

2024

# CAVA INDUSTRY RESEARCH REPORT



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# INTRODUCTION

Cava is a Mediterranean inspired fast-casual restaurant with a mission to “bring heart, health, and humanity to food” (CAVA). They offer customers the ability to choose from curated bowls, salas, or pitas, as well as to build their own. They sell products such as their hummus and dips in some grocery stores. They advertise on using fresh and healthy ingredients that make you feel good and “prioritize lasting value for our guests, the Earth, and our partners” (CAVA).

The restaurant was founded by three second generation Greek immigrants, Ike Grigoropoulos, Chef Dimitri Moshovitis, and Ted Xenohristos. Since opening their first restaurant in 2010, they have expanded to a total of 263 stores across the U.S. (CAVA Group Inc, 2023). In 2018, Cava acquired Zoe’s Kitchen, and has converted those into Cava’s to speed up their expansion (Bean, 2022).



# AUDIENCE RESEARCH

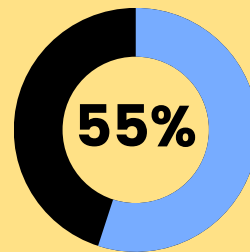
## Demographics

According to Medium.com, “CAVA targets upper-middle income households in high population, high-workforce, urban and suburban areas” (Bean, 2022). In addition, FoodInstitute.com says “the chain said its customer base is 55% female, 28% 25-34 years old, with 37% earning more than \$150,000 annually” (Kreiter, 2023).

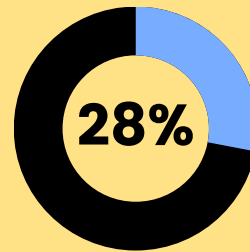
To simplify, the largest segments of CAVA’s consumers are female, millennial, upper-middle to upper class, and in urban and suburban areas.

Furthermore, 176 out of 263 of their restaurants are located in the Eastern U.S. with the remaining 87 in the West and Southwest (CAVA Group, Inc, 2023). That means that the majority of its customer base is located in the East, especially on the coast.

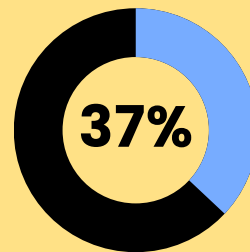
## Majority of Audience



**Women**



**25-34 years old**



**> 150k annually**

# AUDIENCE RESEARCH

## Psychographics and Buyer Behavior

With the majority of CAVA's customers being millennial and upper-middle class, it is important to understand their motivations and behaviors.

According to GroceryDive.com, "research findings show millennials prefer healthy and natural foods... And they support alternative food distribution vehicles like meal delivery" (Skrovan, 2017). This explains why millennials prefer a brand that advertises itself as "a healthy fast-casual restaurant experience" with multiple ways to order include preorder, order in store, and delivery (CAVA). In addition, business.yougov.com states that "eight in ten millennials (80%) agree that when it comes to buying food, quality is important to their purchase decision... 68% of millennials agree that they are willing to spend more for high quality food products" (Nguyen, 2019).

Overall CAVA's healthy options and placement in suburban to urban areas attract millennials who have the ability to pay more for food that is good for them.

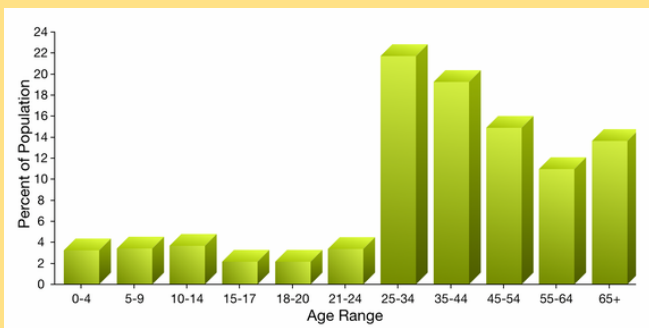


# AUDIENCE RESEARCH

## Audience Segmentation with Claritas Prizm Segmentation

To determine CAVA's target market and location strategy in Tampa, let's take a look at one of its stores on Water Street in Channelside. According to the Claritas Prizm segment, the zip code (33602) that this location is in is mainly made up of five audience segments, four of which at least someone match CAVA's target audience. These are the connected bohemians (midscale younger mostly without kids), the cosmopolitans (upper midscale older mostly without kids), urban elders (upper midscale older mostly without kids), and young digerati (wealthy middle age mostly with kids).

The households in this area are primarily single person with no kids, with the largest age group being 25-34, followed by 35-44 year olds. It is a majority white area. The income in this area varies greatly with the highly percentage of households making under 15k, with the second largest group being in the 50-75k range, followed by the 75-100k, and the 100-125k ranges, respectively. This variety means that CAVA has access to a variety of audience segments in this location, however their primary audience would be middle age, middle-upper class, and caucasian with no kids.



