

**How the Delicacy of Taste Enables Expert Wine Reviews to Function as a Placebo with  
Respect to the Consumer Purchasing and Tasting Wine Experience**

A Research Paper submitted to the Department of Engineering and Society

Presented to the Faculty of the School of Engineering and Applied Science  
University of Virginia • Charlottesville, Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree  
Bachelor of Science, School of Engineering

**Jared Werner Hood**

Spring 2021

On my honor as a University Student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this  
assignment as defined by the Honor Guidelines for Thesis-Related Assignments

Advisor

Kathryn A. Neeley, Associate Professor of STS, Department of Engineering and Society

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The wine industry has seen tremendous growth in the past decade with the current wine market in 2021 having a value of \$323 million dollars. By 2022 it is forecasted to reach \$411 million dollars (Datamonitor, n.d., p.8). Products like wine are experience goods, which indicates that the consumer does not know their individual quality perception of the product before they purchase and consume it (Marks, 2015, n.p.). This leaves the consumer with the risk of purchasing a product they expect to enjoy, but find it has lower quality than anticipated. In order to minimize risk when purchasing wine, consumers can use extrinsic information about a particular bottle such as label information and wine expert ratings to aid their decisions. With the widespread use of technology expert ratings are readily available allowing consumers to use them even if not displayed in stores. A study by Hopfer and Heymann (2014) found that consumers consistently relied on wine expert ratings as an important factor when making wine purchasing decisions. Ratings created by experts being used rather than over community or other individual's ratings hints at the idea of the delicacy of taste being important in who creates the ratings.

The delicacy of taste is an idea from David Hume's essay *Standards of Taste* which states that an individual's taste must be refined and practiced in order to fully experience and critique an arts true form (Hume, 1965). This implies that a novice consumer of an art, such as wine, will not be able to realize and appreciate the complete underlying form of the wine that they are tasting. In order to become a wine expert individuals go through sommelier school where they refine their tasting palate and sense of smell to improve their abilities in identifying and critiquing wine. Thus, by the delicacy of taste wine experts should be able to better assess the quality of a wine over an untrained consumer. However, when it comes to rating wines there is still variability among experts' opinions on the wine indicating that personal preference and other factors may have an impact on expert opinion. If this is the case, then it is not clear if there is an underlying objective assessment of a particular wine that can be generalized to overall consumer satisfaction. The implication of this would be that the training that

wine experts go through does not result in the ability for their higher ratings to act as an indication of whether or not a consumer will find the wine of higher quality and thus there is no need for expert ratings at all.

The importance of understanding the role of expert wine ratings on consumer experience stems from the work done in my technical project where a wine rating was generated by a machine learning algorithm trained on a large dataset of expert wine ratings. If expert wine ratings have an impact on consumer experience, then the results of the technical project can be confidently utilized to aid consumers in their purchasing decisions. They can be used since the algorithm is able to accurately predict the score of an unrated wine bottle, which can then act as a proxy for what an actual expert rating of the bottle. Through the idea of delicacy of taste, I will investigate the differences between novice consumers and experts when it comes to assessing the quality of wines in order to shed light on the role of expert ratings. In this paper, I argue that the role of expert ratings is to give consumers confidence that the wine they purchase and ultimately consume will be of high quality, and thus it most likely becomes a placebo effect in which the consumer actually perceives a higher quality in the given wine.

### **Problem Definition**

Wine retailers, such as supermarkets and hypermarkets, are the largest segment of the global wine market holding a 41.1% share of the total markets volume (Datamonitor, n.d., p. 13). Individual supermarkets usually provide hundreds of wines and even Costco, a wholesaler, carries a selection of 100 different wines at a time (Oana, 2018, p. 4). With the large volume of wine provided, retailers need to be able to sell the wine they buy to the end consumer or else they will lose money. Further difficulty is found in the fact that consumers generally only spend on average less than one minute in front of a

specific store shelf (EBI, 2007). Therefore, it is important for retailers to provide some sort of extrinsic information about a bottle of wine in order to aid the consumers purchasing decisions towards the end goal of selling more wine in an expanding market. A primary strategy used by retailers is to provide an accompanying expert rating with the wines they sell. In fact in a study done by Miller, Genc, and Driscoll (2007) it was found that consumers are willing to pay more for bottles of wine with higher ratings, resulting in more revenue for the retailers who display wines with high expert ratings.

