

The innovation revolution: How next-Gen ingredients are redefining ice cream pleasure



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The global ice cream market size is forecast to increase by USD 31.7 billion between now and 2029, with a year-over-year CAGR of 5.6%, reflecting strong growth momentum. Within this, the country with the strongest growth is predicted to be the United States with 35%¹. This growth serves to reinforce the need for innovation and the launch of new products that meet consumers' evolving needs. But in what direction is the market growing?

As a R&D Specialist turned Sales Account

Manager, I have seen firsthand how texture and emotion have become the star of product innovation. Not only because of the challenge of innovation to create new sensations but also in the desire and craving from consumers for multi-sensory experiences. As we can see in recent surveys², 55% of frozen treat consumers choose a flavour based on what they're craving in the moment, and 6% report they stick to the same flavours every time which is changing the paradigm demanding constant innovation pipelines and compelling storytelling at point-of-

sale. If we go more in depth, we also know that 45% of adult consumers said that their purchase is based on seasonal flavours and 37% in texturized products³. Today's costumers don't just taste ice cream, they feel it.

Moreover, a new trend is shaping the market and driving a sense of urgency: the rapid rise of ice cream trends driven by and on social media. Trends come and go as fast as those 15 second videos. The ice cream industry is experimenting at unprecedented speed in trend cycles driven by digital engagement. Some platforms have more impact than others but Instagram and Tik Tok are specially playing an important role. They have created the concept of virality basically shaping the product development timelines and transforming costumers needs and expectations as living in fast speed permanently, creating a market where trends emerge and fade within months rather than years. This is forcing ice cream manufacturers to restructure their strategy. As a result, projects that were originally planned over a two-year timeline are now being considered for launch in less than a year, and more ad-hoc projects are also emerging to meet market demands.

At Sensient we are a market leader in the development of frozen dessert flavours, extracts, ingredients and formulations – driven by the science, art and innovation of taste. To meet our costumers' needs and be reactive, we have effective solutions that can shape end-products to a surprising and unexpected offering.

Flavours: The gateway of Emotions

Ice cream taste expectations are no longer about vanilla, chocolate or strawberry. Despite these being the mature tastes on the flavour



lifecycle, there is a clear need for more unique, niche flavours that will remind consumers of a country or maybe an unexpected combination. Consumers are increasingly adventurous and they expect to see and delight their mouth with unexpected and surprising flavour combinations.

As mentioned already, recent years have demonstrated the power of social media. Consumers are growing active on those social platforms and the 'fear of missing out' (FOMO) is stronger than ever. Concepts of taste that are surprising and never tried before are appealing. The offer of Sweet and Salty taste in ice creams now goes far beyond the classic chocolate sprinkled with salt, but takes bolder paths with tastes like Caramel with Soy. This contrast and complexity to sweet flavours is intriguing for the consumers.

A perfect example of a global viral flavour trend is the Dubai Chocolate. The concept is pretty simple and even quite rooted into tradition: a chocolate bar containing pistachio and kadayif (very thin, noodle-like pastry) but now that concept is launched in all formats possible, making its way into ice cream, bakery, and even beverages categories. The virality started to spread in August 2024 where the visual contrast of the dark chocolate with the green pistachio provided an interesting appeal. Just to analyse the impact a trend can have in all the food chain, Iran exported 40% more pistachios to the UAE from September 2024 to March 2025, compared to the full previous year^{4,5,6}. Today's consumers rely more on influencers than traditional advertising and this trend really did reflect it.

We see this trend of gateway of emotions with flavour combinations. Flavours can be included to add signature and to offer solutions while avoiding allergens. For example, you want a nut free chocolate Dubai concept that tastes like pistachio – then it's totally feasible. At Sensient we always try to go further and propose solutions that go beyond the expected. Thanks to our marketing, application, flavourist and sales team we put all our expertise together to offer our customers flavour concept products that are memorable.

Inclusions: The Art of Contrast and Surprise

As for the inclusions we can say it's the ingredient that adds the 3D dimension to the ice cream. The mix of the ice cream with a pleasant texture that is flavoured and coloured can add a lot of uniqueness. Also referring to the same example, we have seen the new Kataifi inclusions from Chocolate Dubai concept this year appearing into the category. The feeling of eating an ice cream that is crispy but at the same time delicate adds to the signature of the concept. At Sensient,



we work with surprising inclusions aligned with market needs.

Similar textured inclusions can include for instance our meringue toppings, adding texture on one side and a crunch but delicate texture on the other side. This surprising inclusion can easily fit different concepts, such as a fresh summer concept, where the acidity of the lemon meringues and its texture combined with a bright yellow colour will make the experience unforgettable, even when summer is over.

Another aspect we have been working on regarding inclusions is related to the demand for sugar reduction, while keeping the same taste. "With sugar reduction continuing to be in focus, 47% of consumers globally say they tend to like less sweet, and more savoury or even bitter tastes. Meanwhile, 60% prefer tastes which are lighter on the palette and less sugary or heavy. Tapping into shifting tastes is an opportunity for NPD"⁷. Having this trend in mind, Sensient has been working on a new inclusion range with no added sugars (NAS). These inclusions offer more than just the perfect sweetness level because they add a satisfying crunch and unique taste combinations, turning ordinary flavour into something extra-ordinary.

Sauces and Swirls: Fluid Adventurous Delight

Sauces and swirls have been introduced to the ice cream business for years, but there is always room to do more, by expanding the mouthfeel sensation for example. The global sweet sauces market is expected to grow with a CAGR of 8,8% from 2025 to 2030⁸. Business Research Insights also relate this growth with COVID-19 impact,

"Sweet sauces Industry had a positive effect due to increase in demand for grocery products during COVID-19 Pandemic"⁷.

One of the emerging trends has been the swicy (sweet and spicy) combinations driven by the rising demand for adventurous flavours. At Sensient we have developed different ranges of sauces aligned with this including caramel-soy sauce, together with a coffee concept to balance the overall taste. This concept is a flavour-forward treat with a modern twist. Ideal for people looking for something creamy, complex and on-trend (café-culture), especially in the era of elevated snacking and coffee-dessert crossovers.

Moreover, viscosity plays a big role in the product since it can change completely the mouthfeel sensation of the final ice cream. While a high-viscosity sauce is enhancing the richness perception, a low-viscosity sauce creates a refreshing sensation in the mouth. For this reason, at Sensient we went a step further developing aeratable sauces. Sauces, you can aerate yourself to find the perfect point of softness and freshness when frozen. Imagine you are eating an ice cream with layers of aerated marshmallow sauce that bring you the fluffy and spongy sensation altogether with the creaminess of the ice cream base. Dreams are made of the sensation of biting a sweet frozen cloud.

So as for my opinion in 2025, texture is not just an R&D obsession but the premiumisation of ice cream because consumers are more likely to pay for multi-textured products. Brands that are winning shelf space are those transforming ice cream to a textural and emotional adventure. I think that future innovations and trends will be a





reflect of social media trends and ingredient costs instability. Creating the ideal environment for creative minds to rapidly develop and adapt solutions. So, this is why especially now, R&D developers are prioritising ingredients that can add mouth-delight. Measuring innovation in layers, contrast and surprises.

I'm continuously curious to see how new ingredients will shape the market in the future, with new ingredients and concepts. As an industry professional, I value innovations that balance technical advancement with commercial viability. Nevertheless, the best way to understand and predict is by trying... So I'm happy to share

thoughts around some scoops of ice cream!

References:

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