

Title

Nudging towards sustainable meat consumption: a natural field experiment

Short description

The greatest leverage of reducing anthropogenic climate impact lies within curbing the increasing trend of global meat consumption. As such, there is a need for new types of tools within policy and business, as targeting food consumption with standard policy measures has proven difficult. This study examines the role of altering choice architectures in grocery stores in Sweden by implementing three types of so-called nudges with the purpose of making consumers reduce their minced beef consumption by supplementing it with carrots and beans. Two nudges belong to the category ‘physical change in the environment’: (1) colourful footsteps on the floor, leading to the more sustainable choice and (2) product replacement of carrots and beans adjacent to minced the meat refrigerator and the taco shelf. The third nudge was ‘information disclosure’ in the form of information signs, one in each decision-making environment saying: “supplement your spaghetti Bolognese/tacos with carrots/beans and your food will last for more people - better for your health, animals and the planet”. The effects of the nudges were tested through a natural field experiment involving 26 food stores in the Stockholm region. The results show a significant increase of consumption of carrots and beans. To determine if the nudge-intervention has an effect (a reduction) also on the minced beef, more research is needed. The study provides insights of what could work when it comes to applying nudges in food stores and concludes that nudging has the potential of being a valuable tool for policy makers and business leaders to steer consumers towards more sustainable consumption. Moreover, the study contributes to the understudied field of green nudging and natural field experiments in food stores.

Topic

Consuming – Food

Characteristics (type, level)

Neighborhood, Local/Regional Intervention, Private, Public

Country/Countries of implementation

Sweden

Aims and Objectives

The main objective of the study was to analyse if ‘green nudges’, i.e. nudges implemented to promote pro-environmental behaviour, can be used to change consumer’s decisions towards more sustainable meat consumption. The more sustainable choice is referred to reducing minced beef, by substituting it with ICA’s ecological carrots and Zeta’s ecological beans (herein referred to carrots and beans), as it has a lower environmental footprint in terms of GHG emissions

Target Group

Consumers, supermarkets

Status

Completed

Start and Completion dates

19 weeks in autumn 2015

Lifestyle and Behavior Change

The supermarkets/store keepers were involved in the planning. A small ‘nudge’ in the right direction can help individuals make better decisions for themselves and the environment.

Effects on:

Health and Wellbeing	It might increase awareness of sustainability. Healthier food as in eating more vegetables (direct impact) and less meat consumption leading to less impact on climate and health (indirect impact)
Vulnerable populations	Providing inspiration for eating more vegetables, which is more affordable as well as healthier
Environment	The more sustainable choice is referred to reducing minced beef, by substituting it with ICA’s ecological carrots and Zeta’s ecological beans, as it has a lower environmental footprint in terms of GHG emissions

Initiated and/or implemented by

Stockholm Resilience centre, Stockholm university (Master thesis). Study if ‘green nudges’, i.e. nudges implemented to promote pro-environmental behaviour, can be used to change consumer’s decisions towards more sustainable meat consumption.

Stakeholders and sectors involved

ICA AB, one of the largest retail businesses (groceries) in the Nordic region

Financial support

No financial support needed apart from the student's time and possibly the staff in the stores. No support was provided.

Evidence-base

The concept of Nudging was coined 2008 by, University of Chicago behavioural economist Richard Thaler and Harvard Law School Professor Cass Sunstein with their best selling book "Nudge: improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness". A small 'nudge' in the right direction can help individuals make better decisions for themselves and the environment. Sunstein and Thaler (2008) call the approach being libertarian paternalistic, meaning that it allows people to make their own choices, without limiting any freedom of choice (compared to for example regulations). When it comes to pro-environmental behaviour, scholars argue that there is a disconnection between changing minds and changing behaviour (Verlaken and Wood, 2006). Thus, in order to change human behaviour it is crucial to understand the gap between intention and action (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002).

Main activities

In the stores the following was done: Two nudges belong to the category 'physical change in the environment': (1) colourful footsteps on the floor, leading to the more sustainable choice and (2) product replacement of carrots and beans adjacent to minced the meat refrigerator and the taco shelf. The third nudge was 'information disclosure' in the form of information signs, one in each decision-making environment saying: "supplement your spaghetti Bolognese/tacos with carrots/beans and your food will last for more people - better for your health, animals and the planet".

Evaluation

Sales statistics.

Main results

Awareness, the results show a significant increase of consumption of carrots and beans. To determine if the nudge-intervention has an effect (a reduction) also on the minced beef, more research is needed.

Key success factors and barriers

Easy to implement.

INHERIT Perspective

This project has the potential to improve physical health through eating healthier; more vegetables and less meat. It has the potential to contribute to global environmental sustainability by making people eat less meat products. It has a clear emphasis on changing behaviour and raise awareness. It may have an effect on vulnerable groups by making food more affordable when consuming less meat.

More information

A master thesis in PDF-format can be provided (in English)

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Contact



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