On the other side of the market, consumers want to ensure that the bottle of wine they purchase will meet whatever criteria they have for the purpose in which they are purchasing it. Since wine can usually only be experienced (smelled and tasted) after purchase, customers are left with a lack of important information concerning whether they will like it or not, leaving them exposed to certain risks. When it comes to purchasing wine consumers can have multiple reasons for being risk averse such as the taste of the wine, which was found by Mitchell and Greatorex (1988) to be the risk that concerned consumers the most when buying wine. The same study found that another risk customers perceive is potentially being embarrassed in a social setting when bringing a poorly received wine. Thus customers must rely on their perceived quality, which is defined as “the belief in the overall goodness of what is received, i.e. product or service” (Dodds, 1965, p.51.), of the wine when making purchase decisions. Since customers can only assess the wine during consumption they must fall back on extrinsic information in the assessment of perceived quality when buying wine (Aqueveque, 2015). One important piece of extrinsic information noted in a study by Hopfer and Heymann (2014) that is used by consumers is the expert ratings of wine displayed in store and online. Consumers can use the expert ratings as a proxy for knowledge about the wine in order to make an informed purchasing decision to reduce their perceived risk.

The prevalence of expert ratings in the wine industry has seen a large increase in the 21st century through the widespread use of technology (Storchman, 2015, p.1.). Before the internet there

were wine magazines where expert wine reviews would be printed, but with the internet the wine industry saw the emergence of blogs, online services, and databases where consumers could access a large number of reviews. “The seven major U.S. wine magazines have a combined subscribership of nearly 600,000, with more than 350,000 alone subscribing to Wine Spectator, and wine magazine sales amount to well above \$25 million. In addition, there are a few foreign magazines (e.g., Decanter) and numerous smaller publications, online services (e.g., JancisRobinson.com), and wine blogs” (Storchman, 2015, p.1). Figure 1 below provides basic information about some of the most prominent sources of wine evaluation including possible rating range, whether it is accessible online or in print or both, and type of wines rated.

Ratings source	Access (O/P/B)	Range of ratings	Wines rated	Circulation (P) and/or subscribers/users (est.)	Comments	Source (as of 3 June 2013)
Cellar Tracker	O	None ('NR') or 50–100	All	268,000 + (3 June 2013)	Consumer-submitted TNs, often with rating	
Decanter	B	10 through 20	All	40,000/mo. + online (CY 2012)	Stable in-house panel	
Gambero Rosso	B?	0 through 3	Italian	?	Territorial panels, final panels	Website unavailable
Guide Hachette	P	0 through 3	French, some Swiss, Lux.	?	Local panels	
International Wine Cellar (S Tanzer)	O	70 through 100	All	?	Author and designated others do all tasting (e.g. Josh Reynolds)	
Jancis Robinson	O	10 through 20	All	?	Author and designated others do all tasting (e.g. Julia Harding)	
Wine Advocate (R Parker)	B	50 through 100	All	50,000/bi-mo. + online (CY 2012)	Roster of experts, each with region of expertise (e.g. Anthony Galloni)	; Storchmann 2012
Wine Enthusiast	B	80 through 100	All	108,299 + online (May 2010)	Tasting Panels	
Wine Spectator	B	50 through 100	All	391,667/mo. + online (CY 2011)	Tasting Panels	

Note: O, Online; P, Paper; B, Both.

**Table 1.** *Prominent Wine Evaluation Sources.* There are a number of different wine rating sources, each with different ranges for possible ratings. (Marks, 2015, n.p.).

