Meat consumption can trigger information avoidance

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Problem

- Meat consumption has an impact on
  - the environment (greenhouse gas, freshwater, agricultural land)
  - animal welfare
  - personal health (WHO: carcinogenic)
- In the last fifty years the amount of meat produced has more than tripled, exceeding 350 million tons a year (FAO, 2024).
- Information campaigns to reduce meat consumption: *the more you know, the less you eat*
  - Policy makers and NGOs
  - Paul McCartney's words:

    "If slaughterhouses had glass walls, everyone would be vegetarian."
  - Causal effects of information interventions: mixed results
- Research question: *Does meat consumption increase information avoidance? The more you eat, the less you want to know...*

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Motivation

This Paper

Experiment

- Effect of meat consumption on...
  - information acquisition
  - knowledge
  - attitudes
- Mixed results: Meat consumption...
  - triggers information avoidance!
  - triggers indication not to know!
- Interpretation:
  - Limits effectiveness of information campaigns
  - Revising Paul McCartney's quote: *"If slaughterhouses had glass walls, [more people would avoid looking at them.]*

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Related Literature

- Information avoidance
  - Benabou & Tirole (*JEP, 2016*)
  - Golman, Hagmann & Loewenstein (*JEL, 2017*)
  - Oster, Shoulson & Dorsey (*AER, 2013*)
  - Dana, Weber & Kuang (*ET, 2007*)
  - Grossman, & Van Der Weele (*JEEA, 2017*)
- Economics of meat
  - Hestermann, Le Yaouanq & Treich (*EER, 2020*)
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- Studies on meat consumption in other disciplines
  - Bratanova, Bastian and Loughnan (2011)
  - Bastian, Haslam and Loughnan (2011)
  - Bastian, Haslam, Loughnan and Radke (2012)

Experimental Design

Experimental design

T-Control		WTP info about beef		WTP info about pork	Attitudes	Knowledge	Information
T-Meat	Eating beef	WTP info about beef	Eating pork	WTP info about pork	Attitudes	Knowledge	Information

- Two groups:
  - Control group: T-Control
  - Treatment group: T-Meat
- Random allocation of treatments to sessions
- Between-subjects design
- Comparison among omnivores
- T-Meat makes being a meat eater salient

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Implementation

- 146 participants
- Mostly students in Switzerland: Fribourg, Lausanne, Bern
- Lab in Fribourg and in Bern.
- A variation of T-Meat discontinued.

Two parts

- **online survey**: (10 min)
  - Demographic questions
  - Attitudes
  - Knowledge
- **lab experiment** (40 min)

  Randomized into T-Control or T-Meat
  - Eating meat or not (according to treatment)
  - WTP
  - Attitudes
  - Knowledge

Payment: 15CHF + variable payoffs.

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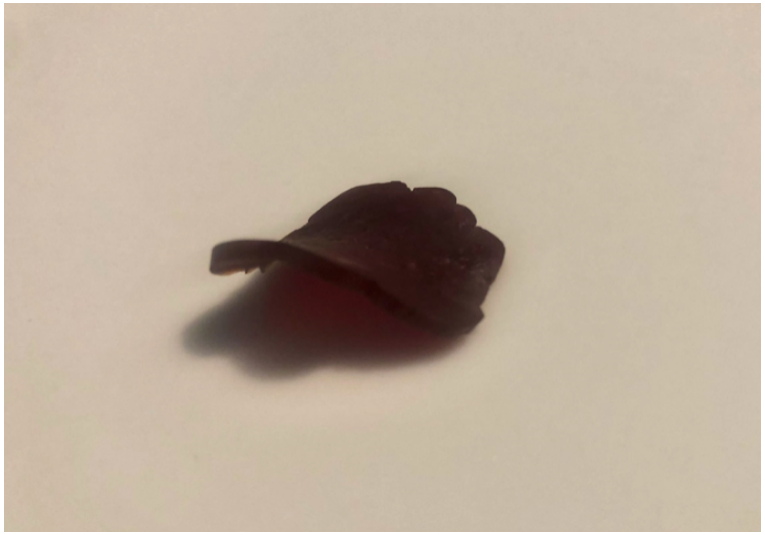
Treatment



Eliciting WTP

Item 1: Information on animal welfare in the beef production

If you are paid 75 points for this information item, would you accept?	○ Yes	○ No
If you are paid 50 points for this information item, would you accept?	○ Yes	○ No
If you are paid 25 points for this information item, would you accept?	○ Yes	○ No
If you are paid 0 points for this information item, would you accept?	○ Yes	○ No
If you have to pay 25 points for this information item, would you accept?	○ Yes	○ No
If you have to pay 50 points for this information item, would you accept?	○ Yes	○ No
If you have to pay 75 points for this information item, would you accept?	○ Yes	○ No

Consistent choice by design

- When switched to “No” all lower answers are switched to “No” too.
- Underlying assumption: if some item is refused at some price p, it must be refused at a higher price as well.

Eliciting WTP

Switch to "No"	WTP	WTPproxy	Info Avoidance
at paid 75 (always "No")	$\in (-\infty, -75]$	-87.5	1
at paid 50	$\in [-75, -50]$	-62.5	1
at paid 25	$\in [-50, -25]$	-37.5	1
at zero	$\in [-25, 0]$	-12.5	1
at price 25	$\in [0, 25]$	12.5	0
at price 50	$\in [25, 50]$	37.5	0
at price 75	$\in [50, 75]$	62.5	0
never (always "Yes")	$\in [75, \infty)$	87.5	0

Outcome variables:

- *WTPproxy*
- *Information avoidance*:= refuse information item even if it is for free.

