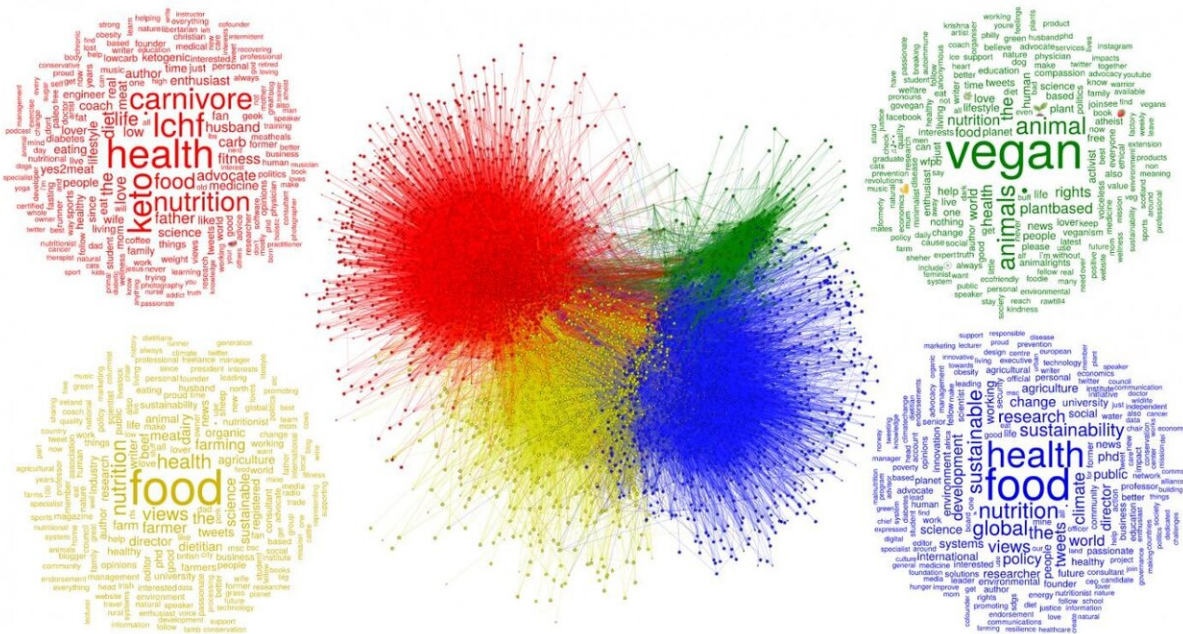


Pro-meat campaign may have turned some social media users against planetary health diet

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Follower networks coloured by community and word clouds of the profiles of users in each community. Words have a size proportional to their frequency in profile text. The largest community (blue) is generally positive, with the second largest (red) very negative, and the third one (yellow) displaying a mix of sentiments. The fourth community (green) is composed of vegan diet supporters that opposed #yes2meat independently of the EAT-Lancet Commission. Credit: The Lancet

In January 2019, *The Lancet's* report "Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT-Lancet Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems" received significant positive international media coverage. The report concluded that greatly reduced meat and dairy consumption would improve health and environmental outcomes and proposed the "Planetary Health" diet.

However, an analysis of [social media](#) campaigns linked to the launch of the EAT-Lancet commission shows that days before the report's launch, online pro-meat advocacy began to consolidate around the hashtag #yes2meat. In the months following the report's launch, tweets attacking its findings surpassed balanced communications. The critics of the planetary health diet reached 26 million people on Twitter—compared with 25 million from academics and others promoting the research—despite having fewer followers (1.3 million compared with 3.45).

The [social media analysis](#), based on 8.5 million tweets by 4,278 Twitter users, is published in the latest issue of *The Lancet*.

The authors, Victor Galaz, David Garcia, and Stefan Daume found:

- The digital countermovement was organized days ahead of the official launch of the EAT Lancet report. This has allowed the diffusion of critical, and at times defamatory, information from social media and alternative media platforms about the report.
- On Twitter, negative sentiments and information surpassed balanced communication about the report from conventional media outlets, by the journal *The Lancet*, and science institutions involved in the scientific work.
- The report and the ambitious communication campaign generated a clear digital backlash, and spurred the creation of a #yes2meat movement. Over time, this skeptical movement may

have helped sway undecided Twitter users.

- The backlash was not driven by so called "social bots," but by users mainly from the US, UK, Australia and Europe.

The #yes2meat hashtag proved very successful with a constantly growing number of tweets over several months after the report's release.

"While conversations in social media such as Twitter only give you a glimpse of discussions online, it's indeed worrying to see such a clear and successful digital backlash to insights provided by an ambitious scientific synthesis such as the EAT Lancet," says Victor Galaz, co-author and Deputy Director of the Stockholm Resilience Centre at Stockholm University.

The authors found that over time, Twitter users originally characterized as "undecided" retweeted critics six times more frequently than supporters, indicating that the skeptical movement may have helped sway their opinion.

The findings highlight that research organizations need to do more to manage online advocacy and disinformation campaigns. "It is critical to understand information dynamics of consumers and [advocacy groups](#) in the digital world," says David Garcia, computational social scientist at the Complexity Science Hub Vienna and the Medical University of Vienna. "This study shows that scientific communication in social media is much more complex than through traditional mass media. However, now we can capture and analyze public conversations to tackle that complexity when talking to the wider public," Garcia adds.

"Social [media](#) are now an integral part of the conversation on and with science. Researchers communicating critical research need to consider tools such as those used in our analysis to better understand the public impact of their research," states Stefan Daume, data scientist and co-

author of the study.

More information: "#EAT-Lancet vs. #yes2meat: Understanding the digital backlash to the 'planetary health diet'" is published online 25 November in The Lancet and in the print edition 7 December.

GitHub repository with code and analysis, and additional visualizations:
github.com/dgarcia-eu/EATLancetR

Provided by Stockholm Resilience Centre

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