With the large number of expert wine review resources available to consumers it is important to consider the differences between them. The obvious difference between the sources of evaluations is the possible range of ratings in each of them. The ranges vary from wide ranges from 50-100 to smaller

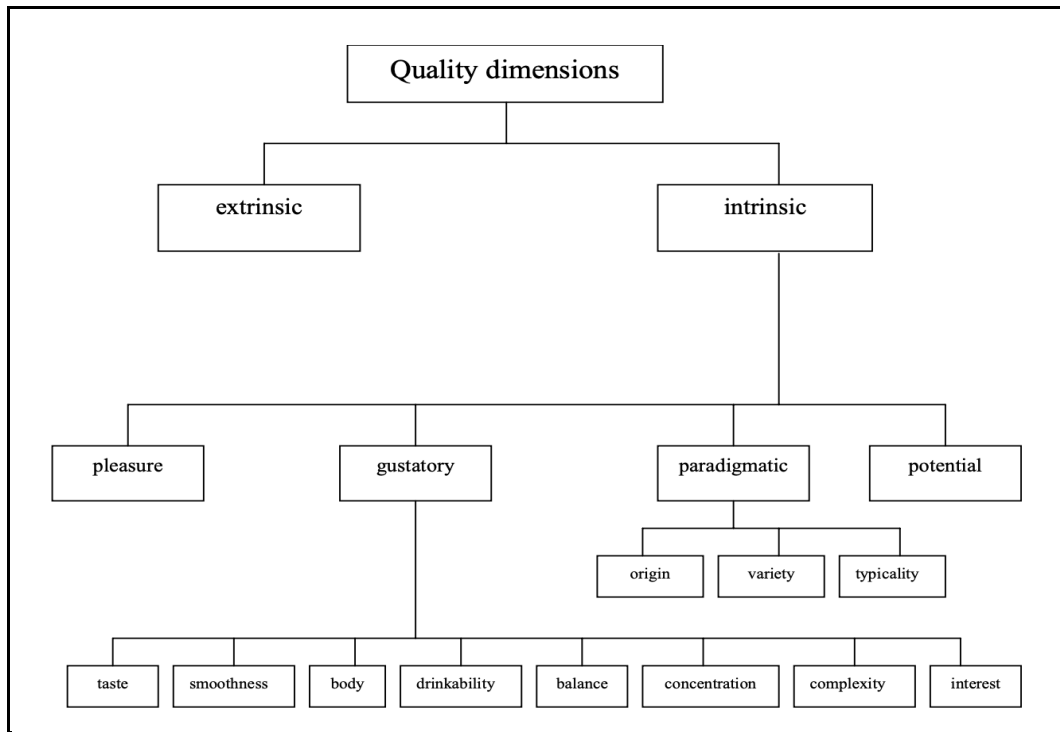
ranges from 10-20 and then to even smaller ranges from 0-3. Unlike the alcohol content or volume of the wine, it is clear from these dramatically different score ranges that the measurement of a wine's quality is not well defined. Additionally, Robert Parker, a notable wine critic and the person who pioneered the 100-point wine scoring system, notes on his website about scores that, "scores do not reveal the important facts about a wine. The written commentary (tasting note) that accompanies the ratings is a better source of information ... than any score could ever indicate" (Parker, n.d., n.p.). And another limitation that arises regarding expert wine ratings is that "No one from any of these sources has ever been able to replicate the original scores assigned by tasting blind the same wines again, assigning a rating, and checking the consistency of the latter score with the former" (Marks, 2015, n.p.). The large number of rating sources available to consumers with drastically different scales combined with the lack of information conveyed with a numerical rating makes it difficult for a consumer to interpret how an individual rating will result in their own increase enjoyment of a wine. This can make it daunting for consumers to utilize expert wine ratings and may result in them not using them at all in their decision process.

