AUSTRALIAN’S MOTIVATIONS FOR LIMITING MEAT CONSUMPTION

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to identify predictors of meat consumption and the intention to reduce it. Meat consumption is one of the major contributors to human made environmental destruction including climate change, biodiversity loss or water and air pollution and at the same time under volitional control meat consumption is an interesting target for interventions. A research model is developed together with an agenda of three hypotheses. The hypotheses will be tested using SPSS statistical software and structural equation modelling techniques. The main contributions of the proposed research are also delineated.

INTRODUCTION

The topic on meat consumption has attracted a lot of interest in recent decades because of ethical, health and environmental considerations. Accumulating evidence assumes that the acquisition and consumption of meat has shaped major parts of our human psychology and behavior (Zur and Klo Eckner, 2014), in particular its effects on human health (Sabate, 2001), human morality and ethics (Walter and Portmess, 1999) and mental well-being (Adams, 2007; Patterson, 2002). The large environmental effects related to meat as a consumption commodity have also become global headlines in recent years. These effects include climate change, water pollution, water scarcity, soil degradation, eutrophication of water bodies, and loss of habitats and biodiversity (Latvala et al. 2012).

Over time, a large body of research has investigated influences on meat consumption in Western cultures (De Boer 2006), with majority of this research originating from Europe or the United States (e.g. De Backer and Hudders, 2014; Zur and Klo ckner, 2014; Klo ckner and Blo baum 2010). However, it is unknown how relevant findings from these studies are to the Australian context, as meat production and retail markets are different within different countries. For example, Australian beef, lamb and chicken is produced domestically, whereas in European and Asian countries imported meat is available. European consumers have been subject to health scares such as bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) and foot-and-mouth disease, whereas Australia has largely been untouched by such scares. It is possible that this has drawn more attention to food safety and animal husbandry issues than in Australia. Additionally, recent research is lacking as consumer attitudes towards food changes over time. In order to move meat consumption in a more sustainable direction it will be necessary to understand current forces that influence meat consumption in Australian meat-eaters. There is a need for investigation of influential factors on Australian meat consumers in order to move towards more sustainable consumption. The present study therefore aims to examine potential psychological motivators in limiting meat consumption amongst Australian consumers. More specifically, the perceived benefits and barriers to limiting meat consumption, as these psychological motivators will potentially represent a much wider group of behaviours in which individuals’ preferences result in environmental, health and social consequences.
LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYHPOTHESES

Perceived benefits and barriers as motivators to limit meat consumption from a consumer’s perspective

The perceived benefits and barriers to limiting meat consumption have been examined in many studies of dietary change. One of the motives for meat consumption would include quality cues such as tenderness and flavour drive meat consumption (Troy and Kerry, 2010). The literature shows the importance of the sensory properties of meat as a very strong influence. ‘Taste’ as a sensory receptor plays a major role as a reason for eating meat (Pohjolainen, Vinnari and Jokinen 2014). The love for the “taste of meat” is a major threshold among men and women of all ages who are reluctant to reduce their meat consumption (Lea and Worsley, 2003). For example, some people ‘experience’ disgust for meat and are deterred by the offensive taste, appearance of fat, chewiness and/or the appearance of blood (Kubberod et al. 2002). However for ‘meat appreciators’, hedonic factors play an important role in meat consumption (Richardson, Shepherd and Elliman 1993; Rousset et al. 2005).

Health beliefs and food safety as motivators to limit meat consumption

Research in Europe indicates that consumers may place more importance on food safety than taste (MacBean 1996). Over the last decade media coverage has highlighted health and safety scares. Food safety can be a potentially discrete determinant (Cook et al., 2009). Beef and pork products have been subject to many food recalls in the past, particularly in developed economies (Charlebois, 2011). Consequently consumers have become more aware of hazards such as antibiotic residues, bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) and hormones (McCarthy et al. 2004). This has caused some to see meat as a potential carrier of dangerous contaminants that may lead to various diseases. A UK study found that declines in the safety of meat would predict a reduction in future meat consumption (Richardson, Shepherd and Elliman 1993). Whether or not this applies to Australian consumers is uncertain.