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Knowledge

According to the Swiss Confederation's nutrition strategy 2017-2021: on average, how much meat do the Swiss eat compared to what would be optimal for their health?

- ○ Meat consumption is 7x too high
- ○ Meat consumption is 3x too high
- ○ Meat consumption is approximately at the right level
- ○ Meat consumption is 2x too low
- ○ I don't know

In Swiss farms, the percentage of pigs that live their whole life without having the possibility to go outside is:

- ○ 36%
- ○ 58%
- ○ 0%
- ○ 88%
- ○ I don't know

Outcome variables:

- *Knowledge score*:= Number of correct answers out of eight questions.
- *IDK respondent*:= Respondent has ticked "I don't know" at least once.

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Attitudes

It is acceptable to eat meat because the animals killed for our consumption have lower intellectual capacities than humans.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○ 6 ○ 7

Animals are mostly treated well in farms in Switzerland.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○ 6 ○ 7

Eating meat is healthy.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○ 6 ○ 7

Eating meat is necessary for good health.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○ 6 ○ 7

It's normal to eat meat.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○ 6 ○ 7

Eating meat may be bad for the environment, but no more so than eating vegetables or cereals.

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Outcome variables:

- *Consequences score*:= perception of bad consequences (vs. downplaying).
- *Justification score*:= average meat justification attitude.

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Attitudes

- *Consequences score*:= perception of bad consequences.
  - Eating meat may be bad for the environment, but no more so than eating vegetables or cereals. (reverse)
  - Animals are mostly treated well in farms in Switzerland. (reverse)
  - The way meat is produced in Switzerland is morally wrong.
  - Deforestation is a major concern for humanity.
  - Preserving jobs is more important than reducing CO2 emissions. (reverse)
  - It is acceptable to eat meat because the animals killed for our consumption do not really suffer. (reverse)

- *Justification score*:= average meat justification attitude.
  - It is acceptable to eat meat because the animals killed for our consumption do not really suffer. (also used for consequence score)
  - It is acceptable to eat meat because the animals killed for our consumption have lower intellectual capacities than humans.
  - It is acceptable to eat meat because animals are raised for this purpose.
  - God created animals for us to eat them.
  - Eating meat is healthy.
  - It's natural to eat meat, it's written in our genes.
  - It's normal to eat meat.
  - I like meat too much to stop eating it.
  - Eating meat is necessary for good health.
  - Eating meat may be bad for the environment, but no more so than eating vegetables or cereals.

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  - Eating meat may be bad for the environment, but no more so than eating vegetables or cereals.

Hypotheses

- Incentivized outcomes: Information Avoidance & Knowledge

Hypothesis (H1)

Meat consumption lowers the willingness to pay for information about meat.

Hypothesis (H2)

Meat consumption hampers knowledge concerning meat.

- Non-incentivized outcomes: Attitudes

Hypothesis (H3)

Meat consumption lowers estimation of its negative consequences.

Hypothesis (H4)

Meat consumption fosters meat justification attitudes.

Pre-registered at AEA RCT Registry: AEARCTR-0008904.

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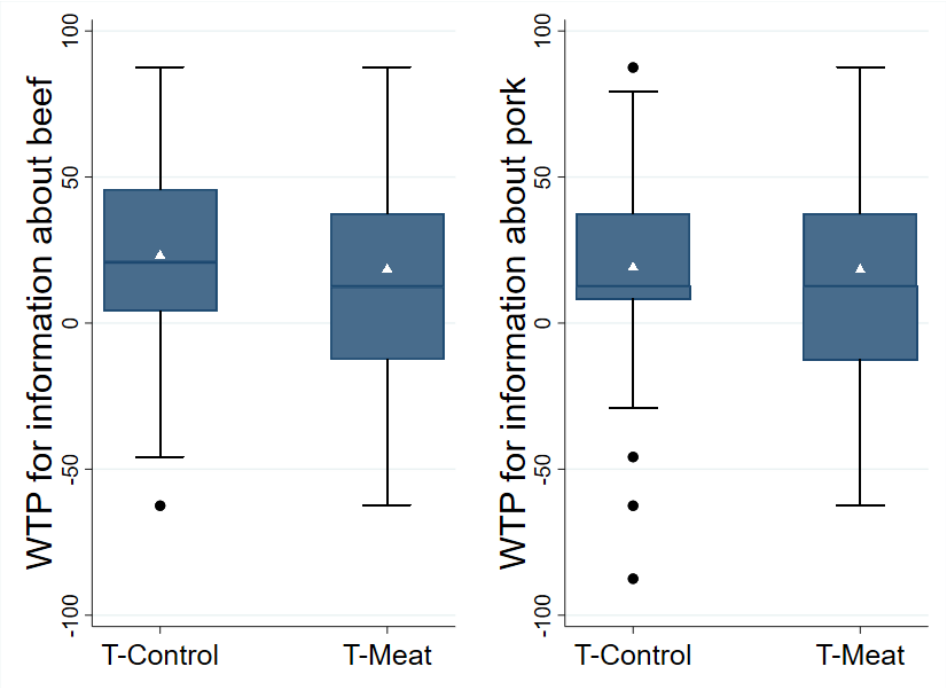
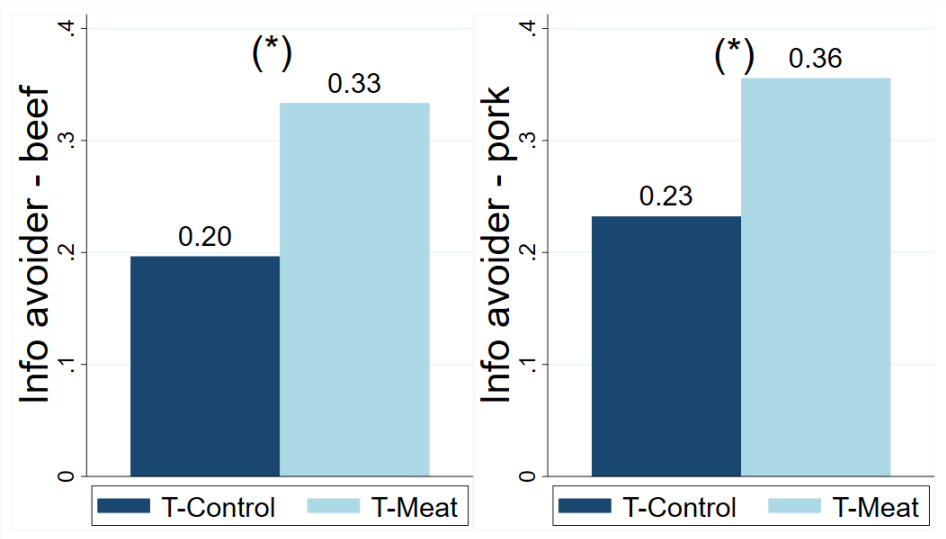
Results

Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
T_Meat	146	0.62	0.49	0	1
Female	145	0.60	0.49	0	1
Age	146	23.56	4.33	19	46
Lab dummy	146	0.45	0.50	0	1
WTP info about beef	146	20.15	34.37	-62.5	87.5
WTP info about pork	146	18.55	34.60	-87.5	87.5
Info avoider - beef	146	0.28	0.45	0	1
Info avoider - pork	146	0.31	0.46	0	1
Knowledge score	146	4.62	1.50	1	8
IDK respondent	146	0.13	0.34	0	1
Consequences score	146	4.81	0.71	2.83	6.33
Justification score	146	3.39	0.99	1.10	5.80

H1: Meat consumption lowers WTP





- Mean WTPproxy does not reduce significantly (*t*-test):
  - 23.1 vs. 18.3 points
  - 19.0 vs. 18.2 points

- Frequency of information avoiders, i.e., respondents who more often avoid information than seek information, increases weakly significantly (one-sided *Fisher exact* test).

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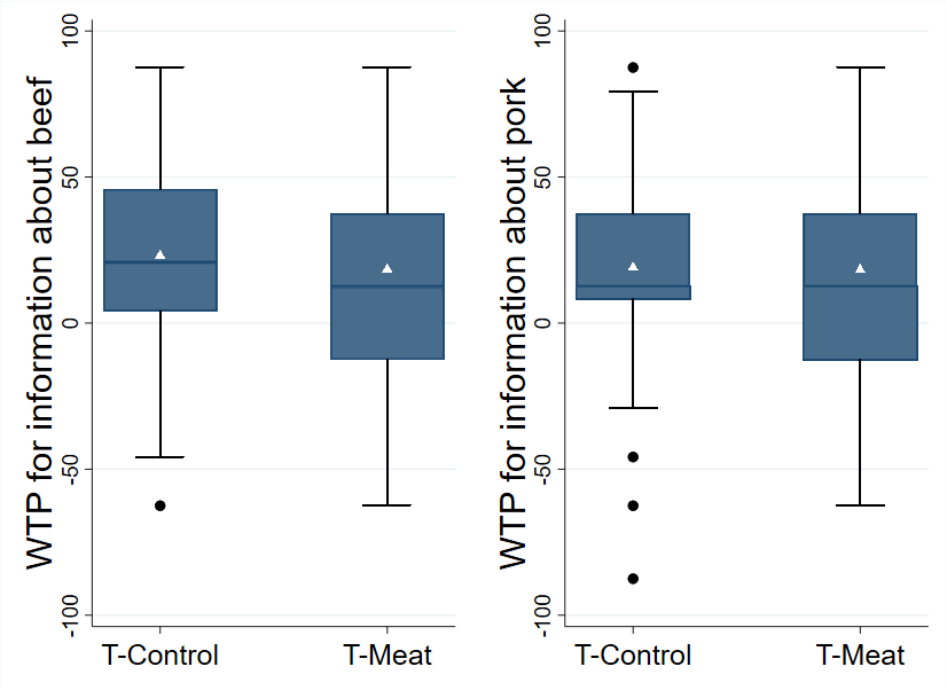

