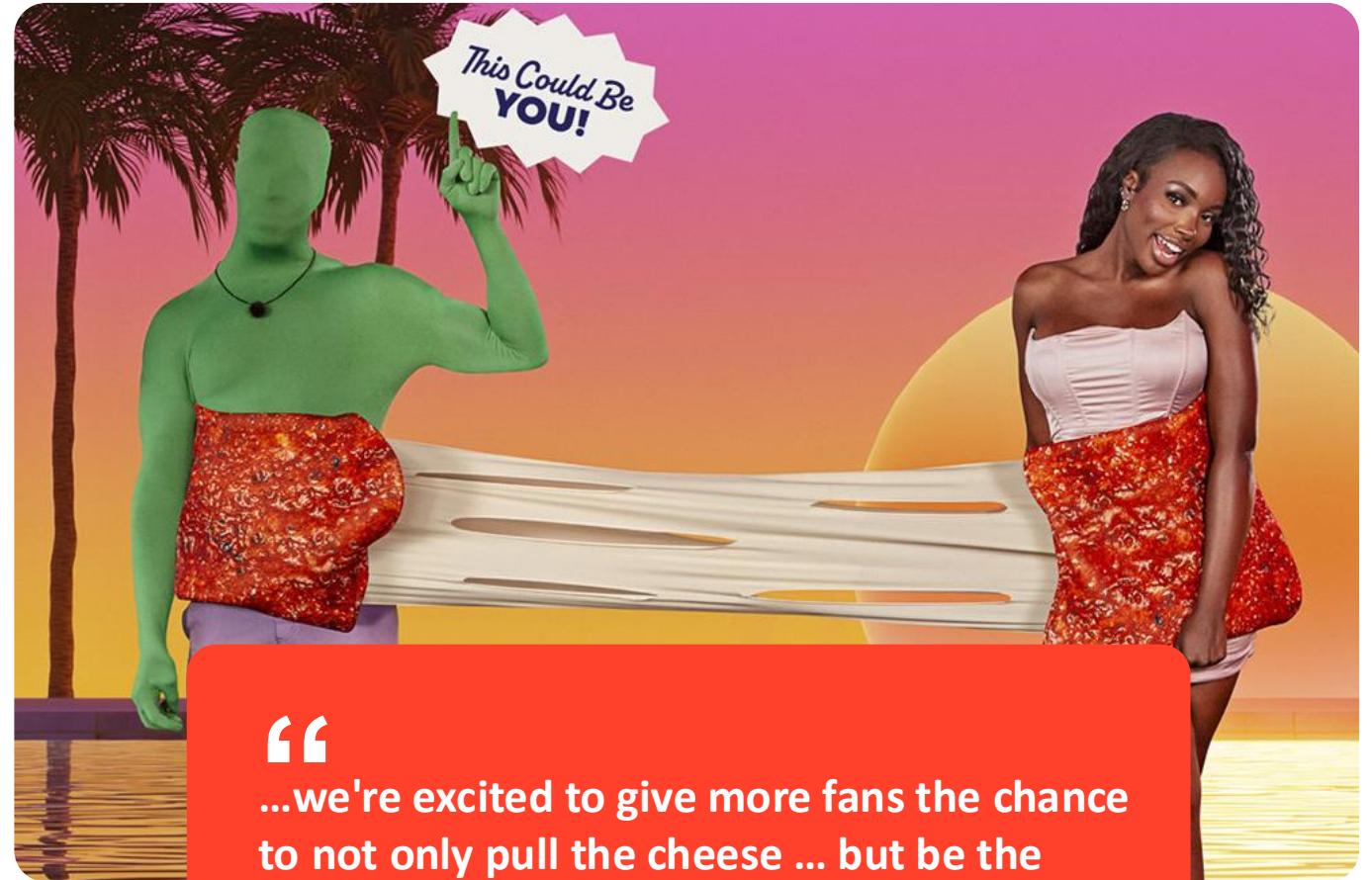


# MozzMates: Be the cheese pull

Impression of Chili's among Peacock streaming customers aged 18-34



Source: YouGov BrandIndex. Impression of Chili's, Jan. 1, 2023 to Dec 31, 2025. Peacock streaming customer aged 18-34 n>125 ; All adults aged 18-34 n> 4,000 52 week rolling average.



“

...we're excited to give more fans the chance to not only pull the cheese ... but be the cheese this Halloween.”

Jesse Johnson,  
VP of Marketing, Chili's

# Tecovas booth boots: Wear the booth

Chili's considerers say:

“ I'm more inclined to buy products that are advertised as limited edition or exclusive. ”

**21%** Chili's considerers  
vs. 17% Gen pop

“ I'm willing to pay more for products that are handmade or artisanal. ”

**44%** Chili's considerers  
vs. 41% Gen pop

Source: YouGov Profiles USA December 2025, Attitudes about retail.

