Introduction

Bottled water has become a staple of our fast-paced lives. Between 2000 and 2008, the sales of bottled water in the United States doubled from $6.1 to $12.6 billion ("Bottled Water," 2008). One of the major reasons that bottled water drinkers give for their preference is convenience. Alternatively, critics assert that bottled water hurts the environment, is overpriced, and is no safer than tap water. This raises the question: does taste or other less physiological factors such as cost and availability affect what water people choose to drink? A study conducted at University of Applied Sciences Hamburg sampled females on whether type of water affected sensitivity to taste (Hoehl, Schoenburger, & Busch-Stockfisch, 2010). Researchers found most subjects tasted a sourness when sampling water containing minerals. Nordin, Razani, Markison, & Murphy (2003) reported older subjects to have a poorer ability to discriminate between taste intensities. These researchers also observed some gender differences. Therefore, the objective of our study was to determine whether taste, age, gender, cost and/or availability have an effect on what water that people at Southwestern Oklahoma State University (SWOSU) actually prefer.

Aim of Study

The following objectives were tested in this study:

1. To compare the water preferences of SWOSU students versus faculty and staff to determine whether age is a factor.
2. To determine whether gender affects preferences of drinking water.
3. To determine whether cost or availability affects water preferences.
4. To determine if the water source preferred by subjects in the experiment was the same as reported in the survey.

Material and Methods

This project was done to meet the course requirements of ALHLT 3043 Health Statistics in Spring 2010. The following steps were followed:

• Received approval from the SWOSU Protection of Humans Subjects Committee.
• Conducted experiment and questionnaire using convenience sampling of 28 student volunteers from the SWOSU University Grill and 24 faculty and staff volunteers from the Old Science and Chemistry buildings on April 20, 2010.
• Subjects completed a blind taste test of six water sources (Evian, Fiji, Aquafina, Desani, Ozarka, and tap water) followed by a questionnaire.
• Data were input and organized using Microsoft Excel.®
• Data Analysis was conducted via Friedman Ranking and Chi Square analysis using PASW® Statistics 17.0 software.

Results

Bottled water has become a staple of our fast-paced lives. Between 2000 to 2008, the sales of bottled water in the United States doubled from $6.1 to $12.6 billion ("Bottled Water," 2008). One of the major reasons that bottled water drinkers give for their preference is convenience. Alternatively, critics assert that bottled water hurts the environment, is overpriced, and is no safer than tap water. This raises the question: does taste or other less physiological factors such as cost and availability affect what water people choose to drink? A study conducted at University of Applied Sciences Hamburg sampled females on whether type of water affected sensitivity to taste (Hoehl, Schoenburger, & Busch-Stockfisch, 2010). Researchers found most subjects tasted a sourness when sampling water containing minerals. Nordin, Razani, Markison, & Murphy (2003) reported older subjects to have a poorer ability to discriminate between taste intensities. These researchers also observed some gender differences. Therefore, the objective of our study was to determine whether taste, age, gender, cost and/or availability have an effect on what water that people at Southwestern Oklahoma State University (SWOSU) actually prefer.

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