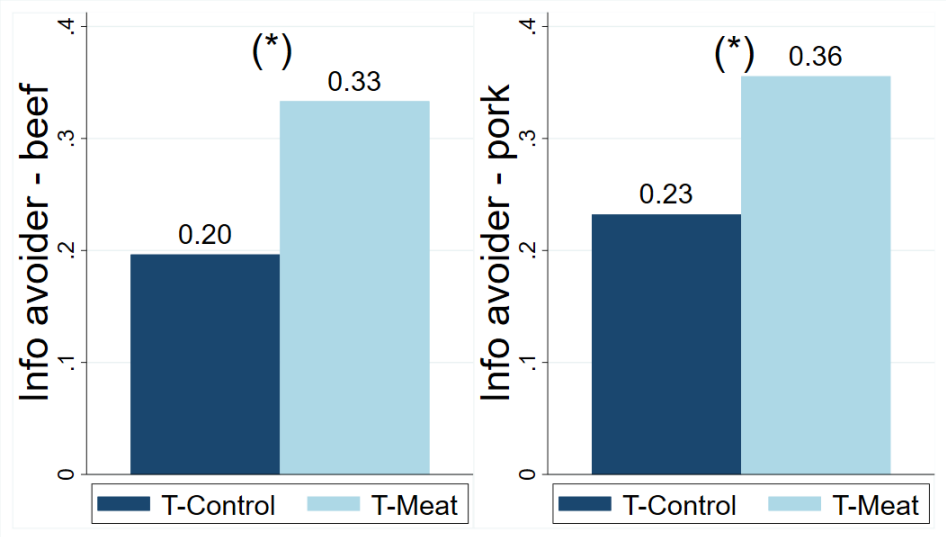

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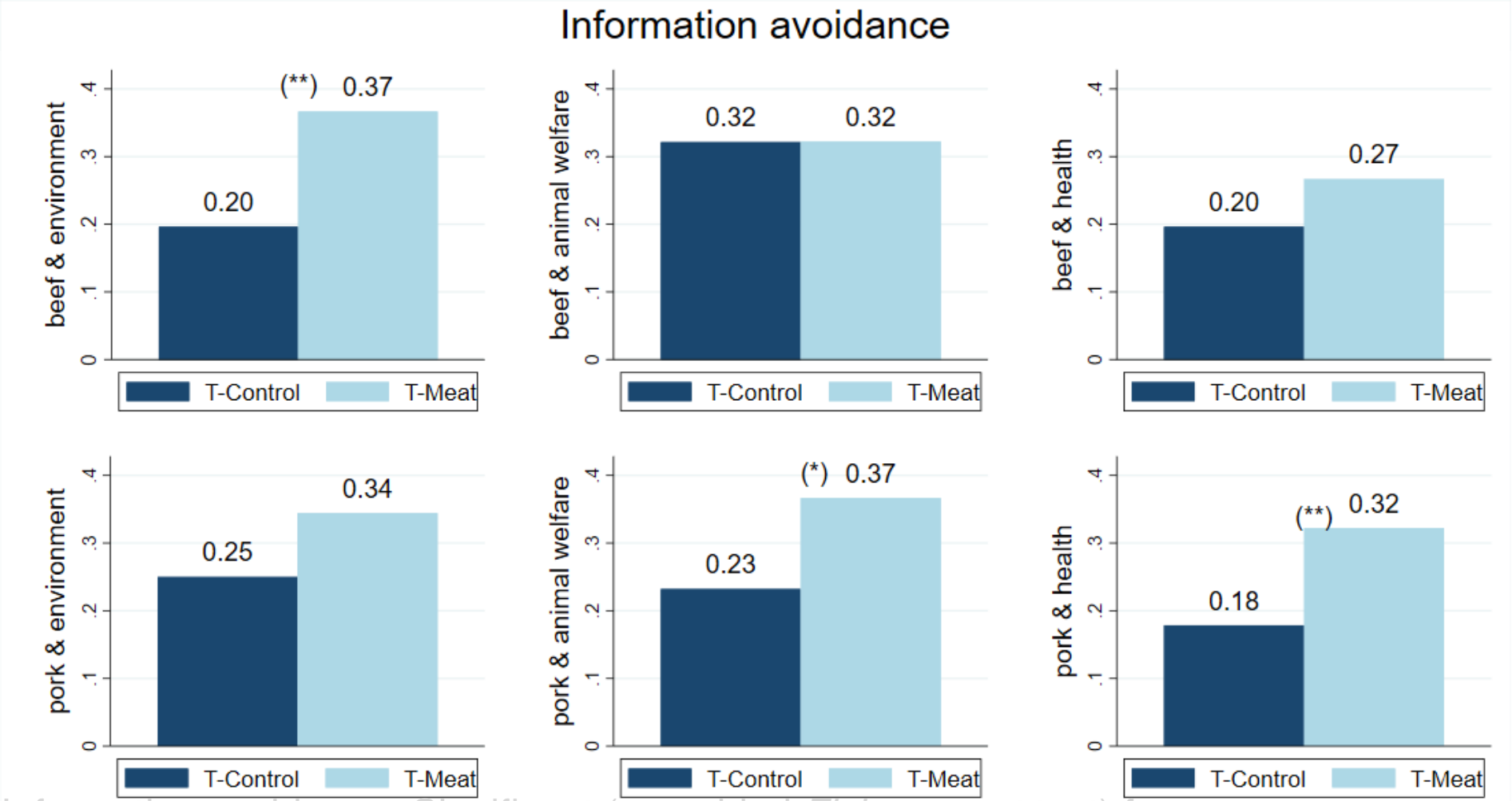
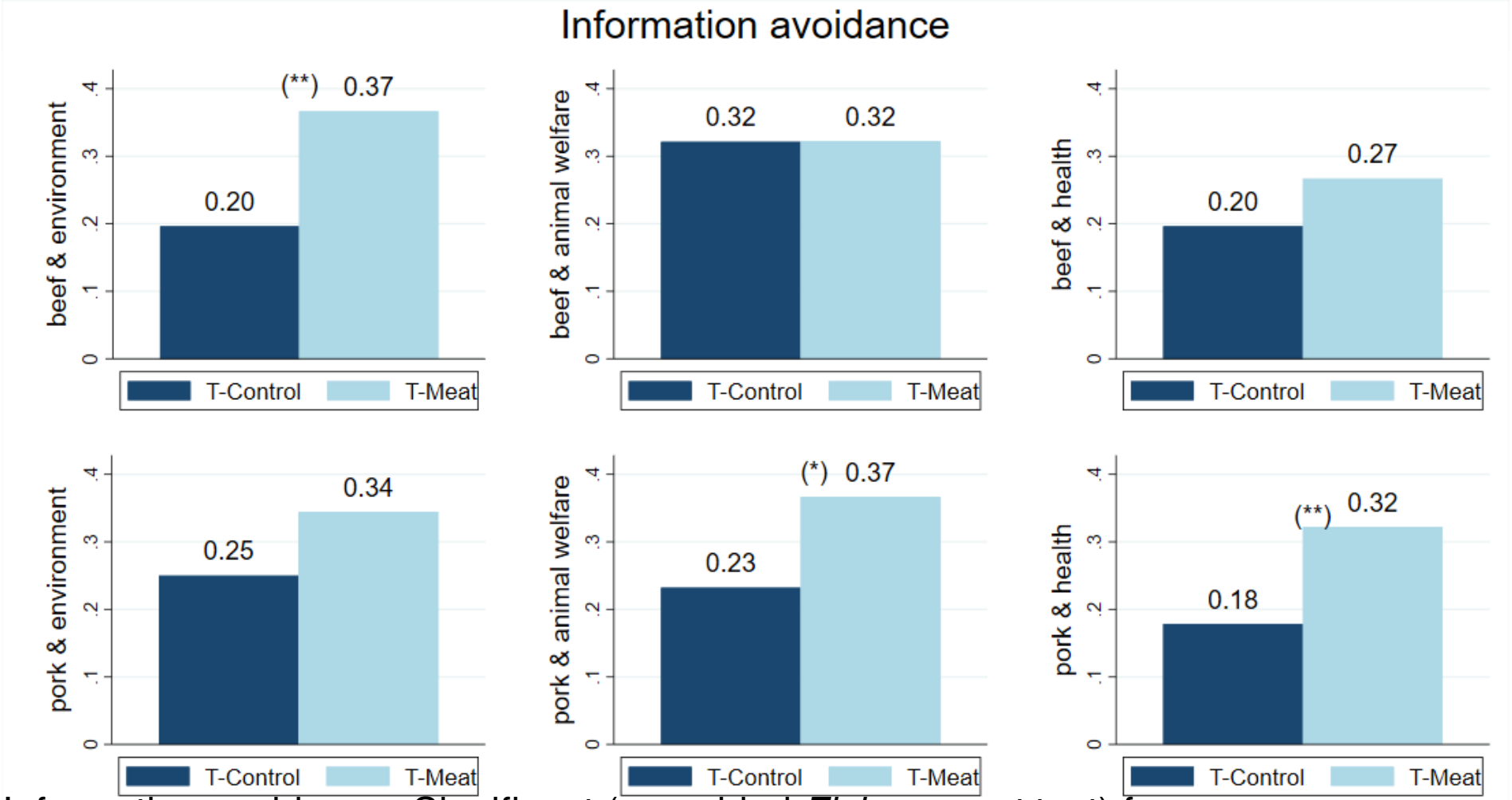
H1: Information avoidance by information item