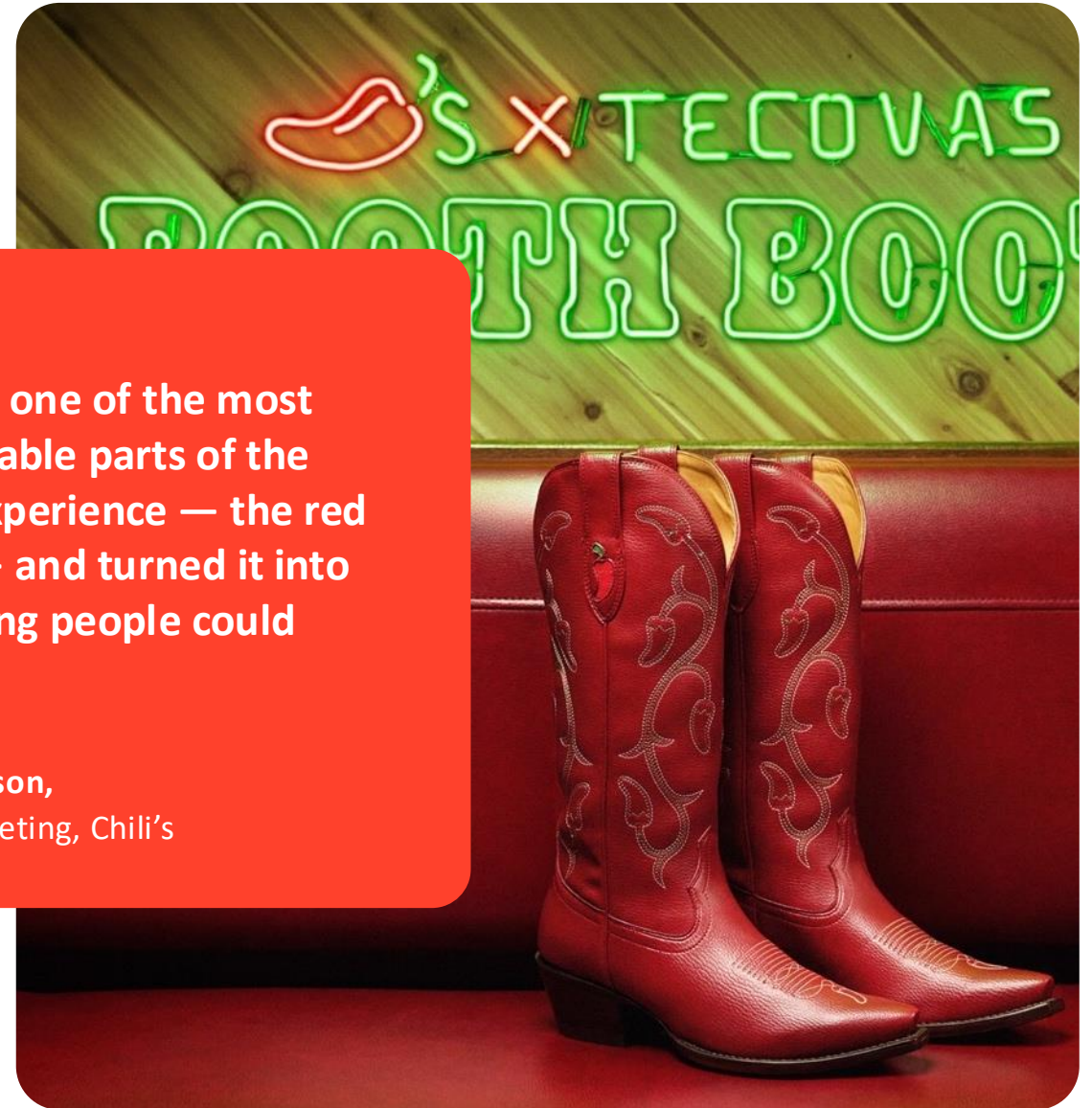
Chili's considerers n> 3,950; Gen pop n> 401,350

Percentage who "Definitely agree" or "Tend to agree" with the statements.

“

We took one of the most recognizable parts of the Chili's experience — the red booth — and turned it into something people could wear.”

Jesse Johnson,  
VP of Marketing, Chili's



# The Queso Crisis



r/Chilis • 7mo ago

I-Have-Mono

Brinker. For the love of all things molten and holy, I am begging you, keep your greedy little paws OFF the Skillet Queso.

