

PEANUT BUTTER





INTRODUCTION

Whether slathered on a piece of toast for a quick and nutritious breakfast solution, or finely spread on a cracker for a midnight snack, peanut butter continues to be one of our favorite go-to foods. Perhaps our peanut butter cravings are rooted in our heritage – after all, a Canadian is widely credited to have the first peanut butter patent back in 1884. Fast forward to the modern day grocery aisles and the category is now amass with a variety of spinoffs – clearly the love affair continues. So we decided it was time to have a closer look at the taste and textural properties of some of the peanut butter brands we go nuts over.

This research aims to explore whether there are perceivable differences between brands of packaged on-the-shelf smooth peanut butter, and if so, what attributes help them stand apart.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

We recruited 50 female peanut butter lovers from the Greater Toronto Area for a blind taste test of six smooth variety peanut butters including three national brands and three private labels. A tablespoon of each sample was presented in a small cup accompanied by a piece of white bread.

RESULTS

Of the six products, one emerged as a clear winner with the top scores on Overall Liking (Figure 1) and an impressive top two box purchase intent of 72% - compared to 58% for the runner-up, Brand A (Table 1).

Figure 1 – Mean Overall Liking

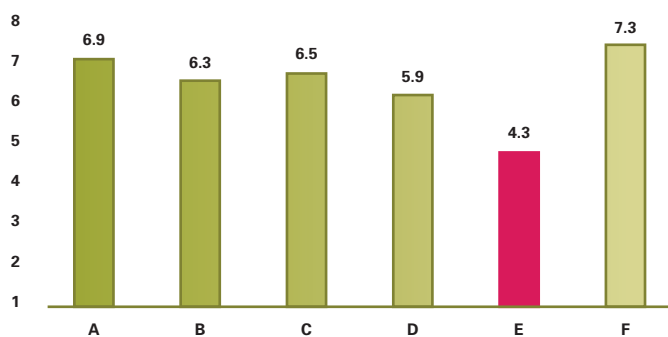


Table 1 – Top Two Box Purchase Intent

Top 2 box Purchase Intent					
A	B	C	D	E	F
58%	44%	38%	42%	16%	72%

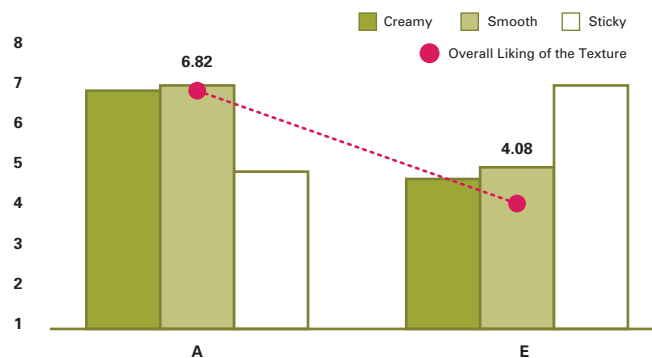
And what explains this gap from 'good to great'? The top performing brand was more likely to be described as creamy and smooth while the least-liked brand was called out for being thick, sticky, and was more likely to be described as artificial (Table 2).

Table 2 – Product Descriptors

Percentage of Respondents describing the product as:	Most Liked Brand	Least Liked Brand
Creamy	88 %	16 %
Smooth	80 %	20 %
Thick	32 %	70 %
Sticky	28 %	66 %
Artificial	10 %	44 %

Taking a closer look at the textural aspects of the products, the product with the best textural rating was Product A with a mean score of 6.82, compared to the lowest textural liking of 4.08 for Product E (Figure 2). The textural intensity scores of these products demonstrate that the best texture was significantly creamier, smoother, and less sticky than the product with the least-liked overall texture.

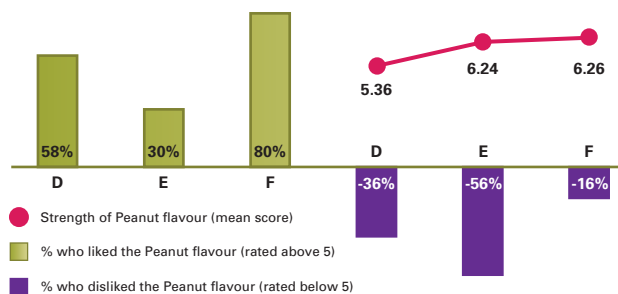
Figure 2 – A comparison between the most-liked texture (Product A) and the least-liked texture (Product E):