Environmental impact and considerations as motivators to limit meat consumption

Environmental considerations are prominently cited as influences on meat consumption (Latvala et al. 2012; Lindeman and Vaananen 2000; Povey, Wellens and Conner 2001; Zur and Klockner 2014). Livestock’s Long Shadow (report released by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) in 2006) intensified the spotlight on the environmental impact of meat production. The report stated that the livestock sector is one of the top contributors to the most serious environmental problems. The United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP, 2010) further stated that animal products, especially meat and dairy products required more resources and generate higher emissions than plant-based foods, and that a substantial reduction of environmental impacts is possible only with a substantial diet change, away from animal products.
PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES OF PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOUR AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The social cognitive theory

The social cognitive theory (SCT) defines human behaviour as a triadic, dynamic and reciprocal interaction of personal factors, behaviour, and the social environment (Bandura 1977, 1986, 2001). The SCT suggests that the dynamic interplay of personal, behavioural, and social environmental influences uniquely determines human functioning (an individual’s behaviour). Lea and Worsley (2003) found that meat appreciation (the enjoyment of meat eating) was a positive predictor of meat eating among people 18 to 32 years of age. In addition, Lea, Crawford and Worsley (2006a) found that the healthiness of meat was a positive predictor of red meat consumption. Kubberod et al. (2002) also observed similar relationships. However, consumers may face barriers to changing their behaviour such as when changing to a healthier diet (Lea, Crawford and Worsley 2006a, Lea, Crawford and Worsley 2006b). For example, the main perceived barriers to eating a healthy diet in a European Union (EU) survey related to lack of time and convenience (Kearney and McElhone, 1999). ‘Time’ has also been found to be a major barrier to the more specific health behaviour of consuming more fruit and vegetables (Balch et al., 1997). Furthermore, “convenience” and a refusal to change eating habits and routine is another key barrier influencing meat consumption. According to Lea, Crawford and Worsley (2006a) a perceived lack of knowledge about preparing vegetarian food, lack of information about plant based diets, and refusal to change eating habits were the most frequently cited barriers. This may be because meat is a highly appreciated product and considered easy to buy and prepare (Lea, Crawford and Worsley 2006a; Lea, Crawford and Worsley 2006b; Pohjolainen, Vinnari and Jokinen 2014) in comparison to vegetarian meals. Furthermore, there is also some evidence that shows of all household types, “families with children” are particularly reluctant to limit meat consumption due to the presumption that meat is nutritious (Lea, Crawford and Worsley 2006a; Lea, Crawford and Worsley 2006b). Therefore the perceived difficulties with a non-meat diet would be a negative predictor of limiting meat consumption, whereas meat appreciation and the healthiness (or necessity) of meat would be the perceived benefits and thus positive predictors. Furthermore the environmental impact derived from meat consumption (Jungbluth et al. 2000) is proposed to be a positive predictor towards limiting meat consumption. Building from the above discussion, the following hypotheses are presented:

- Health beliefs has a positive influence on consumer attitudes towards limiting meat consumption.
- Environmental issues has a positive influence on consumer attitudes towards limiting meat consumption.
- Meat eating habits will have a negative influence on consumer attitudes towards limiting meat consumption.
- Social pressures to limit meat consumption will have a positive influence on consumer attitudes towards limiting meat consumption.

The norm activation theory

Schwartz’s (1977) norm activation theory (NAT) describes the relationship between activators, personal norms, and behaviour. According to this theory, norm activation refers to a process in which people construct self-expectations regarding prosocial behaviour. Studies that use the
norm activation theory to explain pro-environmental behaviour often focus on personal norms and on two situational activators, i.e., awareness of need and situational responsibility (e.g., Vining and Ebreo, 1992). These behavioural self-expectations are termed ‘personal norms’ and are experienced as feelings of moral obligation to perform or inhibit a specific action, awareness of consequences, which relates to whether someone is aware of the negative consequences for others when not acting, and ascription of responsibility, which relates to the feelings of responsibility for negative consequences of not acting (De Groot and De Steg, 2009). Personal norms refer to a person’s own views about right and wrong. In difference from subjective norms, consequences of either their defending or violating are tied to one’s self-concept, and not to one’s perceived social concept (Arvola et al., 2008). The norm activation theory is one of the most widely applied models of moral behaviour (Jackson, 2005), including applications in the environmental domain, for example for studying recycling (Thøgersen, 1996), transport modes (Bamberg and Schmidt, 2003), energy conservation (Black et al., 1985), and pro-environmental political behaviour (Joireman et al., 2001).

