Analysis plan for Information avoidance in moral decisions: an experiment on meat consumption

Berno Buechel, Benedicte Droz, & Anis Nassar*

February 11, 2022

1 Set-Up

The study consists of a sequence of online survey and lab experiment. In the survey and the experiment we ask participants questions about their eating behavior. In the lab participants complete a sequence of tasks in which we elicit their attitudes towards animals and meat as well as, in an incentive compatible way, their knowledge about meat and willingness to pay (WTP) for information regarding meat. We use two treatments and a control, to assess if the consumption of meat in the lab influences attitudes, knowledge and willingness to pay for information (WTP) about meat. Subjects are randomly assigned to the two treatments *T-Past* and *T-Future* and to the baseline treatment *T-Control*, constituting the exogenous variation in this study. Subjects in *T-Past* are served meat before their WTP, attitudes and knowledge are elicited. Subjects in *T-Future* anticipate that they will be

*All three authors: University of Fribourg, Department of Economics, www.unifr.ch/amabe.

served meat after their WTP, attitudes and knowledge are elicited. Subjects in *T-Control* only differ in that they are not served any meat before or after their WTP, attitudes and knowledge are elicited.

Consuming meat may create cognitive dissonance when confronted with its consequences for animal welfare, the environment, and own health. Based on the literature on motivated beliefs (Bénabou and Tirole, 2016) and information avoidance (Golman et al., 2017), we conjecture that eating meat fosters the tendency to avoid and disregard information concerning meat, in particular concerning the negative consequences of meat consumption. Hestermann et al. (2020) formally develop this argument and our hypotheses follow more or less directly from their model.[1]

2 Hypotheses

- **Meat consumption lowers the willingness to pay for information about meat.**
  - Justification: To reduce dissonance and keep a positive (self-)image, subjects who eat meat may demand less information about the consequences of meat consumption.
  - Analysis: Compare subjects' WTP for information about meat (concerning animal welfare, the environment, and health) in *T-Past* and *T-Future* with the WTP in *T-Control*.
- **Meat consumption lowers estimation of its negative consequences.**
  - Justification: To reduce dissonance and keep a positive (self-)image, subjects who eat meat may disregard and downplay information

[1] One difference is that in our experiment subjects do not choose the level of consumption. This could reduce the empathy/guilt (ω) they feel and hence we would rather find smaller effects.

about negative consequences of meat consumption.

  - Analysis: Compare subjects' estimation of negative consequences of meat consumption (concerning animal welfare, the environment, and health) in *T-Past* and *T-Future* with the estimation in *T-Control*. Repeat the comparison for the change in estimation between survey and experiment.

- **Meat consumption hampers knowledge concerning meat.**

  - Justification: If meat eaters disregard and downplay information about negative consequences of meat consumption, this may come at the cost of reduced accuracy of their knowledge about meat.

  - Analysis: Compare subjects' level of knowledge about meat in *T-Past* and *T-Future* with the level of knowledge in *T-Control*. Repeat the comparison for the change in knowledge between survey and experiment.

- **Meat consumption fosters meat justification attitudes.**

  - Justification: Agreeing to meat justification arguments (such as, it is natural, normal, necessary, or nice to eat meat) may relax dissonance between meat consumption and its negative consequences and help preserve a positive (self-)image.

  - Analysis: Compare meat justification score in *T-Past* and *T-Future* with the score in *T-Control*. Repeat the comparison for the change in meat justification score between survey and experiment.

References

Bénabou, R. and Tirole, J. (2016). Mindful economics: The production, consumption, and value of beliefs. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 30(3):141–64.

Golman, R., Hagmann, D., and Loewenstein, G. (2017). Information avoidance. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 55(1):96–135.

Hestermann, N., Le Yaouanq, Y., and Treich, N. (2020). An economic model of the meat paradox. *European Economic Review*, 129:103569.