



KITCHEN MADE

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The Influence of Expectation, Consumption and Revelation on Preferences for Beer

In the study, Dr. Lee and two M.I.T. researchers, Shane Fredrick and Dan Ariely found that they could change beer drinkers' taste preferences by telling them about a secret ingredient in a beer before they drank it.

In previous studies, psychologists had found that putting brand labels on containers of beer, soft drinks and other products tended to enhance people's subjective ratings of quality. But the new experiment demonstrates that this preference involves more than simple brand loyalty. It changes the experience of taste itself.

In a series of experiments, Dr. Lee approached bar patrons and asked them whether they wanted to participate in a beer taste test, with free beer. Few refused; 388 young men and women tasted two beers each, one a regular draft of Budweiser or Samuel Adams, and the other the same beer with a few drops of balsamic vinegar added.

Most beer drinkers say vinegar would worsen the drinks, previous work had found.

But Mr. Lee found that about 60 percent of the patrons in the blind taste test — they did not know which beer contained the vinegar — actually preferred the balsamic “M.I.T. Beer.”

Another group of tasters learned which beer was which after they had tasted the beers but before making their choices, and they, too, preferred the M.I.T. Beer by about the same margin as the blind-test group.

But knowing which beer had the vinegar before swigging soured the experience. About a third of the patrons who were told the identities of the beers beforehand chose the M.I.T. brew.

Lee, L., Frederick, S., and Ariely, D. 2006. Expectation, Consumption, and Revelation (Try it, you'll like it: The influence of expectation, consumption, and revelation on preferences for beer.) MIT.