

# A Christmas Advent-ure!

Understanding the nation's favourite advent calendars with neuro and sensory analysis



A study from Walnut Unlimited's  
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# Foreword.

As Christmas approaches and December beckons, many thoughts turn to festive fare. But before the pigs and blankets get their time to shine, many will indulge in that old traditional daily routine: opening a little door on the advent calendar of our choosing to see what small, exciting goodies lies within.

In fact, according to new findings from the Walnut omnibus, **67% of British adults are planning to buy an advent calendar** this year. But with so many chocolate advent calendars on the market, how can we know which doors are hiding the truly best *tasting* chocolate? And is it possible to figure out the nation's favourite?

Fear not, we've done the hard work for you – leveraging neuro and sensory sciences – so that you can make a choice based on insights!







## Getting to the heart of the matter with neuroscience.

We know that what people say at a conscious level doesn't always tell us the whole story, particularly with the purchase and consumption of chocolate – an experience tied up in lots of emotion for many of us. So, we applied implicit Reaction Time (RT) testing, a technique grounded in neuroscience, to tap into the deeper underlying emotions that really impact our behaviour. Essentially, a faster response to a question indicates a stronger emotional conviction, and by measuring this response, we can understand whether people actually do mean what they say. **In this case, if they truly like that little bit of chocolate!**

## The sensory side.

We also know that people are very good at saying what they do and don't like, but not so hot at explaining why. So, to help delve into the details of the chocolates themselves, we've used expert sensory analysis to create detailed flavour profiles. This gave us another layer of insight around the **flavour and texture of these chocolates** to shed light on some of the consumer responses.

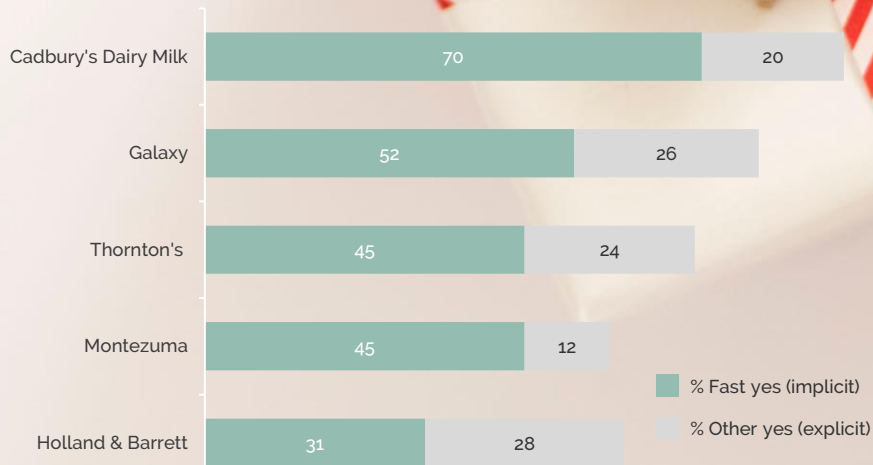


## And the winner is...

We tested 5 leading brands' milk chocolate advent calendars (ranging from £1.50 to £9.99) with consumers and... (drum roll please...), without a doubt, the best tasting chocolate both rationally and emotionally was the nation's favourite, **Cadbury's Dairy Milk**. We should also say that this was the cheapest we tested at a cool £1.50!

So there you have it. You can now make an informed choice as December fast approaches. But this story doesn't stop there...

**But why is it that Cadbury's Dairy Milk wins with a landslide? What is it that is connecting with so many of us both taste-wise and emotionally?**





## Getting a *sense* of the matter...

From a sensory perspective, the chocolates all had very different flavour profiles. However, each bite-size Cadbury's Dairy Milk piece had the classic milk chocolate colour, aroma and flavour comprising of sweet, smooth, rich cocoa, dairy and low vanilla notes, with a firm bite, creamy mouthfeel and soft melt in the mouth. *Mmmmmmm!*

Is it likely that we've been conditioned to accept this as the 'best' milk chocolate taste through repeated exposure over the years? Well, yes. Our inherent *familiarity bias* means we tend to value things that we know well, and this applies to food tastes too. Whether it's that sweet, smooth, rich, dairy taste, or the fact that

it's such a familiar flavour to us is really irrelevant. Both emotionally and rationally, we love Cadbury's Dairy Milk!

