

# Can masculine marketing convince more men to eat vegan?

October 5 2023

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Eating more plant-based meals is better for our health and better for the planet. But cultural preferences are significant barriers to reducing meat consumption—especially for men, who are underrepresented among

vegans and vegetarians. Studies have found that eating meat is associated with masculinity, and that gender stereotypes label plant-based diets as suitable for women but not men. So is it possible to change the perception of plant-based food with marketing, and convince men to eat more of it?

"Men might be less inclined to consume vegan food due to the need to perform gender," said Alma Scholz, lead author of a new study published in *Frontiers in Communication*. "However, with vegan food being framed in a masculine way, men might feel less resistance and become more likely to consume it."

## The root of the problem

While surveys have shown that smaller portion sizes and healthier foods that contain more vegetables are often considered more suitable for women, heartier foods with more [meat](#) are equally associated with men. Consuming meat is culturally associated with strength and masculinity, and meat-free meals are often considered less suitable for men. Women also typically express more concern for [animal welfare](#), a common reason for choosing a [vegan diet](#).

While this may be changing—a recent survey found that vegetarianism was not considered unsuitable for men, although veganism still was—men are generally much more concerned about making consumer choices that reinforce their [gender identity](#) than women are, so men's meat consumption remains much higher. Changing a product's presentation can affect whether it's considered more masculine or feminine, but this typically affects women less than men.

"Since [gender stereotypes](#) also include food choices, men are more inclined to consume in a gendered way to steer social perception. Otherwise, they might be considered less masculine," explained Scholz,

who performed the research at the University of Würzburg and is now studying at Stockholm University.

## Marketing the menu

Scholz and her colleague Dr. Jan Lenhart, at the University of Bamberg, sought to investigate whether it was possible to change men's minds about vegan foods by changing their marketing, and whether men with more traditional views of masculinity would be easier to influence with masculine marketing. They recruited participants online and provided them with descriptions of several dishes.

These descriptions contained words that were either conventionally associated with the [dish](#) or which were typically associated with 'masculine' foods. The researchers asked participants to rate the dishes and their suitability for men and women.

The researchers also measured male participants' identification with different forms of masculinity, as well as all participants' attitudes towards veganism. They asked participants to report the amount of meat they typically ate and their reasons for choosing their diet.

## Seeds of change

Scholz and Lenhart found that women in their sample were more likely to be vegan, and that they rated veganism higher than men did. The most common reasons cited for choosing veganism were ethical and health reasons, and the more reasons someone gave for reducing their [meat consumption](#), the more they were likely to reduce it. Participants who knew [vegans](#) were more likely to have a positive attitude towards meat-free dishes.

Men's preference for vegan dishes didn't change with the altered descriptions of the dishes, but the altered description did change the perception of the dishes: they were considered less feminine and more neutral. Men who identified less with traditional masculinity were more affected by masculine marketing when they rated dishes, but the scientists found that this was most of their male sample: a more diverse sample might show different results.

But a short-term intervention, said the scientists, is not enough to change what's on the menu.

"With a short intervention, the perception regarding gender suitability of vegan food was shifted away from femininity and closer toward a neutral position," said Scholz. "Even if this shift did not go all the way, long-term interventions might have the potential of even stronger shifts, resulting in an improvement in men's liking of vegan dishes, and are thus worth further exploration."

**More information:** Alma Scholz et al, Masculinity and Veganism: The effect of linking vegan dishes with masculinity on men's attitudes towards vegan food, *Frontiers in Communication* (2023). [DOI: 10.3389/fcomm.2023.1244471](https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2023.1244471)

Provided by Frontiers

Citation: Can masculine marketing convince more men to eat vegan? (2023, October 5) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-10-masculine-convince-men-vegan.html>

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