*The Standards of Taste* is an essay by David Hume concerning "the great variety of Taste, as well as of opinion, which prevails in the world, is too obvious not to have fallen under every one's observation" (Hume, 1965, p.1.). In order to solve the problem of differing personal tastes Hume proposes to identify a set of rules that specify which properties and combinations of properties result in a piece of art being of quality. Applied to wine these rules could be used to determine, objectively, the quality of the wine. To be able to accurately assess an art a critic would need the delicacy of taste, which is the practice and refinement of an individual's taste pertaining to a particular art form (Hume, 1965, n.p.). Applying this idea to the wine industry, a wine expert would be an individual who has a large amount of experience and practice with wine. Many expert wine reviewers have gone through some sort of training school such as becoming a sommelier or a master of wine both in which they learn a

great deal about the components of wine, the history, and the production. However, not all prominent wine raters have gone through this training so in this paper 'expert' will just mean "someone who seems widely known and influential among customers according to published evidence of popularity" (Marks, 2015, n.p.). These "untrained" experts though still have a large amount of knowledge of wine and practice tasting and critiquing it and thus can still be considered to have the delicacy of taste necessary to critique wine under the standards of taste.

In order to assess the quality of wine there need to be some set of dimensions that comprise the wine's inherent quality. In a study by Stephen Charters and Pettigrew (2007) through polling both experts and novices the study identified that there are four intrinsic quality dimensions that comprise a wine: pleasure, gustatory, paradigmatic, and potential. Figure 1 below shows the components that comprise the quality dimensions of a wine. In analyzing responses it was found that "for most informants the primary determinant of quality in wine appears to be that it tastes good" and "informants who offered 'good taste' as a component of quality were low or medium-involvement drinkers". Thus as is consistent with the main risk found in the study by Mitchell and Greatorex (1988) mentioned above, novice wine consumers are mostly concerned with the taste of a wine. On the other hand, experts were found to match quality to the dimensions of balance, intensity and complexity (Charters & Pettigrew, 2007, p.5). However, in the end "the consumer view of quality appears to mirror the professional viewpoint in form... but not necessarily in precise content" (Charters & Pettigrew, 2007, p.5). This confirms the idea of the delicacy of taste in that experts are able to more descriptively and precisely identify components of wine that make it quality, leading to the idea that they have a better understanding of wine quality through the standards (or rules) of what makes a good quality wine.





**Figure 1.** *Quality Dimensions of Wine.* Experts and Novices identified four different dimensions comprising the intrinsic qualities of wine. (Charters & Pettigrew, 2007, p.7).

The reliability of expert ratings on wine for consumer use is questioned when looking at the inconsistencies in both experts own repeated ratings of the same wine and between experts and consumers ratings. As mentioned above from Marks, expert wine reviewers are not able to replicate their own previously given scores across multiple blind tastings of the same wine. Further, a study by Hodgson (2009) found widespread inconsistencies of wine experts at a wine competition where, unknown to the judges, Hodgson inserted triplet pourings of one bottle into the sample. It was found that “Only 10% of the judges were able to rank these wines within the same medal rank, and another 10% assessed the triplet wines within a two-medal range. That means 80% of the examined judges ranked identical wine more than two medal ranks apart. In addition, even the 10% of judges who assigned the same quality rank to identical wines were unable to repeat this performance the following year.” (Hodgson, 2009, p.6.). Between experts and consumers it was found in a study by Schiefer and

Fischer (2008) that there was a “lack of conformity between expert and consumer ratings” on the same given flight of wines. Thus if there is no consensus between experts and consumers in a given wine's ratings and experts can't even replicate with their own ratings then it is clear that a wine's rating is simply an arbitrary number. The implication of this is that if wine ratings hold no merit then what is the need for wine experts in the wine industry. The removal of expert wine reviews could have a multitude of effects across the wine industry from the shutting down of review sites and publications and to possible unknown changes in wine price as prices are partially influenced by rating (Miller, Genc & Driscoll, 2007).

The above inconsistencies raise questions of the utility of expert wine ratings. However, there is still a role that ratings play in the wine industry on consumer experience. Notably, this paper argues that expert wine ratings can act as a placebo in which they both reduce customer purchasing risk as well as increase perceived quality of wine when tasting. Placebo comes from the medical world and is something that appears to be a “real” treatment but isn't and results in the patient responding as if it was “real” (Mendes, 2019). Applied to expert wine ratings the placebo is the expert rating and how it changes the consumer's tasting and purchasing experience versus not knowing the expert rating.

