



CASE STUDY

Changing menu descriptions to encourage plant- based food choices

Led by BIT & the World
Resources Institute

BeST

Behaviour Smart community
for Tourism



Co-funded by
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CHALLENGE

In 2018, the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) worked with the World Resources Institute (WRI) to test the impact of different language on meat-eaters' tendency to order a vegetarian dish.

What we eat has important impacts on the environment. In particular, livestock production for meat and dairy products is a disproportionate contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation (to make way for grazing land) and fresh water use.

Shifting consumers' diets to include more plant-based foods and less meat can help limit these impacts.

BEHAVIOUR

Food choices have important impacts on the environment. Diets and eating habits that favour meat and dairy products can have particularly strong negative impacts.

BEHAVIOUR

MECHANISM

Food choices are **rooted in culture** (eating meat can be considered a sign of affluence), identity, strong personal tastes (enjoying meat, for example) and an **aversion to being told what we should eat**. Hard-held **beliefs**, such as perceptions that meat is important for nutrition or that plant-based options are healthy but not tasty can also discourage people from choosing the plant-based option.

HOW DID WE GET THERE?

For this study, we did not undertake research to understand why people choose meat-based options, but we explored how we can help shift choices towards plant-based options.

INTERVENTION

BIT ran a **2-phased online study** to explore the **impact of the language used** to describe vegetarian food on consumer choices.

WRI then ran **field experiments** within UK and US cafés to test whether similar changes in how vegetarian options are presented could affect consumer choices.



Imagine you're having an evening meal at an airport hotel before flying out on holiday the next day...

Which meal would you choose?

Cheese-Topped Beef Burger, Salad and Pickle in a Brioche Bun	£16.00
8oz Beef Burger, topped with melted cheese, salad and pickle in a Brioche Bun served with Onion Rings and Steak Cut Chips	
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<b>Yassai Pad Thai with Chicken</b>	<b>£16.00</b>
Thai pan-fried noodles, with chicken, beansprouts and spring onions with crushed peanuts and fresh lime	
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Traditional Caesar Salad	£17.00
Romaine Lettuce, Chicken, Cherry Tomatoes, Croutons and Caesar Dressing with Parmesan Cheese	
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<b>Comforting Curry</b>	<b>£15.00</b>
Chickpeas and Potatoes in a Mild Curry Sauce served with Pilau Rice, Naan Bread, Chutney and Pappadums	
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Tagliatelle Carbonara	£15.00
Pancetta in a creamy cheese sauce on tagliatelle pasta served with a Garden Salad	

Source: WRI

TESTING

In the **first phase**, 727 online participants saw different variations of vegetarian dish names and were asked to **self-report the likelihood that they would order each dish**. In the **second phase**, 2000 participants saw, at random, the 3-4 more successful dish names from phase one on **mocked-up menus** alongside four non-vegetarian dishes.

The proportion of participants who chose a vegetarian dish was then **measured and compared to the control dish** for each alternative name.

The **field experiments** replicated the food labels used in the online experiments, labelling plant-based options accordingly on menus in US and UK cafés.

RESULTS & LESSONS LEARNED



Across many dish types, **experiential and indulgent language** ('mild and sweet', 'comforting' etc.) and **terms highlighting providence** ('field grown', 'garden') boosted sales.



In contrast, **'meat free' consistently discouraged consumers** from choosing vegetarian dishes.

WRI's field experiments replicated the results of the online experiments, witnessing **sales of vegetarian options increase by up to 70%**.

Changing the language used to describe plant-based options represents a promising avenue to encourage consumers to choose plant-based options in an easy and inexpensive way. Food service managers should experiment with **more appealing names for the plant-based dishes** on their menus.

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LEARN MORE

Behavioural Insights Team (BIT). 2020. a Menu for Change, available online at: https://www.bi.team/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/BIT_Report_A-Menu-for-Change_Webversion_2020.pdf

Vennard D., T. Park, and S. Attwood. 2018. “Encouraging sustainable food consumption by using more appetizing language.” Technical Note. Washington, DC: World Resources Institute. Available online at: www.wri.org/publication/encouraging-sustainable-food-consumption.

Bacon, L., J. Wise, S. Attwood & D. Vennard. 2018. “Language of Sustainable Diets.” Technical Note. Washington, D.C.: World Resources Institute. Available online at: www.wri.org/publication/renaming-vegetarian-dishes.

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