# EMPATHY MAP AND AUDIENCE PERSONA

Audience Member: **Kelly**

Age: 26

Job: Sales Representative

Location: Tampa, Florida



## Empathy Map

### Says:

- “I want something quick and healthy to eat.”
- “What’s a good place to eat around here?”
- “Should I cook or get takeout?”
- “Where can I get good food on my lunch break?”

### Thinks:

- “I wonder if anyone at work would get lunch with me.”
- “Do I have enough time to sit down and eat somewhere?”
- “Wasn’t my friend talking about that Mediterranean place the other day?”
- “I don’t really want to go anywhere, maybe I can get delivery.”
- “How much of my food budget do I have left?”

### Feels:

- Indecisive about what would taste good
- A desire to eat healthy
- Nervous about trying a new spot
- Hungry and wanting something filling

### Does:

- Scrolls through food delivery apps
- Looks at google maps to find restaurants in her location
- Orders her food through the app to be delivered to her office
- Enjoys the food and recommends it to her coworkers

# EMPATHY MAP AND AUDIENCE PERSONA

## Audience Persona

### Motivations:

- Professional growth
- Self-improvement
- Maintaining a healthy lifestyle
- Building meaningful connections
- Living a happy life and gaining new experiences

### Top of Mind Topics:

- Possible travel destinations
- Style inspiration
- Things to do in Tampa
- Eco-friendly living
- Healthy recipes

### Influential Social Accounts:

- @thetampaguide: Instagram account centered around things to do and places to eat in Tampa
- @tampafoodgirl: Instagram account centered around food in Tampa
- @marieforleo: Entrepreneur and author teaching people how to grow a business
- @tampagirlishowwalk: Social club that organizes walks and events for women in Tampa

### Influential Websites and Press:

- Tampa Bay Times: local Tampa newspaper covering local news, events, and culture
- The Everygirl: website catering to women covering many topics including career, finance, wellness, and personal development
- The New York Times: an online newspaper known for its journalism and reporting

### Influential Podcasts:

- "Girls Gotta Eat": a comedy podcast about dating, sex, and relationships
- "The Gold Digger Podcast": a career oriented podcast teaching women how to grow their businesses and careers
- "Armchair Expert with Dax Sheppard": interview style podcast featuring conversations with celebrities about life, personal growth, and relationships
- "The Balanced Blonde" health podcast focused on spiritual awakening, wellness, nutrition, and more



# ATTENTION PERSONA



## @tampafoodgirl- Jessica Stollenmaier

Instagram: 29.2k followers  
facebook: 805 followers

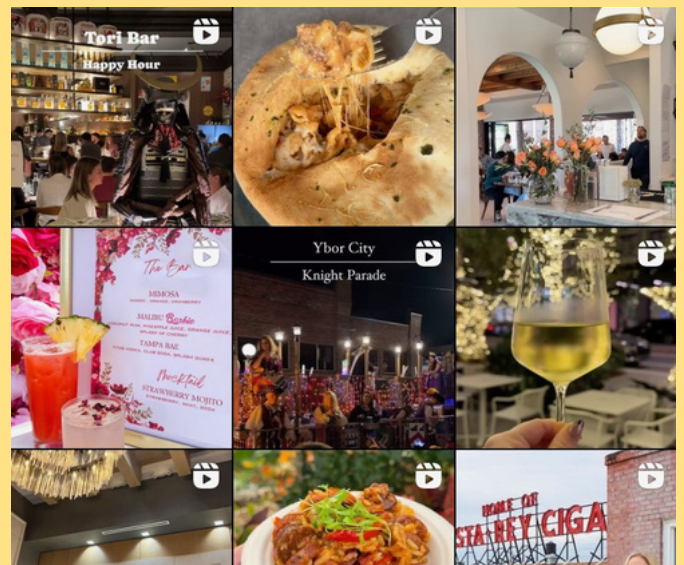
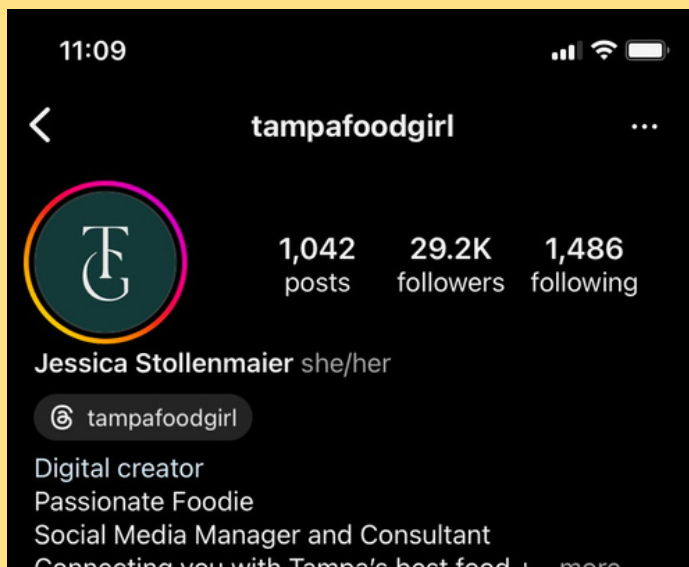
Featured in WFLA and  
VoyageTampa

