



Wine price test shows marketing at work in brain

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CHICAGO (AFP) - In a demonstration of the power of marketing, researchers in California showed you can increase a person's enjoyment of wine by just sticking a higher price on it, according to a study released Monday.

Antonio Rangel, associate professor of economics at the California Institute of [Technology](#), led a team to test how marketing shapes consumers' perceptions and whether it also enhances their enjoyment of a product.

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They asked 21 volunteers to sample five different bottles of Cabernet Sauvignon and rate their taste preferences. The taste test was run 15 times, with the wines presented in random order.

The taste test was blind except for information on the price of the wine. Without telling the volunteers, the researchers presented two of the wines twice, once with the true price tag, and again with a fake one.

They also passed off a 90 dollar bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon as a 10 dollar bottle, and presented a five dollar bottle as one worth 45 dollars.

Aside from collecting the test subjects' impressions of the wines, the researchers scanned their brains to monitor the neural activity in the medial orbitofrontal cortex -- an area of the brain believed to encode pleasure related to taste, odors and music.

The study found that inflating the price of a bottle of wine enhanced a person's experience of drinking it, as shown by the neural activity.

The volunteers consistently gave higher ratings to the more "expensive" wines.

Brain scans also showed greater neural activity in the pleasure center when they were sampling those "pricey" wines, indicating that the increased pleasure they reported was a real effect in the brain.

"It's a common belief among scientists and economists that the quality of the experience depends on the properties of the product and the state of the consumer; for example, if a consumer is thirsty or not," said Rangel.

"But what this study shows is that the brain's rewards center takes into account subjective beliefs about the quality of the experience.

"If you believe that the experience is better, even though it's the same wine, the rewards center of the brain encodes it as feeling better."

In other words, "people's beliefs about the quality of a wine affect how well it tastes for the brain," he concluded.

The study appears in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

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