

# *Winning Flavours*

What's Driving Snacking Innovation in India  
2026

**NielsenIQ**



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# The Top Flavour Trends Shaping 2026



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*India's snacking landscape is undergoing a **flavour-forward evolution**, shaped by changing palates, rising experimentation, and a strong influence from both traditional and global cuisines.*

*In our latest consumer syndicate research on snacking it clearly highlights clear flavour trends that are guiding innovation in the F&B space —and they reflect a noticeable shift in how Indians want to snack.*

***We evaluated 36 flavours overall.***

## Top 10 Flavours

| Flavor          | Main Sample | GenZ | Millennials |
|-----------------|-------------|------|-------------|
| Chaat Masala    | 1           | 1    | 1           |
| Tomato          | 2           | 2    | 4           |
| Cream and Onion | 3           | 7    | 2           |
| Punjabi Tadka   | 4           | 3    | 7           |
| Tikka Masala    | 5           | 11   | 6           |
| Achari Flavor   | 6           | 5    | 16          |
| Khatta Meetha   | 7           | 6    | 11          |
| Spicy Guava     | 8           | 12   | 5           |
| Lemon           | 9           | 4    | 12          |
| Peri Peri       | 10          | 8    | 9           |



# Decoding the Flavour Rankings

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## Local and Global

### 1. Local Flavours Remain the Heart of Indian Snacking

Despite the surge in international influences, **desi flavours continue to dominate**.

Classics such as **Chaat Masala**, **Punjabi Tadka**, and **Tikka Masala** remain category anchors across salty snacks, instant foods, and ready-to-eat formats.

Their staying power comes from:

- **Familiarity and comfort**—these flavours evoke everyday Indian meals.
- **Mass appeal** across regions, age groups, and price segments.
- **High versatility**, working well in chips, namkeen, baked snacks, and even noodles.

Local flavours are not just surviving—they're thriving, forming the “core” of most innovation portfolios.



### 2. Global and Fusion Flavours Are Growing Rapidly

Alongside the traditional, consumers - especially younger cohorts - are increasingly drawn to **world-inspired flavours**.

- The most prominent global winners include:
- **Cream & Onion** – a long-time favourite that continues to lead indulgent snacking.
- **Peri Peri** – now a mainstream flavour, thanks to QSR influence.
- **Mexican Salsa** and **Thai Sweet Chili** – gaining traction due to rising exposure to world cuisine.

These flavours resonate because they bring a sense of novelty without being intimidating. Fusion formats - such as **Masala Nachos**, **Cheesy Tikka**, or **Mexican Bhel** - are also gaining momentum, blending the familiar with the exotic.



# Decoding the Flavour Ranking...

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## 3. Gen Z Drives Bolder, More Experimental Taste Profiles

Younger consumers - especially **Gen Z**—are emerging as the biggest catalysts for flavour experimentation.

The research shows that Gen Z gravitates toward Their staying power comes from:

- **Spicy, tangy, and bold notes**
- **Global spice blends**
- **Limited-edition, seasonal, or “challenge” flavours**

Flavours such as **Peri Peri**, **Hot Korean**, and **Fiery Mexican** appeal to their appetite for intensity and novelty.

Meanwhile, **Millennials prefer comfort flavour** — including cheese variants like **Cheddar**, **Creamy Garlic**, and **Cheesy Masala** - which offer indulgence without unpredictability.



## 4. Nostalgia + Innovation Is a Winning Combo

A notable emerging trend is the blending of **nostalgic Indian flavours** with **modern snack formats**.

Examples include:

- Millet chips with **Chaat Masala**
- Baked makhana with **Lemon Chili**
- Khakhra chips in **Tandoori** flavour

This hybrid approach appeals to health-conscious consumers who also crave familiar taste cues.

# Decoding the Flavour Ranking...

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## 5. *Heat, Citrus, and Umami Are the New Frontiers*

Beyond the mainstream, certain flavour notes are showing strong early signals:

- **Heat-forward profiles** – ghost pepper, chilli-lime, spicy barbecue
- **Citrus-led flavours** – lemon zing, lime-chilli, yuzu-inspired notes
- **Umami-rich flavours** – soy, miso-inspired, and Korean gochujang tones in fusion snacks

These are still niche but rising rapidly among experimental consumers.



## *In Summary*

*India's flavour landscape is becoming richer, bolder, and more globally influenced. **Local Indian flavours remain dominant, but global inspirations and fusion creations are rising fast**, driven largely by younger cohorts like Gen Z. Brands that can balance **core familiar favourites** with **innovative, globally influenced flavours** are best positioned to win the next wave of snacking growth.*

*The above findings and analysis was extracted from the **NIQ Syndicate Study on Snacking**. Please reach out to your NIQ Local Contact for more Details.*



# Thank You

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