

IN BRIEF



Amazon dethrones Google as top brand

LONDON
U.S. retail giant Amazon has moved past Apple and Google to become the world's most valuable brand, a survey showed. The brand value of Amazon surged by 52% to \$315 billion, market research agency Kantar said. Amazon jumped from third to first place to eclipse Google while Apple holds on to the second spot. AFP



Samoa bans Rocketman over gay sex scenes

WELLINGTON
Samoa has banned the blockbuster Elton John biopic *Rocketman* from cinemas over depictions of gay sex, which remains illegal in the Pacific island nation. Samoa's Principal Censor Leiataua Niupu confirmed the ban to local media this week, saying the film contained too many scenes that were "not good for public viewing". AFP



Botswana decriminalises gay sex in landmark case

JOHANNESBURG
Botswana on Tuesday decriminalised gay sex in a landmark case for Africa. The High Court rejected as unconstitutional sections of the penal code punishing same-sex relations with up to seven years in prison. AFP

DNA-based personalised diet advice in the offing?

Comprehensive study looks at individual responses to food

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A decade ago, spurred by the success of the Human Genome Project and the affordability of genetic sequencing, scientists began to explore the promise of "nutrigenomics." Could personalised nutrition, informed by knowledge of an individual's DNA, help prevent and even treat diet-related diseases?

The results of early studies from Harvard, Stanford and elsewhere were compelling: genetic differences seemed to predispose individuals to lose different amounts of weight on different types of diets. A multi-million-dollar industry soon sprang up, premised on marketing DNA-based diets. But subsequent research has failed to show any statistically significant difference in weight loss between overweight people who "eat right for their genotype" and those who do not.

Individual metabolism

In fact, the effect of genes on obesity has been hard to tease out; various studies put the figure at anywhere from 35% to 85%. Nutritionists have long observed that no one weight-loss strategy works for everyone, and that individuals show striking differences in their responses to different diets. What, then, explains the large variation in individual metabolism?

Last year, Tim Spector and Sarah Berry, epidemiologists at King's College, London, and Dr. Andrew Chan, of Harvard Medical School, began an ambitious new search for the answer. Their



The study is trying to find out if personalised nutrition can treat diet-related diseases.

new study, called Predict, is the world's largest and most comprehensive experiment to look at individual responses to food.

Their preliminary results, presented on Monday at the American Society for Nutrition's annual conference, documented, for the first time, substantial and surprising variations in how well participants processed fats and carbohydrates, even among identical twins. How efficiently a person metabolised one macronutrient was no predictor of how that person might respond to another.

"We are getting closer to being able to provide guidance for each person for what their ideal diet should be," said Dr. Eric Topol, a geneticist at the Scripps Research Translational Institute in La Jolla, California, who was not affiliated with the study.

"We're not there yet, but the new study is another major milestone to get us there."

Risk of obesity

For decades Dr. Spector has been exploring the causes of individual variation in disease risk, including diet-related ailments. In 1992, he

set up TwinsUK, a research registry that now includes more than 13,000 identical and fraternal twins. Based on the twins, he concluded that genes contributed 70% of an individual's risk for obesity, on average.

Intrigued, he began a series of studies to tease out which factors influenced the remaining 30%.

Dr. Spector then started Predict to explore how variations in individual responses to fats and carbohydrates might contribute to obesity. Eating foods that contain fats and carbohydrates causes glucose, insulin and triglyceride levels in the blood to rise and fall; spikes that are too high, too prolonged and too frequent are associated with inflammation, weight gain, heart disease and diabetes.

The study included 700 identical twins, 300 individual British volunteers and 100 subjects from the U.S.

The team concluded that genes play a limited role in how a person processes fats and carbohydrates. Among identical twins, only about half of the amount and duration of an individual's post-meal blood glucose level could be attributed to genetic influence – and less than 30% with regard to insulin and triglyceride response. The more important factors in how our bodies metabolise food, it seems, are environmental: sleep, stress, exercise and the diversity and population of our individual gut microbiome.

"That is really exciting for scientists," Dr. Berry said. "It has shown us how much is not genetic and therefore modifiable." NY TIMES

Dazzling sky



Earth sparkles: Lightning flashing through the sky over Dresden city in Germany during a thunderstorm on Monday. AFP

NYT to stop using political cartoons

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
NEW YORK

The *New York Times* has announced that it will no longer include daily political cartoons in its international edition, weeks after apologising for publishing a caricature of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu deemed anti-Semitic.

The cartoon, published in April, depicted Mr. Netanyahu as a guide dog wearing a Star of David collar and leading a blind U.S. President Donald Trump – who was wearing a Jewish skullcap, prompting an uproar among Jews.

CO₂ emissions rose by 2% in 2018: study

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON

Global carbon emissions grew by 2.0% last year, the highest rate since 2010-2011, a review by energy giant BP said on Tuesday, calling the trend "unsustainable".

"There is a growing mismatch between societal demands for action on climate change and the actual pace of progress," said BP chief executive Bob Dudley.

The BP Statistical Review of World Energy is viewed as an energy industry standard. It also found that global energy demand grew by 2.9%.

World's costliest painting on Saudi Prince's yacht: report

Salvator Mundi was sold for a record \$450 mn in 2017

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

Since its sale for a record \$450 million, the whereabouts of the *Salvator Mundi*, said to be painted by Leonardo da Vinci, has become one of the art world's greatest mysteries.

On Monday, London-based art dealer Kenny Schachter, writing for the website Artnews, offered answers: the painting now resides on Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's yacht.

Since its in 2017, the painting, in which Jesus Christ is



Salvator Mundi by Leonardo da Vinci. AFP/FILE

depicted emerging from darkness blessing the world with one hand while holding a transparent globe in the other, has never been exhibited in public, triggering doubts about its ownership

and authenticity.

Many art experts are split over whether the painting is genuine, saying it was not painted by the Italian master personally but instead by his workshop.

Indian girl in UAE honoured for green efforts

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
DUBAI

An eight-year-old Indian-origin student here has collected nearly 15,000 kg of paper waste in the Gulf emirate as part of a nationwide recycling campaign, according to

a media report.

Nia Tony has been honoured for her efforts in keeping the environment clean by collecting the paper waste, the *Khaleej Times* reported.

"I was campaigning

around my area to collect paper, so that it can be recycled. Every week, I would go out to collect newspapers, magazines, and other paper that people were throwing away or didn't want to keep," she said.

She was honoured on Monday during the 22nd edition of the Emirates Recycling Awards in Dubai.

Ms. Tony won the paper section in the individual category for collecting a total of 14,914 kg of paper waste.