Product A was significantly creamier, smoother, and less sticky

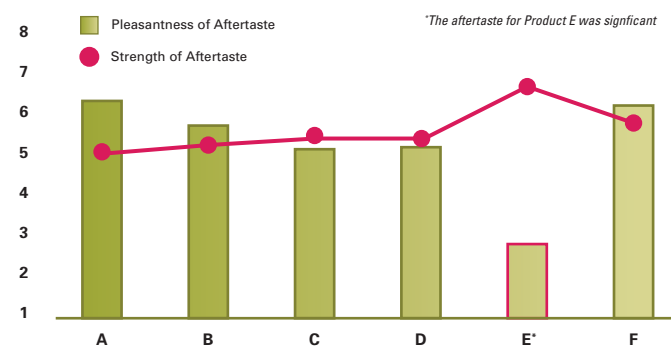
And although texture played a key role, the strongest drivers of overall liking were actually flavour-related attributes – specifically the Peanut Flavour and the Aftertaste. For Peanut Flavour, it was not the intensity of the flavour that drove liking – in fact, there was little difference in the peanut flavour intensity of the top and bottom performing brands, products E and F, yet they were poles apart in terms of the liking of the peanut flavour (Figure 3). Product D had a much weaker Peanut Flavour than both E and F, with a taste appeal that fell somewhere in between. So while the Peanut Flavour is a critical aspect of the product profile, it is not just a simple matter of 'more is better'. It is the quality and balance that matters, not the intensity.

Figure 3 – Peanut Flavour - Intensity & Liking



Another indication of a major shortcoming in the flavour profile of Product E was revealed in the aftertaste attributes. Among those who detected an aftertaste, the aftertaste of Product E was significantly stronger and significantly more unpleasant than all the other products (Figure 4).

Figure 4 – Pleasantness and Strength of Aftertaste



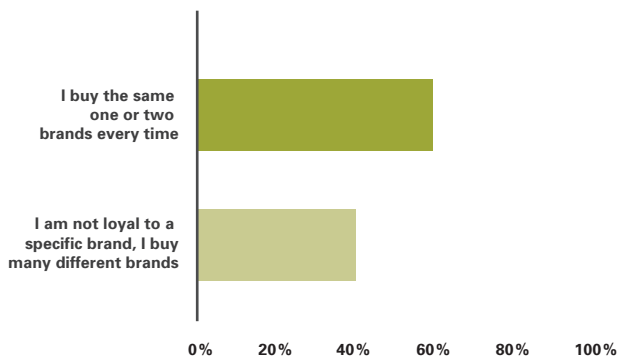
**The aftertaste for Product E was significant*

The results for Product E reveal significant shortcomings in both the flavour profile and texture, and in the sensory testing field provide a perfect example of a product in dire need of improvement. Product F on the other hand, provides an excellent resource for benchmarking the gold standard of the category – at least in terms of what these peanut butter lovers are looking for.

Brand Loyalty

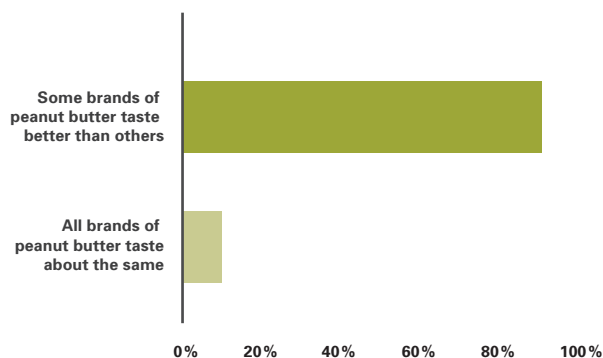
Prior to tasting, we asked our panel a few questions about their loyalty in this category: 60% said they always buy the same one or two brands, while the remaining 40% will switch between many different brands (Figure 5).

Figure 5 - Brand Loyalty



But either way, most agree that some brands of peanut butter do in fact taste better than others (Figure 6). Based on our blind tasting, it turns out they were right.

Figure 6 – Tasting the Difference



CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The objective of this research was to investigate the sensory performance of six smooth peanut butters. We included both national brands and private label brands, and recruited female consumers residing in one geographical area – Greater Toronto. Further research might also explore whether similar differences and preferences are revealed in other geographic markets, or among males or children. Other segments of the category such as Chunky or Natural may also reveal unique drivers of choice.

Within this framework, it was revealed that there are differences in the sensory profiles and likeability of brands and that likeability is connected to both aspects of the textural and flavour profile. In the smooth peanut butter segment it turns out that being smooth, creamy, and not too sticky are very relevant product goals. And when it comes to flavour, it's not just about intensifying the peanut flavour, it's about having the right flavour profile with no undesirable taste notes or aftertaste.

In a category with such high brand loyalty, triggering a brand switch can be a hard nut to crack but it can also mean big payoffs. Like most packaged food categories, a superior product profile alone does not sell the brand - but the difference between a good product and a great product may be just what's needed to entice loyal consumers to switch, increase market share, and boost your bread and butter...er, peanut butter that is.

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
Detroit, Michigan	Calgary, Alberta
Atlanta, Georgia	Halifax, Nova Scotia
Columbus, Ohio	Montreal, Quebec
Milford, Connecticut	Vancouver, British Columbia
Phoenix, Arizona	