**This is not a menu item.**

**This is not a “cheese dip.”**

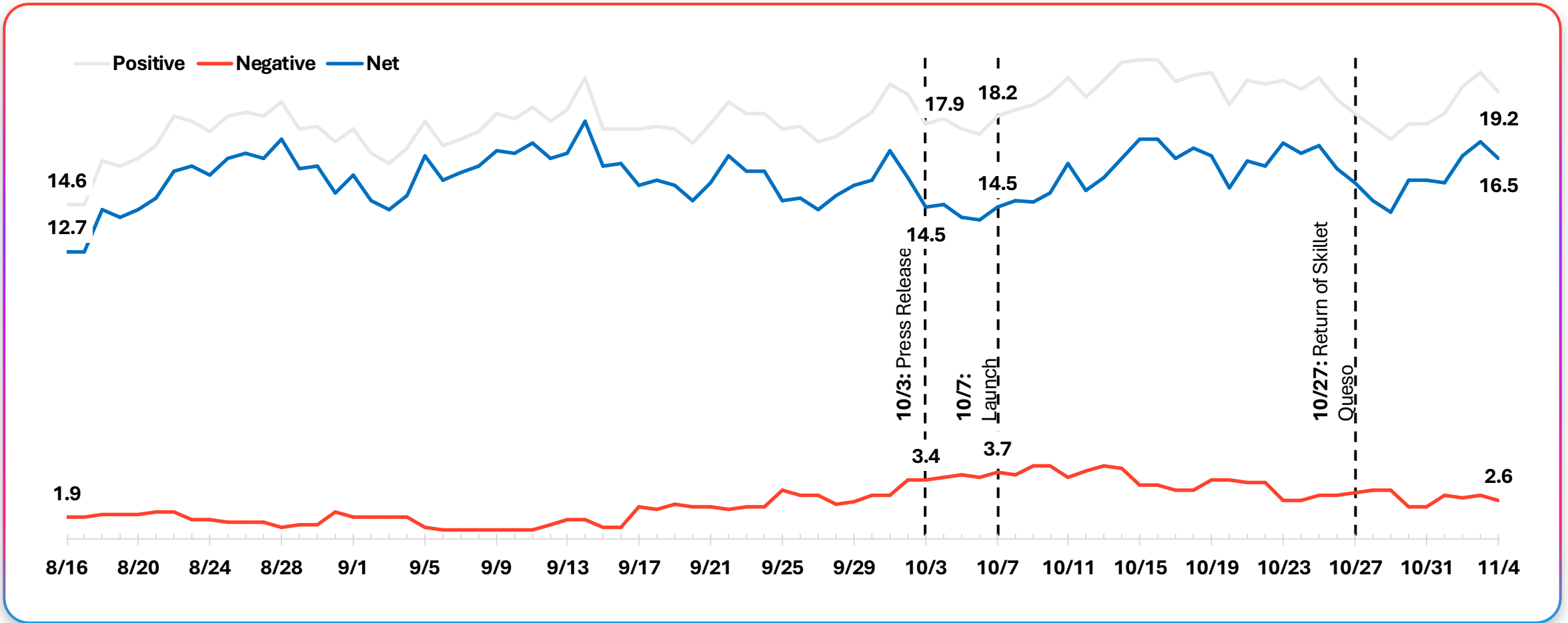
**This is a pillar of civilization.**

↑ 678 ↓ · 💬 110



# Queso Buzz trendline

Negative Buzz increased around launch but was offset by corresponding increase in positive Buzz



YouGov BrandIndex | Sample c. 2,600-4,900 per brand for total population

Q. Over the PAST TWO WEEKS, which of the following brands have you heard something POSITIVE about (whether in the news, through advertising, or talking to friends and family)? / Now which of the following have you heard something NEGATIVE about over the PAST TWO WEEKS?

# Why Americans are saying positive things about Chili's

## In their own words



"A burger at Chili's may cost \$12.00 while the same amount of food at McDonalds or Burger King may be closer to \$16.00. No one could argue the difference in quality between McDonald's and Chili's." – **Female, 50+**



"My friends were talking about how their Triple Dipper has gone viral, especially the mozzarella stick. One of my friends has never been to Chili's so we said we should go sometime." – **Female, 35-49**



"I used to go now and then, but that was like 10 years ago. But I've been hearing more about it since they've been having this big Triple Dipper marketing campaign and the Wicked margaritas. Some friends even suggested we go eat there to get the Wicked margaritas and then go bowling. That was this past December. We went and it was the first time I'd been in probably 10 years." – **Female, 35-49**



"I choose chili's over other cause the portions are bigger, the deals are good and the service is friendly" – **Male, 18-34**



## Key themes & sentiment analysis

Conversation topic	Interview mentions	Engagement (of 10)	Sentiment (of 10)
Food quality and flavor	148	6.1	8.2
Value and meal deals	77	6.4	8.3
Social recommendations and influence	72	5.6	8.0
Atmosphere and social dining	56	5.6	8.3
Staff and service quality	50	5.4	8.0
Advertising and media exposure	48	5.6	7.3
Menu variety and options	29	5.2	7.5
Location and convenience	27	5.1	7.1

Based on 58 AI-led interviews with  
Americans who heard something positive  
about Chili's



High engagement,  
High sentiment

# Questions?

# Thank you

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## /Research Reality

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