

# **Meat Menu or Vegetarian Option? A ‘Prompt’ to Choose the Vegetarian Option, Combined with the Swiss Food Pyramid as an Intervention for Making More-Balanced Food Choices**

**Project: 608**

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## **Background and Objectives:**

In Switzerland we eat over three times as much meat as is recommended for a balanced and healthy diet. The situation is similar in the other European countries. What’s more, high meat consumption negatively impacts the environment. This raises the question as to what measures could help bring meat consumption more in line with the dietary recommendations. Since a large percentage of the population eats lunch out (menuCH; FSVO, 2017), measures for the staff restaurant context were investigated in the present study. The aim of the study was to investigate the influence of various measures (i.e. interventions) and the combinations of these measures in an online experiment in order to find a promising intervention for use in a field experiment.

In previous behavioral intervention studies, ‘prompts’ have proven to be relatively effective. Prompts are written and/or visual requests to exhibit a specific behavior in certain situations. There were also attempts to modify behavior with the help of social norms. Social norms indicate what constitutes socially appropriate behavior.

## **Method:**

Participants in the online experiment (n=2,198) read a text about staff restaurants and were randomly assigned either to the control condition without intervention or else saw a written prompt, a visual prompt, a social norm or one of all possible combinations thereof (1 x 8 between-subjects design).

The written prompt read as follows: “Choose the vegetarian menu or serve yourself at the balanced salad buffet. Compared to the recommendations of the Swiss Food Pyramid, we eat 2 to 3 times too much meat per week.” The Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office (FSVO) was quoted as the source. The visual prompt was an adapted version of the Swiss Food Pyramid which illustrates how the population’s diet differs from the dietary recommendations. The social norm was a so-called “dynamic social norm” that shows how the social norm has changed with regard to meat consumption and thereby implies what behavior will be the social norm in future: “In Switzerland, more and more people are reducing their meat consumption. Whereas then years ago, it was 40 % of the population that occasionally refrained from meat, today it is 60 %, which have adjusted their eating habits and occasionally refrain from meat (Coop: Plant-based food report, 2022)”.

After being exposed to the respective intervention in the experimental conditions with intervention, the participants were asked to imagine that they could choose between three menu options in a staff restaurant: a meat menu, a vegetarian menu and a vegetarian salad buffet. The participants made 15 such decisions. Shortly before making their decisions, the participants in the experimental conditions with intervention saw the respective intervention once more.

**Results and Outlook:** The participants who saw the written prompt to choose a vegetarian option in combination with the adapted Swiss Food Pyramid chose a meatless option more frequently than those assigned to the control condition without an intervention. The written prompt contributed the most to the effectiveness of the intervention. The next step would now be to investigate whether this intervention also leads to consumers choosing a vegetarian option more frequently in actual staff restaurants.

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