

Peak-end pizza: Higher prices mean first impressions count

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How does price impact your evaluation of a restaurant meal?

Psychologists have long thought that we judge experiences based on their most intense moment (the peak) and the last part of the experience (end). However, a new Cornell study found that this rule can change dramatically depending on how much customers are paying for the experience.

Cornell researchers David Just, PhD, Ozge Sigirici, PhD, (currently at Marmara University in Turkey) and Brian Wansink, PhD investigated how the price of [pizza](#) changed the relationship between a consumer's overall evaluation of the meal and the evaluation of each individual slice of pizza. 139 diners at an all-you-can-eat restaurant were divided into two separate groups. One group was charged \$4, while the other group was charged \$8 for an Italian lunch buffet. After the meal, the diners evaluated the taste, their satisfaction, and their enjoyment of each slice of pizza they ate. Other measures of behavior and self-perceptions were also recorded.

It was found that the peak-end rule worked for the overall taste, satisfaction, and enjoyment evaluation of the pizza when the price for the buffet lunch was \$4. Diners who paid \$4 for the buffet rated the pizza based on the taste of the last piece of pizza and the peak rating of taste. However, when diners paid \$8 for the all-you-can-eat buffet, their evaluations appeared to be completely dependent on their impression of the first slice of pizza they ate. "There had been several studies showing that price influences overall evaluation. This is a first look at how price

can change what you pay attention to in judging quality," explains Dr. Just "It is really remarkable how simply increasing the price can lead one to focus so much less on the end experience and so much more on that first impression."

Every part of an experience is not taken into account when the experience is evaluated. Instead, just a few moments appear to affect overall evaluation. The findings of this study suggest that, when [prices](#) are moderate to high, firms may benefit from giving customers the best experience first. Lower priced restaurants may wish to save some of the best for last. You can read the full research article in the January, 2015 edition of the *Journal of Product & Brand Management*.

More information: David R Just et al. Peak-end pizza: prices delay evaluations of quality, *Journal of Product & Brand Management* (2015). [DOI: 10.1108/JPBM-01-2015-0802](https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-01-2015-0802)

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