

corresponding figure for fresh fruit (62%). By region, chocolate was the second most frequently consumed snack amongst Europeans (trailing only fruit), while it also occupied second position in the USA (behind potato crisps), in Latin America (behind yoghurt) and in the Middle East and Africa (behind fresh fruit). The same study found that chocolate was consumed as a snack slightly more often amongst women, at 68% of all respondents. This figure decreased to 61% for male consumers.

Confectionery such as chocolate also represents a popular form of gift, reflecting emotions such as affection, gratitude, hospitality or even remorse. Much of this is skewed towards certain times of year, when chocolate sales are on the high side – notable examples in many western markets include Christmas, Easter, Valentine's Day and, increasingly, Halloween. Chocolate is virtually synonymous with Easter and (to a slightly lesser extent) Christmas in many parts of the world, when gifts are traditionally exchanged. In the UK, sales of boxed chocolates during Easter, Valentine's Day and Mother's Day are worth over £ 100 m (US\$ 150 m) per year.

Easter is arguably the most significant season within the global chocolate market, despite the fact that it has yet to catch on in parts of the world such as China. In contrast, it is well-established across large parts of Europe, as well as in the USA, where the Easter period accounts for over a third of seasonal chocolate sales. Another significant market for Easter chocolate is Brazil, where Easter eggs account for around 20% of the country's chocolate market, and over 100 million are eaten every year. This figure falls slightly, to around 80 million Easter eggs, in the UK.

Chocolate eggs (both shell and filled varieties) remain the mainstay of the Easter confectionery market, both in Brazil and elsewhere. Sales appear to have held up well during the recession – in the UK, for example, the market for chocolate eggs grew by 5.5% to more than £ 300 m during 2013. Consumers also display an increasing appetite for Easter-themed novelties and shapes in markets such as the UK. Traditionally, one of the best examples has been Gold Bunny from Lindt and Sprüngli, but competition is increasing from rival companies. The Malteaster Bunny from Mars, for example, was launched in the UK in 2009 and is now worth almost £ 17 m per annum.

The Christmas period accounts for a sizeable percentage of sales of boxed chocolates in many parts of the world. In the UK, for example, November and December respectively account for 24% and 45% of sales of boxed chocolates during the course of a typical year, while chocolate assortments sold over Christmas accounts for up to one-fifth of the total French chocolate confectionery market. The Christmas chocolate market also encompasses seasonal novelties (e.g. tree decorations and advent calendars), as well as products geared towards children. Mintel estimates that between 15% and 20% of all Christmas chocolate confectionery products launched per year are targeted at this age group.

Halloween has traditionally been an important time of year as far as the USA chocolate market is concerned – in 2013, for example, chocolate accounted for over 70% of all consumer expenditure on confectionery during the Halloween period. Data from the National Confectioners Association indicates that USA spending on chocolate during Halloween in 2013 grew by over 5% to US\$ 2.2bn. Across the Atlantic, sales of chocolate during Halloween are also rising sharply in Western European countries such as the UK and Ireland. The UK market for Halloween-themed food and drinks is now worth over £ 300m per year, with chocolate treat packs one of the best performing sectors.

In both Europe and North America, snack-sized chocolate bars are especially popular at this time of year, owing to their suitability for giving to “trick or treaters”. The growing significance of Halloween within the UK chocolate market is further illustrated by new product activity from major confectionery manufacturers such as Cadbury/Mondelez International. Its range now includes the Screme Egg, a version of the Crème Egg brand, which features green-coloured “goo” instead of the usual yellow.

Another occasion during which consumption of chocolate is becoming increasingly significant is what is usually termed as the “big night in”. As the economic situation worsened in regions such as Europe and the USA, greater numbers of people became less inclined to go out socialising, largely on the grounds of cost. Instead, many turned towards staying in with their friends and family, making use of home entertainment and sharing food and drinks in the process.

With its indulgent nature, chocolate is ideally placed to capitalise on this trend. One effect has been the growth in demand for bite-sized chocolate confectionery products, which are usually packaged in formats geared towards sharing, such as bags and pouches. The UK market for bite-sized chocolate, for example, was valued by Mars at £ 550m in 2013, up by around 40% from the previous year. Many leading manufacturers have extended their chocolate brands into this sector, thereby further driving market growth – examples include Mars, Milky Way and Twix from Mars, as well as Aero from Nestlé, Cadbury’s Twirl and Flake from Mondelez International.

Despite the fact that some research has linked chocolate consumption with health, this has yet to become a leading reason for purchasing chocolate. Although the science community as a whole remains to be convinced that chocolate possesses significant nutritional benefits, the last decade has seen products coming to market which have been positioned on various health platforms – examples include weight management, anti-ageing and heart health. Chocolate manufacturers have even made references to these health qualities in the marketing of their products, although the prevailing regulatory situation means that very few make specific claims.

A recent example was the study carried out by the University of California in San Diego (2012), the results of which were published in the March 2012 issue