

Online menus could prompt people to make healthier choices

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New research has found even modest interventions, such as encouraging consumers to reflect on their choices before they submit their order, could reduce the emissions associated with the production of their food by more than 50%.

The interventions work by "nudging" consumers towards more sustainable food choices using a variety of methods, including by asking people to think about their choices before they make them or by providing additional context and information around the nutritional value or sustainability of their food.

The findings were revealed in a new paper published in the journal *Nature Sustainability*, co-authored by Professor Peter John (King's College London), Dr. Sanchayan Banerjee (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam), Dr. Matteo Galizzi and Professor Susana Mourato (London School of Economics and Political Science).

Professor Peter John, Head of the School of Politics and Economics and Professor of Public Policy, said, "Our findings generate new insights for different stakeholders in the [food industry](#), such as online food-delivery companies and [public institutions](#) that offer food menus regularly.

"Our interventions are readily implementable through push-in prompts on ordering kiosks currently used in many cafeterias, which can be programmed to provide customers with short thinking prompts that enable them to reflect on their sustainable dietary preferences as they are navigating the menu.

"Introducing 'think' prompts should be relatively low-cost, both for suppliers and for consumers, who do not need any longer time to order than they otherwise do—as we showed in our experiment."

The researchers conducted an [online study](#) with more than 3,000 people in the U.K., trialing a number of different types of [intervention](#).

For the study, participants were presented with a restaurant menu containing 36 main course items and told they would be required to place an order for delivery. People were then randomly assigned to

either a [control group](#), or 1 of 9 groups which were exposed to a different "treatment"—a variation of a behavioral tool known as a nudge, think or boost.

After the "treatment," the participants were asked to complete their order and their responses were collected.

The researchers found that, when compared to the control group, all experimental treatments were "significantly effective" in reducing the emissions of intended orders of meals.

The most effective treatment, in which participants were asked to reflect on their choices before being presented by default with more sustainable food choices, reduced emissions by 76%.

The researchers believe the findings could offer important insights to firms that use menus, such as takeaway providers, as well as schools, universities and hospitals.

Prof John said, "Firms are likely to benefit in the long-term by using the agency-enhancing interventions used in our experiment.

"As more people become health-conscious and concerned about the environmental impact of their diets, [food](#) companies might want to cater to these changing preferences to remain relevant and competitive in the market long term."

More information: Sanchayan Banerjee et al, Sustainable dietary choices improved by reflection before a nudge in an online experiment, *Nature Sustainability* (2023). [DOI: 10.1038/s41893-023-01235-0](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-023-01235-0).
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