Information avoidance: Significant (one-sided *Fisher exact* test) for

- beef & environment
- pork & animal welfare
- pork & health

H1: Information avoidance by information item



Information avoidance: Significant (one-sided *Fisher exact* test) for

- beef & environment
- pork & animal welfare
- pork & health

H1: Information Avoidance - Beef

Table 2: Information avoidance for beef: probit model

	(1) Info avoider beef	(2) Info avoider beef	(3) Info avoidance beef & env.	(4) Info avoidance beef & env.	(5) Info avoidance beef & a-w.	(6) Info avoidance beef & a-w.	(7) Info avoidance beef & health	(8) Info avoidance beef & health
main								
T_Meat	0.424*	0.442*	0.514**	0.529**	0.00221	-0.0101	0.232	0.286
	(0.235)	(0.248)	(0.234)	(0.247)	(0.222)	(0.237)	(0.238)	(0.251)
Female		0.135		0.0695		0.157		0.366
		(0.238)		(0.234)		(0.231)		(0.249)
Age		0.0793***		0.0782***		0.0945***		0.0698***
		(0.0275)		(0.0277)		(0.0284)		(0.0262)
Lab_dummy		-0.0117		0.0131		0.0238		-0.239
		(0.238)		(0.235)		(0.234)		(0.245)
_cons	-0.854***	-2.824***	-0.854***	-2.763***	-0.464***	-2.800***	-0.854***	-2.673***
	(0.192)	(0.719)	(0.192)	(0.721)	(0.174)	(0.722)	(0.192)	(0.692)
N	146	145	146	145	146	145	146	145

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Marginal effects: Meat consumption increases the probability of...

