

Have your (imaginary) cake and smell it too

Study finds we can virtually smell food that isn't there



An image of cake used by researchers in one of their experiments.
PHOTO: JOURNAL OF CONSUMER RESEARCH

COMMENT |  Like 1 |  Tweet 4 |  g+ 0 |  Pin it |  |  Share 4



Misty Harris

Published: March 3, 2014, 1:48 pm
Updated: 4 weeks ago

A A A

If you don't have time to stop and smell the roses, looking at a picture of blooms and imagining their scent will do almost as well.

So suggests a groundbreaking new study in which researchers find that with a photo and a brief written prompt, people can virtually smell something that isn't there. Furthermore, the effect is so powerful that in cases of food imagery, the imagined odour makes the mouth water, and leads to greater consumption of that item if it's provided afterward.

Sections

- News
- Entertainment
- Health
- Life
- Business
- Financial Post Biz
- Technology
- Sports
- Travel
- Driving
- Househunting
- Obituaries

Discussions

TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS

MOM'S THE WORD

TORONTO ELECTION

VANCOUVER CANUCKS

Follow Us



Most Popular Stories



Morning-after pill ineffective for women over 176 pounds:
Health Canada



7 reasons why one former Tim Hortons employee hated Roll Up the Rim to Win



Watch: Weather Network reporters get blown away in Nova Scotia



The first big debate of the 2014 Toronto election



Mom's the word: Five first-time mom traps to avoid



Misty Harris

Misty Harris is a senior Postmedia News

WINNIPEG JETS

MONTREAL
CANADIENS

TORONTO BLUE
JAYS

OTTAWA SENATORS

SEE ALL

Voices

Andrew Coyne

Bruce Arthur

Ishmael Daro

Jon Dekel

Lauren Strapagiel

Marc Weisblott

Matthew Fisher

Michael Den Tandt

SEE ALL



Aradhna Krishna

Reporting in the prestigious Journal of Consumer Research, lead author [Aradhna Krishna](#) – an expert on sensory marketing – calls it “smellizing.”

“People know that smells can lead to desires for food, and to salivation,” said Krishna, a professor at the University of Michigan. “We’re showing that even imagined smells can bring about the same physiological response.”

This effect is demonstrated across four experiments with roughly 600 participants in a variety of scenarios.

In one, for example, people were asked to spend two minutes looking at an image of chocolate chip cookies and the tagline, “Fancy a freshly baked cookie?” Half the participants were asked to imagine the food’s scent during this period, while the other half were given no such instruction.

Measurements of saliva production, when compared to pre-test levels, were significantly higher in the group asked to imagine the cookies’ aroma – a more reliable yardstick, said Krishna, than simply asking people to self-report their desire to chow down.

Follow-up experiments revealed that imagined scents only appear to influence mouth-watering when people can visualize the object in question, whereas being able to smell a sachet of the actual food enhances salivation regardless of the presence of a photo. In addition, researchers find that the combination of a food’s picture and a prompt to imagine its scent increases how much people will eat of that food immediately afterward.

Krishna, who co-authored the study with Temple

writer covering consumer trends, social science and demographics. She has been honoured by the Society for Features Journalism; appeared as a pop culture commentator... [read more](#)

FOLLOW ME



THE HARRIS FILE

ENTERTAINMENT / 1 DAY AGO

“Conscious uncoupling” pretentious but signals real trend

NEWS / 3 DAYS AGO

Turf wars: Pro soccer players link synthetic surfaces to higher risk of injury

NEWS / 4 DAYS AGO

Superstitions can mean profit or loss in house sales

HEALTH / 1 WEEK AGO

Eating with your eyes: Study links pretty plating to improved taste

LIFE / 1 WEEK AGO

Pride of place: Where you meet your mate matters

University's [Maureen Morrin](#) and Koc University's [Eda Sayin](#), said it's clear that food marketers are wasting a huge opportunity by not asking consumers to imagine their products' smells – or even describing those smells in ads, which indirectly prompts olfactory consideration.

"It's very difficult to replicate the smell of food and put it in a scratch-and-sniff panel," said Krishna. "What we're saying is that you don't really need the actual smell. You can do pretty well with imagined smells."

Indirectly, the study also sheds light on the well-known "tip of the nose" phenomenon, whereby no matter how hard someone tries to place the fruit in their wine, the floral note in their perfume, or the funky aroma wafting from the office lunch room, they fail [about half the time](#). The authors conclude that "people may have difficulty in correctly identifying odours because they cannot clearly picture them in their minds' eyes."

mharris@postmedia.com

[Twitter.com/popcultini](https://twitter.com/popcultini)

Street Scents

Everyday aromas and their influence on mood

Citrus: Can encourage consumers to shop longer and spend more. Lemon in particular is linked with improved concentration, calming and clarifying properties.

Talcum powder: Promotes a sense of security.

Apple or cucumber: Can make a space feel larger.

Cinnamon: Boosts concentration, fights mental fatigue, helps with short-term memory and, behind the wheel, has been linked with decreased driver anxiety and greater alertness. Also shown to make women more attractive to potential male mates.

Licorice: Shown to make men more attractive to potential female mates.

Lavender: Calming, relieves nervous tension.

Rosemary: Mentally stimulates, fights exhaustion, helps memory.



An image of cookies used in the study

[More Articles](#)

Sign up for the newsletter

What's Canada talking about?

Get the newsletter shared by more than 150,000 Canadians, delivered to your inbox every Tuesday.



SIGN UP

★ Editor's Pick



TORONTO ELECTION
Who's getting paid to argue on Twitter about the Toronto election?



SPORTS

What happens when a journalist tries the Red Bull Crashed Ice course



NEWS

Avril Lavigne the most famous Canadian? Not so fast



BOOKS

Scenes from the last remaining days of the World's Biggest Bookstore



LIFE

Ingredient of the week: Beer

Peppermint: Invigorates the mind, promotes concentration, encourages clear thinking.

Sources: Scent Marketing Institute, Dr. Bryan Raudenbush, West Coast Institute of Aromatherapy

[Read more Articles from Misty Harris](#)

[Twitter.com/popcultini](https://twitter.com/popcultini)

© COPYRIGHT - POSTMEDIA NEWS

 [REPORT AN ERROR](#)

COMMENT

 Like 1  Tweet 4  g+1 0  Pinit   Share 4



Add a comment...

Comment

 Facebook social plugin

