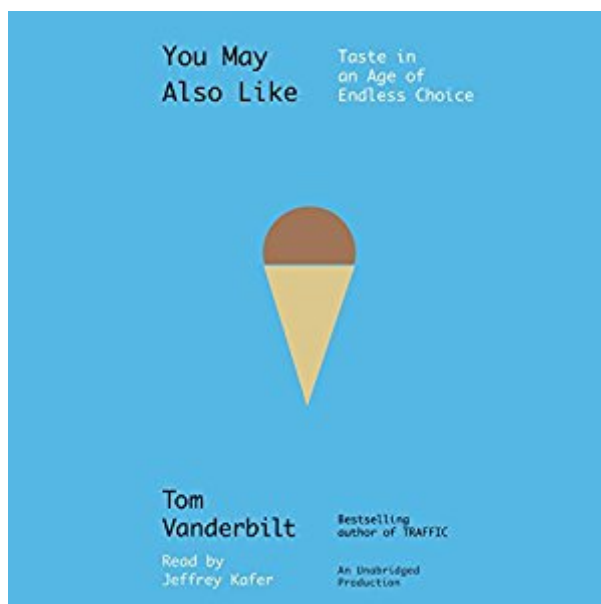# You May Also Like: Taste In An Age Of Endless Choice

Synopsis

From the best-selling author of Traffic, an enlightening and illuminating look at why we like the things we like, why we hate the things we hate, and what our preferences reveal about us. Why is showing up to work wearing the same outfit as a coworker so embarrassing? Why do we venerate so many artists who were controversial or ignored during their lifetimes? What makes an ideal cat an ideal cat, or an ideal beer an ideal beer, in the eyes of expert judges? From the tangled underpinnings of our food taste to our unsettling insecurity before unfamiliar works of art to the complex dynamics of our playlists and the pop charts, our preferences and opinions are constantly being shaped by countless forces. And in the digital age, a nonstop procession of "thumbs-up" and "likes" and "stars" is helping dictate our choices. Taste has moved online - there are more ways than ever for us, and companies, to see what and how we are consuming. If you've ever wondered how Netflix recommends movies, how to spot a fake Yelp review, or why books often see a sudden decline in ratings after they win a major prize, Tom Vanderbilt has answers to these questions and many more that you've probably never thought to ask. With a voracious curiosity, Vanderbilt stalks the elusive beast of taste, probing research in psychology, marketing, and neuroscience to answer myriad complex and fascinating questions. Comprehensively researched and singularly insightful, You May Also Like is a joyous intellectual journey that helps us better understand how we perceive, judge, and appreciate the world around us.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Whenever I read a pop science (or pseudo-science) book, whether by Malcolm Gladwell or anyone else, I check the footnotes, endnotes or bibliography first to get an idea of how well the author claims to have researched the subject. Then I will choose a few random references and see if the author seems to be interpreting the reference accurately. (There are many pseudo-science books where authors appear to provide citations, but in fact the references have nothing to do with the subject or the author has misinterpreted and so on.)Tom Vanderbilt has provided 62 pages of endnotes and they correlate with his writing. Vanderbilt has done an excellent job of approaching the issue of personal tastes and why and how we decide what we like and donÃ¢Â Â™t like. His writing is very clear and he incorporates much very serious academic and scientific work seamlessly in language a layperson can readily grasp. The content itself never rises to the level of true research and it is not intended to. Rather Vanderbilt explores the mechanics of tastes, posited he says by his daughter asking him about his favorite color and number. He goes into current and past work on how and why people develop tastes and how they exercise them and how knowledge of taste formation is used as a marketing tool. I thoroughly enjoyed VanderbiltÃ¢Â Â™s approach: he didnÃ¢Â Â™t try to turn this into a contemporary Ã¢Â Âœhidden persuadersÃ¢Â Â• expose. Instead, he educates us Ã¢Â Â" the lay public Ã¢Â Â" on a very interesting and very complex scientific subject. Excellent work on Mr. VanderbiltÃ¢Â Â™s part. As a matter of taste, I like his style.Jerry

