

A close-up photograph of several frozen citrus popsicles. The popsicles are rectangular and have a gradient of colors from light pink to light orange. They are surrounded by fresh slices of blood orange and several clear ice cubes. The background is a soft, out-of-focus mix of these colors.

FROZEN ICY TREATS



Contract Testing Inc.



INTRODUCTION

As summer fast approaches, the demand for frozen treats will be heating up. One popular and convenient option popular among both parents and kids is colourful non-dairy icy treats 'on-a-stick', sold in a multi-pack at the grocery store.

This research aims to explore the differences in taste, appearance and texture among these products to determine which attributes drive overall liking by kids and purchase interest by mothers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research recruited 50 boys and girls between the ages of 6 and 12 from the Greater Toronto Area to participate in a blind taste test of six national brands. All brands were 'on-a stick', sold in a multi-pack in the freezer aisle, and purchased at a local grocery store.

The children answered a series of questions relating to the appearance, taste, and texture. Taste testing with children comes with a unique set of rules – the main one being that the language must be simple and kid-friendly. Consequently, scales which measure attribute 'liking' were shortened from the typical 9-point (adult) scale, to 5-point scales, with the anchor points using the kid-friendly vernacular of 'Really Good' to 'Really Bad'.

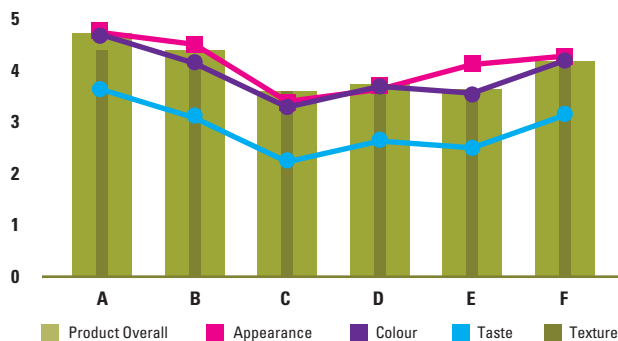
At the same time, their mothers answered questions about their purchase decisions in the category and their interest in the same six national brands.

RESULTS

Kids

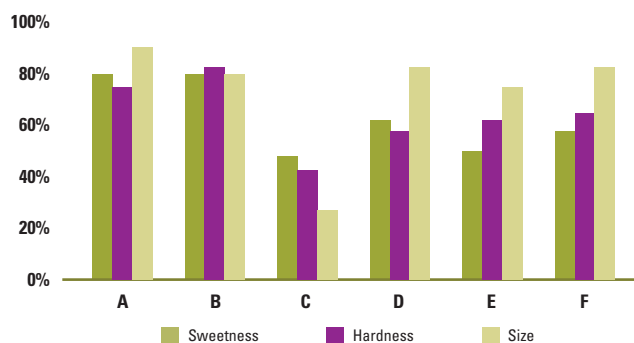
Among the kids, one product emerged as the clear winner, with top scores on all product attributes – appearance and colour as well as taste and texture. (Fig.1)

Figure 1 – Overall Liking and Liking of Appearance, Colour, Taste, and Texture – Mean Scores



It had optimal levels of sweetness and a good 'bite' texture, with almost 80% of kids saying those attributes were "just right." In contrast, for the worst performing product #3, less than 50% said sweetness and hardness were "just Right." (Fig. 2)

Figure 2 – Percentage of Kids Who Say Attribute is "Just Right"



Product #3 was too soft and too sweet. It was also too small. In fact, only two of the products tested met our action standards for Sweetness and Hardness. Three were too sweet. Two were too hard and two were too soft. (Figs. 3 and 4)

Figure 3 – Perception of Sweetness

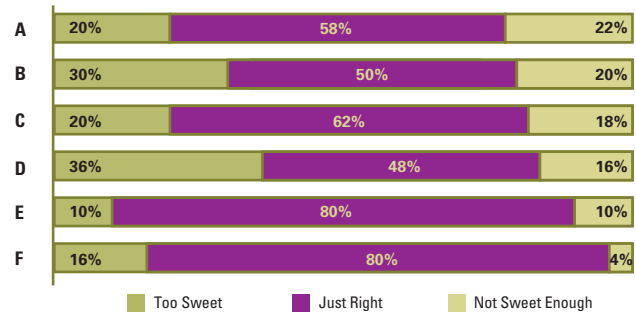
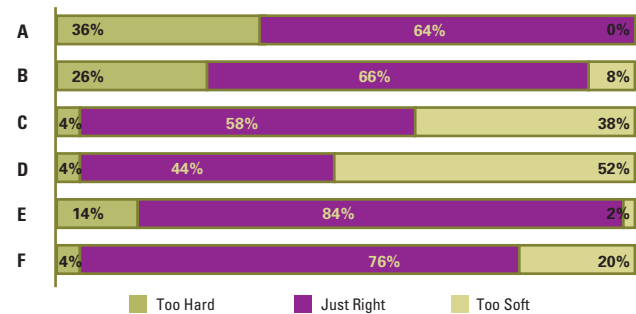
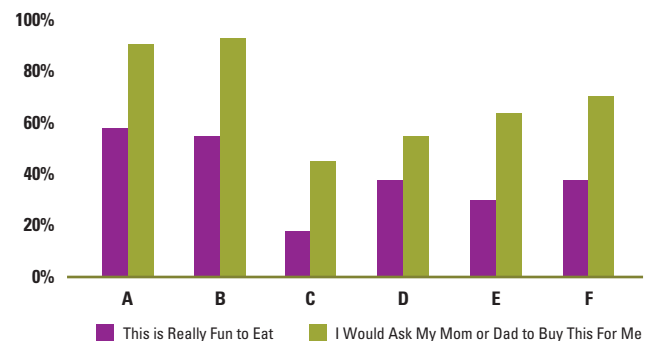