- ...becoming a beef information avoider by $14.2^{\star}$ *p.p.*
- ...avoiding information about beef & environment by $17.7^{\star\star}$ *p.p.*

H1: Information Avoidance - Pork

Table 4: Information avoidance for pork: probit model

	(1) Info avoider pork	(2) Info avoider pork	(3) Info avoidance pork & env.	(4) Info avoidance pork & env.	(5) Info avoidance pork & a-w.	(6) Info avoidance pork & a-w.	(7) Info avoidance pork & health	(8) Info avoidance pork & health
main								
T_Meat	0.361	0.387	0.274	0.245	0.391*	0.421*	0.459*	0.544**
	(0.229)	(0.240)	(0.227)	(0.237)	(0.229)	(0.237)	(0.239)	(0.251)
Female		-0.207		-0.188		-0.108		-0.0106
		(0.227)		(0.225)		(0.225)		(0.235)
Age		0.0528**		0.0465*		0.0330		0.0464*
		(0.0262)		(0.0260)		(0.0251)		(0.0256)
Lab_dummy		-0.0821		0.118		-0.104		-0.300
		(0.231)		(0.229)		(0.229)		(0.240)
Constant	-0.732***	-1.835***	-0.674***	-1.697**	-0.732***	-1.413**	-0.921***	-1.931***
	(0.185)	(0.670)	(0.182)	(0.666)	(0.185)	(0.645)	(0.196)	(0.665)
Observations	146	145	146	145	146	145	146	145

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Marginal effects: Meat consumption increases the probability of...

- (...becoming a pork information avoider by $12.7^{n.s.,p=0.114}$ *p.p.*.)
- ...avoiding information about pork & animal welfare by $13.8^{\star}$ *p.p.*
- ...avoiding information about pork & health by $15.0^{\star}$ *p.p.*

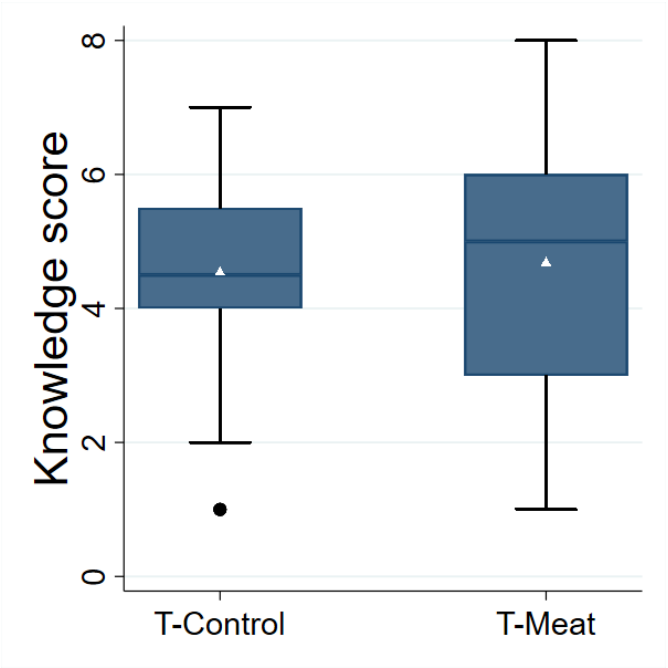
H1: Summary

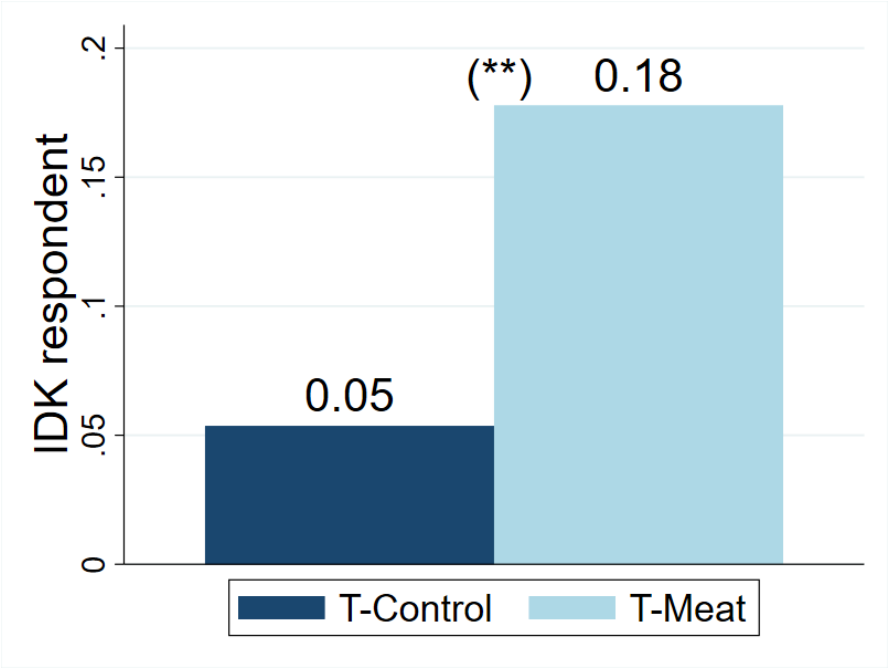
We do not find that meat consumption lowers the mean WTP, but it does significantly lower the probability of seeking information.

Result

Meat consumption can increase information avoidance.