Social variables have long been established to be important in affecting consumer decision making (Miniard and Cohen, 1983); hence they will be tested for influence towards purchase intention. Thus,

\[ H_{2a} \] - There is a positive relationship between health beliefs and behavioural intention towards limiting meat consumption.

\[ H_{2b} \] - There is a positive relationship between environmental issues and behavioural intention towards limiting meat consumption.

\[ H_{2c} \] - There is a negative relationship between meat eating habits and behavioural intention towards limiting meat consumption

\[ H_{2d} \] - There is a positive relationship between perceived social pressures to limit meat consumption and behavioural intention towards limiting meat consumption

The theory of reasoned action

The theory of reasoned action (TRA) was introduced by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) as a framework for understanding, predicting and changing human social behaviour. The TRA suggests that a person's behaviour is determined by his intention to perform the behaviour and that this intention is, in turn, a function of his attitude toward the behaviour, his subjective norm and his perceived behaviour control. “Attitudes” refer to a personal evaluation of the behaviour in question as more or less favourable (Gange’ and Godin, 2000). Subjective norms refer to the perceived expectations of other people (Klo‘ckner, 2011). The theory of reasoned action as well as the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen 1985, 1991) has been widely applied, including the domain of food choice, sustainable consumption (Arvola et al., 2008), and meat consumption (Povey et al., 2001). Verplanken and Aarts (1999) argue that habits are an important additional variable to the TRA when predicting repeated behaviours, which applies to meat consumption. As such, intentions to reduce meat consumption should be directly predicted by attitudes towards a diet with less or no meat. Thus,

\[ H_{3} \] - There is a positive relationship between attitudes towards limiting meat consumption and the behavioural intention towards limiting meat consumption.

Figure 1 provides a summary of the hypotheses for this study.
RESEARCH DESIGN

Data was collected via online survey using Qualtrics software. The consumer panel was selected randomly in Australia nationwide to secure a general population. The survey instrument was developed using established scales. All items will be measured with a seven point Likert scale with 1 representing “strongly disagree” and 7 representing “strongly agree”. A total of 421 usable surveys from 600 responses were obtained. Preliminary results show that 51.3% of the respondents were male and 45.8% of the respondents were aged between 26 – 35. 54.2% of the respondents hold a Bachelor degree, followed by 25.2% of the respondents holds a high school equivalent qualification. Furthermore, majority of the respondents (73.9%) consume meat as a staple for up to three times a week. However, a large amount of the respondents (71.0%) are aware of the benefits in adopting a vegetarian diet, with 65.6% of the respondents also aware that limiting their meat consumption would have a positive impact on the environment (such as global warming).

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The findings of the study will have important implications for tailoring interventions aimed at the reduction of meat consumption: By identifying habits, health beliefs, environmental benefits, attitudes, social pressures and eating habits as relevant aspects in the decision making process and by formulating how they play together, a comprehensive intervention package can be designed. Potential managerial contributions provided by the study include: (1) increase awareness include educational programs and health promotion campaigns that improves food literacy relevant to meat – particularly on whether meat is necessary for humans could be an important influence on meat consumption; and (2) improve guidelines and policies that integrate health and sustainability are important – particularly public procurement policies aimed at reducing meat consumption in public dining facilities. Examples include efforts to create a health-supportive infrastructure, sustainable choice defaults (e.g. in public dining facilities), and access to affordable, healthier alternatives for all income groups.
REFERENCES


