

The effect of choice architecture interventions on driving sustainable food choices for heterogeneous market segments: a field experiment

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Food production and consumption significantly contribute to global greenhouse gas emissions, with food systems alone accounting for nearly one-third of the carbon footprint. Transitioning from animal-based to plant-based diets presents a significant potential for mitigating carbon emissions, but consumers require assistance in navigating the complex climate change landscape to make sustainable food choices. Behavioral science provides a promising tool for facilitating this ecological transition through nudges. However, the application of nudging to sustainable food choices is still in its infancy.

This project aims to explore the effect of nudging techniques in driving sustainable food choices in restaurants, considering different consumer profiles.

The research hypotheses propose that behavioral, cognitive, and emotion-oriented nudges will steer consumption towards sustainability, with behavioral nudges being the most effective overall. A field experiment is planned using a community-based social marketing approach to assess barriers, design interventions, implement them, and evaluate their effectiveness.

The nudges are to be implemented in two settings: a hospital cafeteria and a bakery within Montreal. Community-based research (including interviews and surveys) is conducted prior to designing the interventions to take into account the heterogeneous nature of customers in each setting.

Primary results show that consumer profiles vary widely, ranging from having no prior knowledge of the impact of food choices on climate change to environment-motivated vegans. Designing sustainable food interventions must focus narrowly on a specific consumer segment and relevant target behavior. The intervention design is proposed based on community-based research. Implementation is planned in early November.

This study aims to offer practical recommendations for successful nudge interventions in restaurants, aiming to reduce the carbon footprint of food consumption and advance knowledge in promoting sustainable food choices.