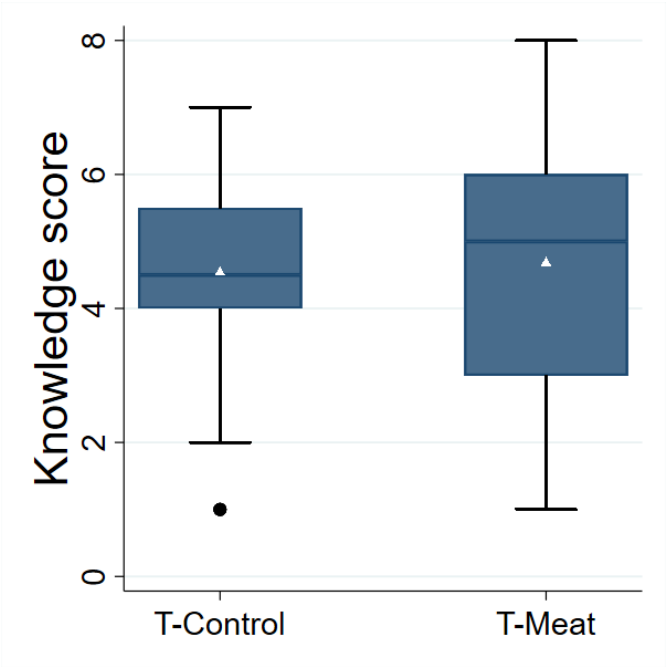
H2: Meat consumption hampers knowledge

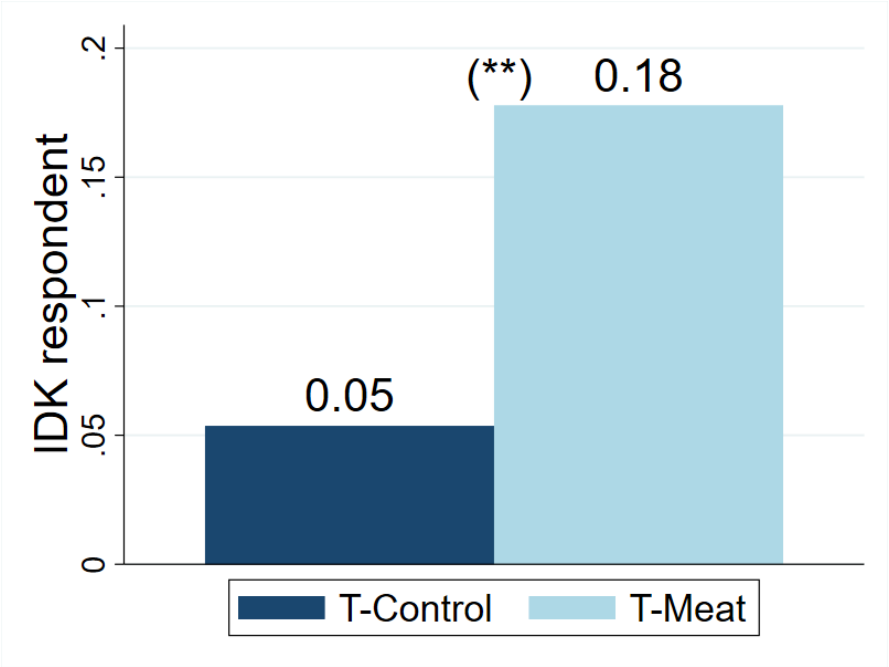




- Mean knowledge score does not reduce significantly (*t*-test).
- Frequency of IDK respondents, i.e., respondents who tick at least once "I don't know", increases significantly (one-sided *Fisher exact* test).

H2: Meat consumption hampers knowledge





- Mean knowledge score does not reduce significantly (*t*-test).
- Frequency of IDK respondents, i.e., respondents who tick at least once “I don’t know”, increases significantly (one-sided *Fisher exact* test).

H2: Meat consumption hampers knowledge

Table with marginal effects of probit regressions

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	IDK respondent	IDK respondent	IDK respondent	IDK respondent
T_Meat	0.135**	0.157***	0.102**	0.108**
	(0.0592)	(0.0576)	(0.0427)	(0.0439)
Controls	no	yes	no	yes
Survey IDK resp.	no	no	yes	yes
Observations	146	145	146	145

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Marginal effects: Meat consumption increases the probability of...