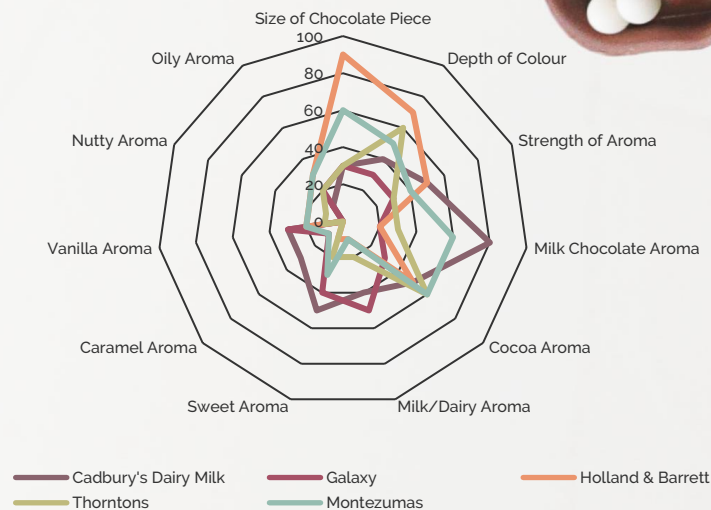
On the surface, a close second to Cadbury was Galaxy. However, it's in the true, emotional scores that we see Galaxy a long way behind Cadbury's Dairy Milk. A similar sized chocolate to CDM with a paler milk chocolate colour. Galaxy pieces had a lighter aroma and flavour of milky chocolate, together with more creamy dairy notes and greater sweet, vanilla flavour. The Galaxy pieces had a harder bite than Cadbury's Dairy Milk with a creamy mouthfeel and a sweeter aftertaste.



# Getting a *sense* of the matter...

Next came Thorntons' advent chocolate. Their chocolate pieces were a similar size to the first two but had a darker colour. Although the aroma was quite light, the intensity of cocoa came through more than the Cadbury's and Galaxy chocolate on taste and overall Thorntons had a stronger cocoa flavour. This chocolate also had some deeper, sweet vanilla and caramel notes and had the softest bite with the fastest speed of melt in the mouth and a creamy mouthfeel. From a sensory perspective, this chocolate shows a lot of positive attributes! But perhaps not being a "household" brand like Cadbury or Galaxy is stopping this

contender taking a leading spot? Last in the ranking were Montezuma's and Holland & Barrett. By comparison to the previous three chocolates, the Holland & Barrett chocolates were ginormous, chunky chocolates and had the darkest colour of the milk chocolate assessed. This colour gave a clue to the strongly cocoa flavour of these chocolate pieces, which also had low milky notes and some low-level vanilla, nutty and oily undertones. Possibly because of their size, these chocolate pieces had the hardest bite, least melt in the mouth and were the most mouthcoating.





## A deeper layer of insight...

Holland & Barrett had the greatest drop in implicit liking, suggesting that although there was something about the chocolate that people thought they should say they like (the size of the pieces and therefore value for money, for example), but people didn't truly feel they liked it at a deeper, subconscious level. Perhaps the taste didn't quite live up to expectations?

The Montezuma's chocolate pieces were also larger than the first three tested, but not as huge as Holland & Barrett.

The colour was slightly lighter than Holland & Barrett's but the flavour had more cocoa and dairy and also had a sweet, vanilla flavour and low level oily notes. Although the Montezuma's chocolate had the lowest explicit score, those consumers who say they like it *truly* do like it – with the lowest drop in implicit scores across all of the chocolates tested. This may suggest that Montezuma's have a loyal following – **if you like it, you really like it!**





So, there you have it. Whether you are young or old, that little thrill that comes from tiny pieces of chocolate throughout the month of December never dims. At least this year, you can make a choice of calendar backed by insights!



If you want to find out more about this study, or about the techniques mentioned, please get in touch with Debbie Parker at [debbie.parker@walnutunlimited.com](mailto:debbie.parker@walnutunlimited.com)



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