On the surface level “expert opinion can provide quality information to consumers, as at least some consumers use such information when making purchasing decisions” (Hilger, 2008, p.8.). Further, high agreement among good critic ratings can increase a buyer's likelihood of purchasing a particular bottle by 9.8%, indicating that when purchasing wine at the store a consumer's perceived risk is reduced with the availability of good expert wine ratings. (Mueller, Lockshin & Louviereb, 2009, p. 6). For consumer perceived quality it was found in a study comparing consumers enjoyment of wine with and without knowing the expert rating that “the cue of expert ratings (coefficient = 0,51) appears to operate at five times the strength of the original intrinsic rating” and “instance of wine novices who have little or no experience in wine appreciation nor the attendant skills of wine merit calibration, the authority of

the expert cue increases a further 50 percent (coefficient = 0,76), while the influence of intrinsic merit (as proxied by the original blind tasting) falls away completely (coefficient = 0)" (D. Priilaid, J. Feinberg, O. Carter and G. Ross, 2009, p.4.). Finally, although wine experts may rate wine's differently, in terms of objective quality "Wine sensory studies show that panels comprising experienced tasters, such as sensory experts, typically agree on a wine's overall quality - its objective nature" (Cadot, Caillé, Samson, Barbeau, & Cheynier, 2010). This was reinforced by Grohman and Pena (2018) who found in a study comparing wine experts from different regions that "The wine educators and influencers who served as wine experts in the current research, generally agreed on the overall quality of the wines they evaluated, whereas their perceptions of subjective sensory attributes differed". Given the above strengths of expert wine ratings reducing consumer purchasing risk, increasing the consumer's perceived quality when tasting wine, and the objective agreement between wine experts, the following sections of this paper will argue that expert wine ratings serve as a valid form of wine knowledge for consumers.

## **Methods**

The foundation for the framework used in this paper is centered on the ideas presented by David Hume in his 1757 essay *The Standards of Taste*. In this essay Hume was concerned with how individuals perceive beauty in art differently writing, "Beauty is no quality in things themselves: it exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty" (Hume, 1965, p.6.). From the idea that individuals all have their own perceptions of beauty, Hume wanted a way to differentiate between sentiments and opinions.

Among a thousand different opinions which different men may entertain of the same subject, there is one, and but one, that is just and true: and the only difficulty is to fix and ascertain it. On

the contrary, a thousand different sentiments, excited by the same object are all right; because no sentiment represents what is really in the object. (Hume, 1965, p.6.).

Thus Hume's goal in *The Standards of Taste* was to find a way to determine which sentiment represented the true, objective quality of an art and thus was the correct opinion. In pursuit of this goal he created the notion of the standards, or set of rules, of taste in which "the various sentiments of men may be reconciled; at least a decision afforded confirming one sentiment, and condemning another". (Hume, 1965, p.5.). Hume's solution to the problem of which individuals were able to identify and follow these standards was the idea of the delicacy of taste.

The delicacy of taste is concerned with an individual's acuteness of the senses that allow them to fully perceive and critique an art in its true form. Individuals perceive the world through their senses, aided by organs such as the nose and mouth, so refinement of these senses where "the organs are so fine as to allow nothing to escape them, and at the same time so exact as to perceive every ingredient in the composition" is what Hume (1965, p.11.) refers to as the delicacy of taste. Having the delicacy of taste indicates that an individual is able to perceive and note the minute details of what they are perceiving. Naturally there is a wide difference in delicacy of taste between individuals; however, "nothing tends further to increase and improve this talent, than practice in a particular art, and frequent survey or contemplation of a particular species of beauty" (Hume, 1965, p.13.). In the case of wine, delicacy of taste is apparent among experts as they both are practiced in drinking wine and in the reflection of such drinking experiences on a wine's different qualities in the pursuit of identifying its objective beauty.

The application of the delicacy of taste to the identification of a wine's quality is directly mentioned in *The Standards of Taste* when Hume references a story from Don Quixote. In the story it is

told how a good hogshead of wine is tasted by two kinsmen, one who finds the wine good but for a taste of leather and the other who finds the wine good but for the taste of iron. Both are ridiculed for their judgements initially, but on emptying the hogshead there was an iron key with a leather thong tied to it. The inconsistencies of the irony and the leathery taste were identified in the wine by the kinsmen, whose refined senses (and thus delicacy of taste) were able to pick up on those subtle qualities. Further the kinsmen related these qualities of leather and iron to be an indication towards the poor inherent quality of the wine suggesting that the presence of such qualities subtracts from the beauty of the wine.

