

3rd International Symposium on Nutrition (ISN 2022): Urban food policies for sustainable nutrition and health, 27–28 January 2022

Evaluating the impact of a retailer-led pilot at changing consumer behaviour

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Background/Objectives: Current patterns of consumption in the Western world are driving increasing levels of malnutrition and environmental degradation. Consumer behaviour change is needed to improve nutrition and sustainability outcomes of our food systems. Food retailers represent the interface between food production and consumption, and exert significant influence over the supply chain and food purchasing behaviours. There is a significant opportunity for food retailers to influence consumer behaviour and therefore support healthier, more sustainable food consumption practices. Engaging directly with consumers to build their capacity to adopt more sustainable food behaviours shows promise in creating long-term change⁽¹⁾, although this approach has received less attention in the literature than changes to the choice architecture (nudging). The primary objective of this study was to evaluate the impact of a behaviour change pilot implemented by a food retailer on three related food consumption behaviours: protein consumption (meat, vegetables and plant-based meat alternatives), food waste and scratch cooking. Secondary objectives were to assess changes across variables related to behaviour change: awareness, behavioural intention and perceived barriers to change.

Methods: Participants were surveyed at baseline (before the start of the pilot), at the end of the pilot, and 3 months after the end of the pilot. The 3 months on survey enabled analysis of lasting effects of the pilot. Focus groups were conducted to enable a more in-depth exploration of emerging themes.

Results: Results indicate that the pilot had a positive and lasting impact on participant food behaviours, including reduced meat consumption, increased consumption of fruit, vegetables and wholegrains, reduced food waste and increased scratch cooking. Knowledge on how to eat more healthily and intention to adopt healthier and more sustainable behaviours including reducing meat consumption and food waste was also higher after participation in the pilot.

Discussion / Conclusion: This pilot provides a tangible, practical and scalable example of how food companies can engage meaningfully with consumers to drive behaviour change. While results from this pilot study indicate positive change across target variables, more research is needed to evaluate this approach to behaviour change and how effective it is compared to other approaches such as nudging that do not require direct consumer engagement. Furthermore, while strategies to change behaviour are important, structural and cultural changes to the food environment are needed to drive change at scale and pace.

Reference

1. Elf P, Gattersleben B, Christie I (2019) *Front. Psychol.* 9, 2699. DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02699

Disclosure of Interest

None Declared