- ...becoming a IDK respondent by 13.5** *p.p.*

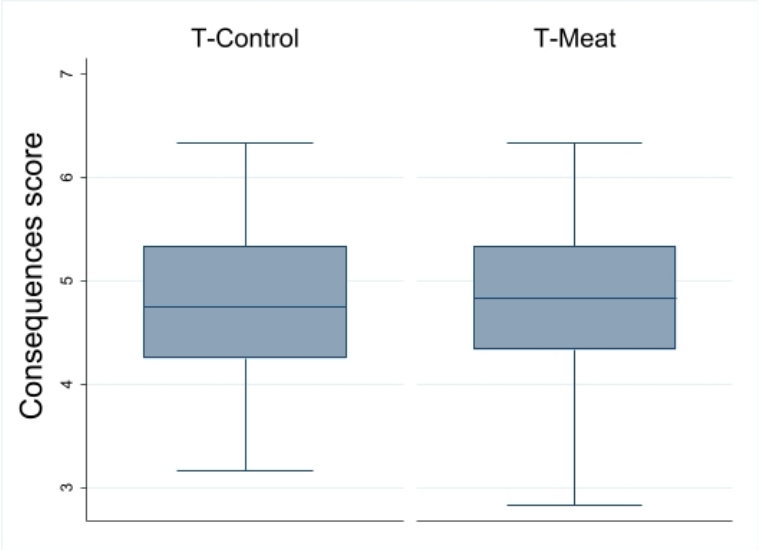
H2: Summary

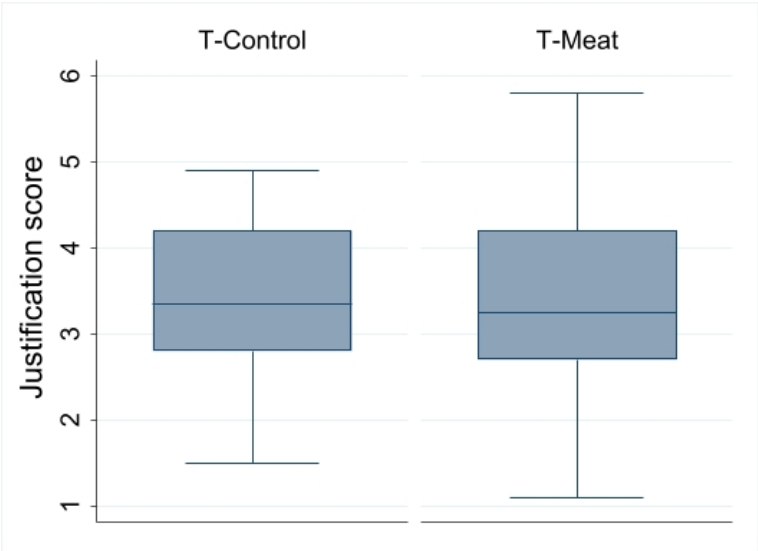
We do not find that meat consumption significantly lowers the knowledge about meat, but it does significantly increase the probability of ticking “I don’t know”.

Result

Meat consumption increases the probability of indicating not to know.

H3 and H4: Attitudes





H3: Meat consumption lowers estimation of its negative consequences.
H4: Meat consumption fosters meat justification attitudes.

- Mean consequences score does not reduce significantly (*t*-test).
- Mean justification score does not increase significantly (*t*-test).

Result

No effect of meat consumption on attitudes found.

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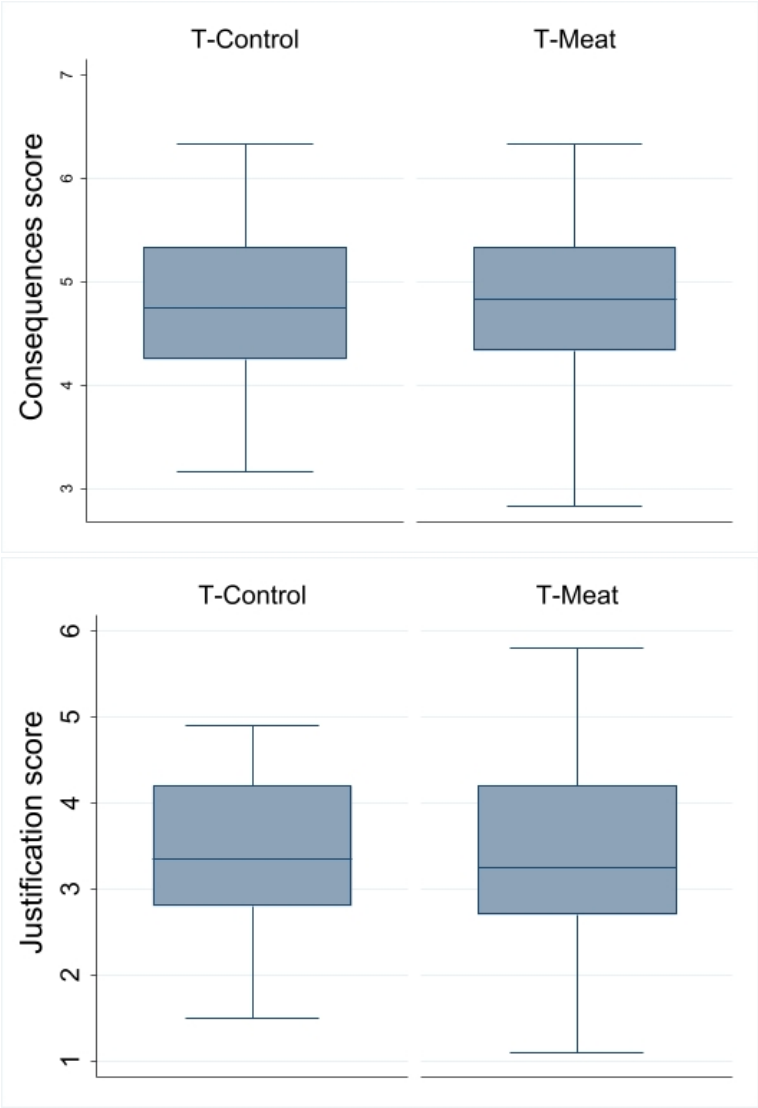

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Further, Explorative Results

Warning:

- ! Cross-sectional correlations!
- ! Not pre-registered hypotheses!

- Information avoidance correlates positively with **age** and **right-wing** political orientation.
- Meat consumption outside the lab correlates positively with information avoidance, negatively with WTP, negatively with Consequences score, and positively with Justification score.

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Conclusion

Experiment

- Influence of meat consumption on...
  - information acquisition
  - knowledge
  - attitudes
- Mixed results: Meat consumption...
  - triggers information avoidance!
  - triggers indication not to know!

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Discussion

Thank you!