What Are You Hungry For? An Analysis of Conditioning Stimuli of Meat-Eating Predisposition

Stephanie Barboza, Universidade Federal da Paraíba, Brazil
Diana Carvalho, Universidade Federal da Paraíba, Brazil
Adriana Bastos, Fundação Getulio Vargas, Brazil

This research investigates the motivations for the reduction of meat consumption; it tests the stimuli that deal with health, environment, suffering and the right of animals to verify consumption behaviors. The results indicate that the environmental and legal appeal influence the predisposition to eat meat.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The discussion on meat consumption has been the subject of international academic concern. A debate permeates both the relationship of consumers with the meat itself, as well as the treatment that the industry develops in the production and the treatment of the animals. Consequently, the world’s demand for meat has fluctuated a lot, with a greater decline in times when health and animal health problems emerge, and end up achieving the credibility of this food (Miele, 2010).

The reduction of meat consumption and adherence to vegetarianism have been highlighted as food consumption practices arising from the rise of the discourse on the nutritional value of this food in the context of healthy diets. In addition, various studies have shown that consumer questions and consequent meat aversion stem from the impact on human health, from the moral concerns of the meat industry’s treatment of animals, and from the negative externalities that affect the environment (Bersden & Van der Pligt, 2005; Ruby & Heine, 2011).

This study aims to analyze the motivations of people for the reduction of meat consumption. For this, it was defined stimuli related to health, impact on the environment, suffering and animal rights, in order to explore influential behaviors in reducing this consumption.

To verify the stimuli that influence the reduction of meat consumption, a quantitative study was undertaken. A total of 179 online questionnaires were applied, in which the first part of the questionnaire had questions related to the attitude of the respondents regarding vegetarians, their attention in terms of food safety, general health concern, and concern with relative aspects to meat consumption, such scales were drawn from McCarthy’s (2003) study. The second part of the questionnaire was composed of stimuli based on suffering, environment, animal rights and health to identify the likelihood of respondents to reduce meat consumption (Orsini, Barboza & Costa, 2015).

In order to analyze the data collected, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for exploratory data analysis (descriptive measures analysis, Kruskal-Wallis test and ANOVA tests). Initially, we looked at the attitude of the respondents towards vegetarians, their attention in terms of food safety, general health concerns, and concerns about meat consumption.

All variables, excepting the ‘possibility to stop eating meat’ and ‘likelihood of continuing to consume meat’ (which are single-item), were aggregated by the mean of the scores of the respondents weighted by the factorial score of the respective variables. Among the constructs, those who obtained, in average and quartiles, the highest values were ‘health concern’ (7.79) and ‘food safety attention’ (7.42). This indicates that respondents have a good level of concern about the safety of the foods they consume, certainly because of their health concerns (in effect, the two constructs have a good measure of association, as measured by Pearson’s parametric correlation (0.595) and by the nonparametric Spearman (0.590)).

The mean values and the lowest quartiles values were observed in the construct ‘possibility of stopping meat-eating’ (3.62), in which it was revealed that the initial predisposition of the respondents (without having been presented to the stimuli of the four appeals of the study) to stop consuming meat is very small, reaching a moderate level only in the third quartile (that is, only 25% of the respondents). The other constructs obtained averages that indicated a moderate preoccupation with the consumption of meat, as well as a moderate appreciation for the vegetarians.

The initial questions were answered before we presented the respondent to the stimuli of the four appeals, along with the question about the possibility of stopping eating meat. We asked about the level of informative quality, the convincing power of the advertisement, and the use of a good central argument of all four stimuli announcements created in the study. By the obtained values, we conclude say that the advertisement that used the appeal of suffering, on average, was the best evaluated in terms of its informative quality, its convincing power, and the use of a good central argument.

The central hypothesis of our study concerned the likelihood of respondents being willing to continue to consume meat after being exposed to one of the four appeals exposed in the announcements. We sought to identify if there was any appeal that would diminish the person’s intention to continue eating meat. For that, parametric analysis of variance (ANOVA) and non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis techniques were used, from which we extracted the descriptive measures as well as the reference measures in the tests to verify differences between groups.

According to the results presented in table 1, based on the tests (both with p-value> 0.05), we cannot reject the null hypothesis that there is equality in terms of probability of continuing to consume meat, regardless of the appeal to which the respondent was exposed. However, when we observed the magnitudes of the measures of position, there is a sign that those who responded to the health appeal were those that showed a greater tendency to continue to consume meat, by the arithmetic average, by the posts and by the median (second quartile).

Table 1. Measures of the likelihood of continuing to consume meat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appeal</th>
<th>Arithmetic mean</th>
<th>Average of posts</th>
<th>Percentile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffering</td>
<td>6.87</td>
<td>88.14</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>6.66</td>
<td>86.48</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights</td>
<td>6.64</td>
<td>88.22</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>7.28</td>
<td>97.62</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Tests: Kruskal-Wallis c²=1,287 (3 gl), p=0,732; ANOVA F=0,489 (3, 175 gl), p=0,690

In order to analyze the motivators of the practice of reducing meat consumption, it were selected some stimuli that present an impact relation on the probability of the individual continuing to eat meat. We believe that the knowledge generated in this study will collaborate to the exploration of influential behaviors in the reduction of this consumption.

Thus, the approach adopted contributes to the analysis of other studies on meat consumption, as well as new perspectives on the subject when developing groups that expose different consumption behaviors. It is desirable that this research be used in contexts of interlocution of the academic scope with the public agents and of social
impact. We propose as a suggestion the involvement of other statistical techniques and we recommend further improvement of sampling.

REFERENCES