Figure 4 – Perception of Hardness



In the end, Product #1 was the best tasting, with optimal sweetness and hardness, and was the most fun to eat. As a result, 90% of our testers said they would ask their parents to buy this top performer for them. (Fig. 5)

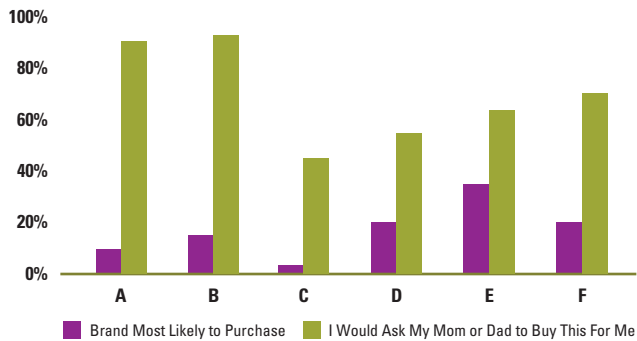
Figure 5 – Fun vs. Purchase Interest



Mothers

While the kid testers clearly preferred Product #1, their mothers were of a different opinion. Only 10% of mothers chose this brand as the one they would most likely purchase. In contrast, the most popular brand among mothers, chosen by 36% as the one they are most likely to purchase, was not one of the top ranking brands tested among kids. (Fig. 6)

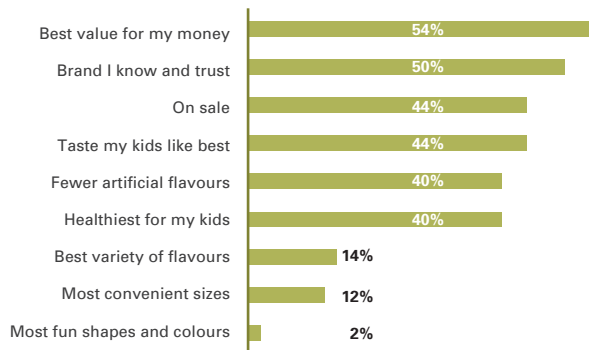
Figure 6 – Purchase Interest of Kids vs. Moms



And although Moms do pay attention to what brand their kids like, the top factors for brand choice were “The Best value for money” and “A Brand they Trust”, followed closely by “A Brand that’s on sale”. In contrast, only one mom said that “Fun shapes and sizes” influences their purchase decision. (Fig. 7)

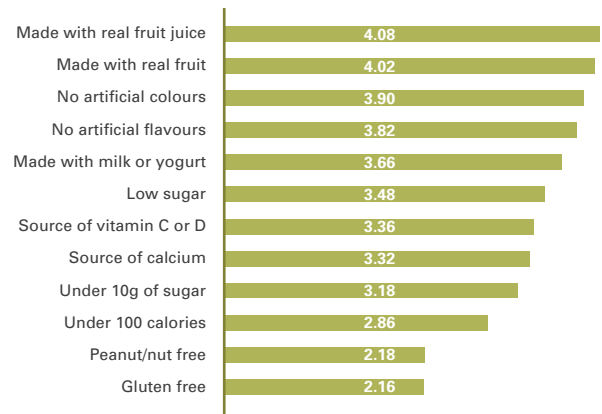


Figure 7 – Reasons for Purchase



Healthiness was another fairly important factor, with 40% of Moms choosing a brand that is “healthiest for my kids”. When asked about specific nutritional benefits, the most important mentions were ‘Made with Real Fruit or Real Fruit Juice’, followed closely by ‘No Artificial Colours or Flavours’. (Fig. 8)

Figure 8 – Importance of Nutritional Claims – Mean Scores (1= Not at all, 5=Very)



CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The objective of this research was to investigate the taste and textural profile of frozen icy treats among kids and the reasons for purchase among mothers. Within this framework we see that many products currently on the market may not fully meet the demands of both audiences.

Marketing kid-oriented packaged foods comes with a unique set of challenges – appealing to the primary consumer (children) with a fun, engaging image and a taste and texture they love; while at the same time appealing to the primary purchaser (Mom or Dad) with a sensible product, a brand they trust, and perceived value for money. While children may not be the most articulate and sophisticated when it comes to sensory evaluation, they can tell you what they like, what they don’t like, and why. And most importantly they can also tell their parents if they want more, which makes them a key decision maker of repeat purchase.

For questions about this research, or how you can leverage consumer taste buds in your business, contact Andrew Scholes at andrew.scholes@contracttesting.com.

Contract Testing Inc. is an industry leader in sensory evaluation and consumer product testing. We are the only sensory evaluation and consumer product research company with corporately managed test sites in both Canada and the United States. With nearly 30 years of experience, we are innovators in testing with consumers across all major food, beverage and household and personal care categories.



Contract Testing Inc.

CONTACT:

119 West Drive
Brampton, ON L6T 2J6
6760 Jimmy Carter Blvd. Suite 110
Atlanta, GA 30071

Phone: 905 456 0783
Fax: 905 456 1172
Email: info@contracttesting.com
www.contracttesting.com

TEST SITE LOCATIONS:

Grand Rapids, Michigan	Toronto, Ontario
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