The expert wine reviewers that exist today mirror the role of the kinsmen from the above story. Compared to the regular consumer, wine experts not only consume a greater variety of wine, but also take the time to analyze its different components in order to determine the quality of the wine through the nature of their work. Through tasting and reviewing wine the experts refine and practice their senses and understanding of wine and thus it can be concluded that they improve their delicacy of taste. Therefore, by the foundation laid out above based on Hume's work, wine experts are better able to perceive and make quality judgements of wine than the standard consumer. This idea of wine experts having greater delicacy of taste serves as the framework for the research done in this paper. This allows expert ratings to be seen to closer reflect the true nature and beauty of wine than a consumer's sentiment towards it.

The evidence analyzed in this paper, mentioned in the above section, consists of empirical studies relating to the effect of expert ratings on consumers perceived risk when purchasing wine and consumers perceived quality when tasting wine. When purchasing wine at the store, the evidence showed that a consumer's perceived risk was reduced when good expert wine ratings were available (Mueller, Lockshin & Louviereb, 2009). When tasting wine the evidence showed that when supplied with the expert rating of the wine, consumers enjoyed the wine more and perceived it as higher quality than when they did not have the expert rating available (D. Priilaid, J. Feinberg, O. Carter & G. Ross, 2009).

Applying the framework of the delicacy of taste to these studies helps to explain the validity of the expert ratings. Without the delicacy of taste the limitations and inconsistencies of ratings mentioned in the above section could lead to the conclusion that expert ratings are just arbitrary numbers and consumers are misguided in using them. However, through the delicacy of taste it is possible to conclude that there is some knowledge of a wine's quality conveyed in the score, validating the consumers use of them.

Another piece of evidence analyzed in this paper were the studies done by Cadot, Caillé, Samson, Barbeau, and Cheynier (2010) and Grohman and Pena (2018), both mentioned in the above section, which concluded that while wine experts may disagree about minute details concerning a wine, they all agree on a wine's overall, objective quality. The delicacy of taste confirms and validates this result as all the experts are practiced enough to be able to identify in a given wine the components that comprise it. Then with these components, using their existing knowledge and reasoning abilities they all came to the same conclusion on a wine's objective quality.

All of the above-mentioned aspects of expert wine ratings and their effects on consumers make expert wine ratings a form of placebo. The placebo effect as defined in the above section is a fake treatment that has similar results to a real treatment. A placebo functions through an individual's own expectation of it working. In the case of wine a study by Priilaid (2006) found that the placebo of knowing the price of a wine before tasting explained 84% of the consumers perceived quality assessment with only 5% being explained by the intrinsic quality of the wine. In a subsequent study by Priilaid (2007) it was further found that when consumers knew the origin of the wine, they made their quality assessments based on that rather than the wine's intrinsic quality. Thus, the extrinsic cues of price and origin will be shown to be joined by expert ratings as placebos that affect consumers quality perception of wine.

## Results

When purchasing wine at a store, expert ratings give consumers confidence in the purchase they make by reducing the perceived risk. When tasting wine, expert ratings increase the consumers perceived quality of the wine, therefore improving the consumers experience of drinking the wine. From these two factors it can be concluded that expert wine ratings serve the role of a placebo in increasing consumer confidence in a particular wine. This can be derived from the empirical studies mentioned above in tandem with the nature of what it means to be a wine expert and thus have the delicacy of taste when it comes to wine.