I enjoyed VanderbiltÃ¢Â Â™s earlier book, Traffic, and this book is similar in its reasonable deep coverage of the topic, with lots of studies examined.You May Also Like looks at how our hedonic and aesthetic responses are similar and how they are different. It examines how we come to like and to dislike things. It looks at making judgments, and how the judgments of laypeople and experts differ.Chapter 1 looks at food and is perhaps the most interesting chapter in the book. In part, this chapter considers how we come to like particular foods and how variety or lack thereof effects our liking of different foods. There is very interesting coverage of flavor-nutrient conditioning, in which post-ingestive signals cause us to like foods that make us feel good after we eat them, even if we do not know it.Chapter 2 covers online reviews. It looks at information overload, how earlier reviews effect later reviews and purchasing decisions, and how reviewing is different for practical items vs. items we buy to enjoy.Chapter 3 is about music preferences. The book discusses likes and dislikes and how taste disputes are most likely between those who are closer socially. People want to distinguish themselves by their tastes. Music Ã¢Â ÂœlikesÃ¢Â Â• can have a lot to do with your social persona. The book also looks at the popularity of individual songs Ã¢Â Â" how the internet

has resulted in the most popular songs becoming even more popular, with less popular songs getting even less popular. The vast number of songs available to us these days may reduce how much we check out songs outside of our current interests because we are overwhelmed at the choices. This leads to a discussion of how exposure may or may not lead to liking something more, and how the simplicity or complexity of a song (or anything else) effects how long we like it.Chapter 4 looks at art. First, Vanderbilt discusses how we pay attention or fail to pay attention. This involves what we are inclined to notice, which is different for different people. There is coverage of how the setting we view art in effects us, with a look at differences between museums. There is a very interesting look at our brainsÃ¢Â Â™ use of a dual process, which Vanderbilt describes as Ã¢Â Âœa kind of conversation between our bottom-up sensory organs and our top-down cognitive machinery, moving from sheer object recognition to things like artistic style or semantic meanings.Ã¢Â Â• This involves things from gut reactions to learned expertise. Which leads to a deeper discussion of gut reactions versus things we have learned to like.Chapter 5 covers novelty and familiarity. Vanderbilt looks at how we change, so our tastes change too. This leads to difficulty predicting what we will like in the future. As we become fluent in understanding something, we usually come to like it more. This chapter also looks at conformist distinction, in which people want to be differently alike, which of course leads to fashion. The internet allows us to know so much more about what others like, and the book covers how this affects us, as well.Chapter 6 is about experts, judging and criteria. Basically this is the psychology of judging and how it affects our liking of things. There is discussion of judging standards, of how the order of appearance affects our perceptions, and the objective vs. subjective aspects of judging.Vanderbilt summarizes his book well when he writes, Ã¢Â ÂœTrying to explain, or understand, any one personÃ¢Â Â™s particular tastes Ã¢Â Â" including oneÃ¢Â Â™s own Ã¢Â Â" is always going to be a maddeningly elusive and idiosyncratic enterprise. But the way we come to have the tastes we do can often be understood through a set of psychological and social dynamics that function much the same, from the grocery store to the art museum. The more interesting question is not what we like, but why we like.Ã¢Â Â•I found You May Also Like: Taste in an Age of Endless Choice, to be both very interesting and slightly dry, due to the writing style. It lost 1 star for not being the most enjoyable read, even though it was offering fascinating information.

This is an interesting topic and an interesting book that attempts to take a look at what makes us like and not like different things at different points in time. It is a relatively easy read for the general population, with the actual text being under 250 pages. There's obviously plenty of psychology

mentioned but it's not necessary to be familiar with it. It is divided in seven main chapters that approach the topic from different angles.The most interesting thing about the book is the journey it takes us as it investigates along. The conclusions it reaches are probably something we can more or less guess from our daily online lives (we like what we like, we hate what we hate, our taste changes over time, we don't know ourselves as well as we think do, etc, etc, etc).Netflix/movie fans may especially like the "The fault is not in our stars" chapter that takes a look at how Netflix approaches ratings and recommendations. There's also a brief history of how the Stars rating system came to be.While conversational in tone, it does not have as many jokes as some other popular science type of books. Occasionally it surprises with some poetic zingers such as "Perhaps as a concession to the inexorable noisiness of human taste..." or "Experts are people who have the same opinions as other experts".Beer and cat competitions are used as examples, but many of the findings there could apply to many other areas, where a seemingly never-ending struggle for balance between the subjective and the objective is on the forefront of attempts to define and decide how to evaluate and rate.It has an extensive reference list, broken down by chapter and shown in the order they are mentioned in each chapter. The reference section is around 60 pages, so plenty of other material to read and cross reference if you are interested in this topic.

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