### Target Audience:

- Younger people who live in Tampa Bay
- People who enjoy fine dining
- People who enjoy cooking
- People looking for fun hangout spots

### Top of mind topics:

- Where to eat and get good drinks in Tampa Bay
- New restaurants opening
- Events in the area



# OBSERVATIONAL RESEARCH

**Research Objective:** Determine the amount of people who purchase from the CAVA in Channelside around lunchtime, the gender of those people, and how many take their food to go vs. eat in the store.

I observed and recorded the phenomena as a complete participant. Sitting in the space allowed to keep track of who was entering and ordering, and who left with their food vs ate there. Performing direct observation was best for me to count the participants myself, since this specific research doesn't exist yet. I used structured observation by created a list of questions I wanted answered beforehand.

## Research Details:

I conducted this research via participant observation. I sat in the Cava and tallied the data by hand on Tuesday February 20th from 2-2:30pm.

Question	Result	Percentages
How many total people purchased from Cava (M/F)?	27 People Total 16 Male 11 Female	59% of the people that purchased from Cava in that time period were male, 41% were female.
How many people ate in the store (M/F)?	6 People Total 2 Male 4 Female	22% of people ate in store. 25% of males ate in store. 6% of females ate in store.
How many people too their food to go (M/F)?	21 People Total 14 Male 7 Female	78% of people took their food to go. 88% of men took their food to go. 64% of females took their food to go.

## Conclusions and Insights

Despite more men than women purchasing from Cava in the period I observed, more women than men ate in store. Making the store friendlier toward men could encourage more men to sit inside and eat. In addition, marketing more toward women could encourage more women to purchase from the brand.

# MEDIA TRENDS

## Search Trends

**Interest over time:** Over the last month, CAVA has been a popular search topic, with its highest point being 100/100 and its lowest being 62/100. Despite that dip it seems that it will remain popular due to fitting the current trends of healthy and customizable food.

**Interest by subregion:** Over the last month, CAVA has had the highest interest in the East Coast, with the highest interest in Maryland, and the lowest in the West and Northwest part of the country. The highest interest seems to be where they have the most locations.

### Related topics:

1. Cava menu
2. Tahini Caesar dressing
3. Cava Do
4. Chipotle
5. CAVA

With CAVA expanding quickly, people will want to learn more about their menu as well as what their other options are.

### Related queries:

1. Culvers
2. Cava pita chips recipe
3. Cava dips
4. Naya
5. Cavva

People want to know what is in Cava's food items as well as their other options for food.

## News Trends

Much of the news surrounding CAVA has been about its fast growth as shown in the articles "Hummus, Falafel, and the Unlikely Rise of Cava" by American University, and "Cava opens in Westport this week, serving Mediterranean food" by CT Insider (Google Trends).

News about the company's stock has also been popular, as seen in articles such as "How Cava Stock Stands Out By Standing Apart" by Investor's Business Daily, and "CAVA Group Stock: Buy, Sell, or Hold" by The Motley Fool (Google Trends).

In summary, the main news topics surrounding Cava are its' growth and stocks, as written by business and finance news outlets (MuckRack).



# WEBSITE AUDIT AND ASSESSMENT

## Cava.com

The lighthearted Cava homepage shows off their popular menu items as well as gives viewers a hub to access their other content. The tone is bright and playful with yellows and blues acting as the main colors. The page is mainly made up of a combination of aesthetic images (showing their menu items) and humorous graphics. Short descriptions tell the user about the menu items, and many call to action links are included on the home page to prompt users to go to their menu, order now, sign up for rewards, and download their app.

After discovering Cava, the user would likely look at their website to learn more before making a decision, because of this the home page would most likely be included in the consideration stage of the buyers journey. Because of its playfulness, bright colors, and modern look, it appears that this website is looking to target young people who value good food, health, and aesthetics. Cava recently rebranded itself in 2022, redesigning their logo and website using inspiration from the Mediterranean sun (Vines, 2022). This made their website more aesthetically pleasing and easier to use.

A combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis allows us to quickly see which areas of the site are excelling, and which could use improvement, as well as why. After evaluating the website I found that it is well designed and user friendly. However, an opportunity that Cava could take advantage of is to add their mission to their home page. Seeing a companies motivations can induce stronger brand loyalty within customers.

Criteria	Evaluation (1-5)	Reasoning
Usefulness and Relevance	5	Content is organized, all content the user is looking for can be found, information is updated and relevant
Clarity and Accuracy	5	All information is presented accurately, images are clear, content is organized in a way that makes sense
Influence and Engagement	5	Call to action buttons are utilized to persuade users to move through the site and into the decision phase
Completeness	4	Provides relevant information, users have to click through other pages to find the information they need
Voice and Style	5	Content uses a consistent friendly, upbeat, professional voice, matches the context of the website
Usability and Findability	4	Site is easy to read easy to navigate, transforms to fit any screen, had to scroll down on google to find it

# COMPETITOR ANALYSIS

## Chipotle

**Overview:** Chipotle is a popular fast-casual Mexican restaurant style chain. It offers a variety of customizable meals including burrito, bowls, and tacos. They allow customers to build their own meal by choosing from their many fresh ingredients.

**Top Social Medias:** @chipotle

Instagram: 1.2M followers

Tik Tok: 2.3 M followers

Facebook: 3.3 M followers

**Content Strategies and formats:**

Chipotle posts similar content across all their platforms with a basis of humor across their content. They create funny and relatable content including memes and videos. They utilize popular trends across social media to gain attention for the videos, which they then repost on their other platforms. They also repost UGC content from big names such as Billie Eilish. Overall, Chipotle's content strategy is to post funny and entertaining content that is easy for their audience to engage with.

## Similarities

**What they Do:**

- Fast-casual restaurant experience
- Healthy ingredients

**Social Media:**

- Utilize images and videos of their food
- Participate in trends
- Create memes surrounding their brand

## Differences

**What they Do:**

- Chipotle has Mexican food, Cava has Mediterranean food
- Chipotles stores are made to be dimmer and cozier, Cava's are more bright and modern

**Social Media:**

- Cava places a greater emphasis on aesthetic content, Chipotle places a greater emphasis on humor and relatability
- Chipotle has significantly more followers on all platforms than Cava
- Cava includes collabs with influencers in their story highlights, Chipotle does not



# INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## Main Insights

According to my research, Cava's rapid expansion has been caused by its ability to place itself in suburban and urban areas where its main target audience of middle to upper class millennials live. Because their audience values living a healthy lifestyle, Cava's various ingredients with transparency about their sourcing appeal to them. They provide their audience with a quick, healthy, and satisfying alternative to cooking or ordering take-out with many convenient options to purchase from them including order ahead and delivery.

Using aesthetic images and videos of their food, participating in trends, and partnering with influencers has been beneficial to help them create buzz and build a following on their platforms. Acquiring Zoe's kitchen and converting these locations to Cavas has helped them expand rapidly and grow their stock, gaining the attention of news media and making them a popular Google Search. In addition, the 2022 rebrand of their logo and website has made them more modern, eye-catching, and interesting to the younger generations, presenting them with an opportunity to continue to grow their audience.

## Opportunity

In 2022, Cava seized the opportunity to make their brand more appealing to younger audiences by redesigning their logo and website. Continuing with this rebrand and using fun and engaging graphics on their social platforms as well as other advertising mediums such as billboards, commercials, and more could help distinguish their brand and create greater brand recognition. In addition, following the lead of a brand like Chipotle and using more humor in their social media could help increase their following and encourage reposts of their content, ultimately growing their online audience and presenting them with greater opportunity to advertise online.



CAVA

# INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## Research Recommendations

### Conversion Research

Acquiring Zoe's Kitchen and converting them to Cava has allowed the brand to expand rapidly. However, I think more research should be conducted before continuing. In my opinion, it would be helpful to conduct a survey from the people that currently purchase from Zoe's Kitchen and others that live in those areas to find out how they feel about converting them into Cava. This could help the brand find out if the Zoe's kitchen audience will purchase from Cava once its' converted, or if they are upset about the change, and will boycott the brand as a result. This could tell the brand if it would be beneficial to keep some of the Zoe's Kitchens the same without converting them.

### Northwestern Expansion Research

Cava currently has no locations in the NorthWest of the United States. Conducting research in that area could help them determine if people there would enjoy having a Cava in their area, or if their target audience isn't located there. Online surveys as well as a possible test location could tell the brand if that population enjoys Mediterranean food, and/or the fast-casual restaurant experience that they provide. Ultimately conducting research on these topics can help Cava thoughtfully expand their restaurant and grow their audience.



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