

The Role of Environmental Concern in Explaining the Intention to Reduce Meat Consumption

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Introduction: The level of meat consumption and the rate of its growth varies between countries and regions. For years, meat consumption was associated with wealth, power and masculinity - a meat-based diet was regarded as the most desirable. Consumers may want to reduce their meat consumption for different reasons, mostly due to 3 types of motivation: moral considerations, health aspects and environmental concern. Environmental reasons are the main focus of the current study, in which we wanted to understand the premises of the intention to reduce meat consumption. In order to explore this topic, we combined 2 models widely used for explaining intention: the Theory of Planned Behaviour as the most generally used for explaining people's intentions and behaviours, and Norm Activation Model applied for examining altruistic behaviour (pro-environmental recognised as such).

Materials and methods: Two similar studies were carried out in Poland and Slovakia, very similar in terms of GDP capacity and dynamics, as well as social, cultural and historical background, located close to each other and in the same climate zone. Nonetheless, they differ in terms of the meat consumption per capita and the direction of its change. These characteristics created unique conditions for examining predictors of intention to reduce meat consumption. A total of 809 respondents participated in both trials. A survey was conducted in Poland on a sample of 409 subjects, and 430 respondents from Slovakia.

Results and discussion: Based on the study, analysis of the effects between factors was performed. The applied structural model explains the very high variability of intention to reduce meat consumption ($R^2_{SK} = 0.81$; $R^2_{PL} = 0.87$). In the current research, the meaning of environmental concern is highlighted as a motivator for meat consumption reduction. The results of the model tests turned out to be similar to some extent for both countries. In the discussed study, it was shown that attitude toward meat consumption reduction influenced the level of intention to reduce meat consumption in both countries. Comparing results for both countries, we may conclude that the self-interest motivation is much stronger as the results regarding meat consumption limitations were not yet observable in Poland. It should be also emphasized that the attitude towards meat consumption reduction better reflected beliefs concerning the environmental consequences of eating less meat, as all items considered regarded that issue. In both countries, we discovered strong relationships between awareness of consequences and ascription of responsibility, and very strong relationship between awareness of consequences and personal norm regarding eating meat. In both countries, awareness of the problem regarding harmful impact of meat consumption on the environment influence ascription of responsibility, but does not affect personal norms. In our study, we found that the social norm did not influence the intention to reduce meat consumption in either of the countries, thus the perceived expectations did not support the willingness to eat less meat.

Conclusions: The most valuable contribution of our results comes from replication of the research in 2 purposefully chosen countries. We discovered that, regardless of the level and direction concerning meat consumption changes, only these 2 variables, reflecting individuals' opinions and norms, were related to meat consumption reduction. However, their nature differs; attitude is related to self-interest motivation, while the personal norm can be link to pro-social reasons. Further penetrating the topic, attitude towards meat consumption reduction, influenced the intention to eat less meat in both countries.