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Reducing Meat Consumption: How Information and Emotion Drive Dietary Change

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Reducing meat consumption and transitioning to plant-based diets are recognized as crucial to tackle climate change. Concern for animal welfare can reduce meat consumption by activating cognitive dissonance, which may also arise from environmental concerns associated with meat consumption. Yet, there is a lag in empirical research examining the effect of such interventions on reduced meat consumption. Our research seeks to address this by (i) adding knowledge on environment-related interventions that elicit meat-related cognitive dissonance and (ii) compare the effectiveness of interventions using information and interventions inducing negative emotions in reducing actual meat consumption. In two online experiments consumers first had to choose between a meat-based and a plant-based burger followed by receiving information about the negative environmental effects of meat consumption (informational intervention). The results did not show a significant effect of information about the environmental effects of meat consumption on consumers' experienced cognitive dissonance. In a next step we plan to test an intervention aiming to activate negative emotions among consumers (emotional intervention). Following their meal choice, consumers receive a series of pictures showing the negative environmental consequences of meat consumption based on recent Austrian examples (e.g., dry lakes). These pictures ought to activate feelings of guilt and/or anxiety and, cognitive dissonance among consumers. To complement these series of studies, in a following laboratory experiment, the effectiveness of emotional interventions on actual meat consumption will be tested.

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Yes, I am within 6 years of receiving my Ph.D.

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