The delicacy of taste that wine experts possess indicates that they are able to judge wine's true, objective nature in order to determine its beauty and thus quality. Therefore, expert wine reviews reveal the objective nature of a wine. This is backed up by the studies that found that experts generally agree on the objective quality of a wine, even if they disagree about some of the sensory attributes and thus give the wine slightly different ratings. This then would seem to imply that expert reviews are not a placebo, but instead are actually indicators of a good wine and thus it's obvious why consumers enjoy the wine more when following expert ratings, it's good! But there are two important factors to consider that show that it's a placebo and not just a given that they will enjoy the wine. First, the idea of the delicacy of taste is such that individuals are able to separate sentiment from opinion from refined practice with their respective art. However, wine experts still disagree among themselves on the sensory attributes of wine. This means that the expert ratings, while indications of the objective quality, are still subject to some level of deviating sentiment influence. Second, since the ratings are subject to sentiment, the sentiment of the expert may not directly correlate with the sentiment, and thus preferences of the consumer. This could result in consumer's preferences not matching with both the experts preferences in taste and the taste of the wine that was said to be objectively beautiful. Thus it

cannot be concluded that just because a wine is considered good by experts that consumers will enjoy it. However, the fact that consumers know they are purchasing and tasting a quality wine increases their confidence in it regardless of their own preferences and thus they feel less risk when purchasing it and perceive greater quality when tasting it. Therefore, it can be seen that expert ratings do in fact act as a placebo effect on the customer experience.

The placebo effect of expert ratings can further be seen in the fact that expert ratings, as indications of objective quality, signal that a wine has innate, artistic beauty. When an expert in some particular artistic field says that something is beautiful, a less experienced person is inclined to believe them. In the case of wine, regular consumers are inclined to believe an expert when they say that a given wine has innate beauty. Consumers inherently want to buy something that is beautiful over something that is not. Usually consumers need to make these beauty judgments for themselves, but in the case of wine there is limited information that a consumer can use to judge a wine's beauty for themselves before purchase as wine is an experience good. Thus consumers are inclined to believe the experts when they give a wine a high rating, and is therefore beautiful and of high quality. The notion that something is innately beautiful is itself a placebo effect because when one hears that, they too at least attempt to see the beauty in it. So once the consumer already has the idea that a wine is beautiful in their mind, they will perceive the wine to be of higher quality because beauty should taste good.

The idea of consumers believing a wine to have innate beauty and therefore be of high quality before tasting is even more exaggerated in novice consumers. A novice wine drinker does not have as much experience with different wines so they do not yet have their own sentiments about taste preferences. Further, novices have not tasted enough wine to know the difference between a good wine and a bad wine as according to Hume, "A man who has had no opportunity of comparing the different kinds of beauty, is indeed totally unqualified to pronounce an opinion with regard to any object presented to him". (Hume, 1965, p.14.). Thus when novices are tasting a wine for the first time the only



thing that they have to guide them in their quality assessment is their raw, natural sensory perception. However, with the knowledge of an expert rating that says something is of high quality a novice will believe that what they are tasting is of quality and then relate those sensory perceptions to equal quality. Thus the expert rating acts not only as a placebo to increase novice consumer quality perception but also acts as a guide for what the novices believe to be a general standard for what makes a quality wine.

## **Conclusion**

Expert wine ratings act as a placebo effect for consumers in decreasing purchasing risk perception and increasing the consumers perceived quality of the wine in the tasting experience. When presented with a high expert rating of a wine the consumer expects the wine to be of higher quality and thus, they succumb to the placebo effect of the rating. Further the delicacy of taste of the wine experts gives their ratings some level of objective correctness about the quality of the wine. Thus, expert wine ratings either present consumers with a good quality wine or make them believe that they are tasting a quality wine. And in the end, as long as the consumer is content with the wine they are drinking, it doesn't really matter if it is objectively of quality or not.

The implication of this finding is that the expert ratings of wine have a valid and useful place in the world of wine. They not only make the whole wine experience easier and better for consumers, but also do communicate some quality information about the wine. However, it should be noted that as they are just a number "they may be the best proxy we have for consumer knowledge of wine; but, as knowledge, they suffer from a variety of flaws" and thus can't give the full picture of the wine they represent (Marks, 2015, n.p.). Further, with the increase of accessibility of the internet, consumers

should always be wary of “false experts” who provide ratings of wine, but do not themselves have the delicacy of taste necessary to be able to objectively critique its quality.

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