Overcoming Strategic Avoidance: The Role of Self-Affirmation on Exposure to Information about Animals Reared for Consumption

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Abstract

The consumption of animal products is in stark contrast to moral values humans hold about the treatment of sentient beings. The discrepancy between moral beliefs and behaviours manifests in psychologically painful dilemmas, such as the meat paradox and meat-related cognitive dissonance. To prevent and relieve emotional distress, some individuals strategically avoid reminders about the mistreatment of animals reared for consumption. Avoiding information that conflicts with personal beliefs changes the conceptions, thus beliefs, about animals. This is in a subconscious attempt to fit beliefs to current behaviour. However, interventions aimed at sustainable behaviour change rather desire a change of behaviour to align with properly informed beliefs, instead. This study investigated whether self-affirmation is an effective means to decrease such strategic avoiding tendencies. Two experimental studies were conducted. Study 1, set in the context of a social media scenario, showed an effect of self-affirmation on a hypothetical behavioural choice of information exposure, but no effect on general strategic avoidance tendencies. Study 2, set in the context of a media streaming scenario, could not replicate those findings, as self-affirmation neither affected the behavioural choice, nor general strategic avoidance tendencies. The findings suggest that the effectiveness of self-affirmation may be context-dependent, with social incentives possibly playing a crucial role. To prove beneficial for interventions aimed at moral behaviour change, more research is needed to precisely identify conditions under which self-affirmation can be used as a reliable tool to consistently decrease strategic avoidance tendencies.

Introduction

Consumption of animals and products thereof contradicts moral values held about sentient beings, such as to not harm or kill them. Nevertheless, most people continue to consume products derived from animals and tolerates their mistreatment. To avoid

psychologically painful moral dilemmas and thus align moral values and behaviour, some individuals strategically avoid information about animals typically reared and slaughtered for consumption, as the confronting material would elicit the need to either change a person's behaviour or their beliefs about animals. The aim of this paper is to investigate the role of self-affirmation on a person's willingness to expose themselves to information related to animals reared for consumption, thereby extending existing knowledge on information communication strategies targeted at moral behaviour change.

Theoretical Foundations

The Meat Paradox and Meat-Related Cognitive Dissonance

In the following sections, we will highlight the role of psychological research in addressing the issue of animal product consumption. Then, we will show why psychological research into this issue is also relevant to the individual. While it is evident that consumption of animal products is societally and dietarily established and cherished (Bastian & Loughnan, 2017; Šedová et al., 2016), one cannot overlook the distress individuals experience when faced with evidence of suffering of other sentient beings. With emotional responses ranging from anger to disgust, and contempt towards the entity that intentionally inflicts harm, consumers of meat or other animal-derived products create tension between conflicting wishes and needs, such as exploiting and caring for animals. Researchers Bastian and Loughnan (2017) coined this "the meat paradox". According to the researchers, the harm brought upon others due to direct morally troublesome behaviour or indirect responsibility for mistreatment through dietary choices conflicts with the generalised individual's self-perception as a morally behaving person. Being presented with evidence of mistreatment of animals reared for consumption versus the desire to consume products derived from animals thus represents a moral conflict resulting in psychological distress, as further theorised by the framework of meat-related cognitive dissonance (MRCD).

Rothgerber, who established the theory of meat-related cognitive dissonance (2020) in moral psychology, draws the basis for his framework from among others Bandura's (1999) work about moral disengagement manoeuvres and Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance. According to Festinger (1957), people seek to reduce cognitive dissonance, which manifests as intra-personal, psychologically painful conflicts between moral values and behaviour. This need for reduction of distress, fuelled by the experience of intense emotions, can be achieved by mechanisms of three broader, overarching categories: Through changing beliefs, changing perceptions about own behaviour, or changing behaviour, with the latter often being the desired process psychological interventions aim for. Rothgerber (2020) extends this by applying the theory specifically in the sector of individual meat consumption, thereby identifying concrete actions individuals take upon experiencing moral dissonance. Such actions can be denying animal minds, restructuring meat as crucial in society and diet, blaming others, and displaying moral outrage. However, Rothgerber (2020) additionally highlights that MRCD can be avoided by blocking triggers of MRCD before it occurs: People avoid, ignore, and dissociate from information or reminders about animal suffering.

Strategic Avoidance of Information

Literature shows that some individuals strategically avoid information that conflicts with their personal beliefs. In their research on consumer segments, Onwezen and van der Weele (2016) identified several clusters of consumers handling MRCD and their respective attributes. The cluster most important to our research consists of *strategic avoiders*. It is interesting to note that strategic avoiders tend to only avoid information about animals reared for consumption, not about animals that are considered companions (pets). This reflects the alignment of moral beliefs and behaviours towards companion animals, but a misalignment for animals reared for consumption. Strategically avoiding consumers do not experience negative emotions (MRCD) upon the consumption of meat due to their willingness to avoid

information and reminders of farm-animal welfare, thereby blocking triggers of MRCD. However, strategic avoiders do feel responsible for their choices and actions, as opposed to truly indifferent consumers. In effect, consumers belonging to this segment often do change their behaviour when exposure to information about animals reared for consumption cannot be avoided, meaning they do not buy or consume meat as a result, at least in the short term. In Onwezen and van der Weele's (2016) research, 27% to 28% of the participants were classified as strategically ignorant towards animal welfare when faced with consumptive choices. This means that, at a given moment, more than a quarter of consumers would choose not to buy products for which animals were harmed if they were recently exposed to information related to the treatment of animals reared for consumption. This insight is invaluable for the development of interventions aimed at changing moral behaviour towards animals reared for consumption.

Research into determinants of behaviour change for strategic ignorant consumers is small, as investigating and measuring real-time ignorance is paradox by nature. With the results of Onwezen and van der Weele (2016) indicating that responsibility should be helpful in classifying instantaneous consumer behaviour, this can hopefully be overcome. However, there is another body of research that, too, deals with strategic ignorance. Health science investigates patients' strategic avoidance of risk information relevant to the individual, and how to overcome it.

Self-Affirmation as a Determinant of Information Avoidance

According to Howell and Shepperd (2012), patients tend to decline receiving information on possible personal diseases or risks as the information is perceived to be threatening to the self, in this instance to personal health. The more threatening the information is viewed to be, the higher the likelihood that patients decline to receive diagnoses and medical advice. Health science research describes self-affirmation, which

refers to the reinforcement of personal core values and identity, as an effective way of changing patients' perception of threat to the self that information carries (Howell and Shepperd, 2012; Branković et al., 2023). The authors explain that by reinforcing self-identity through reminders of personal virtues, people maintain a positive self-image, reducing the potential for information to threaten the self. Branković et al. (2023) applied this framework particularly to reception of information about health risks related to the consumption of meat. Again, patients were less likely to perceive the information as threatening and more likely to agree to exposure after undergoing experimental manipulation that increased self-affirmation. Establishing an individual's self-worth therefore seems to alter processing of information, leading to a change of perception and thus to openness to exposure to information.

Research Gap and Hypothesis

Applying this knowledge to moral psychology, especially regarding beliefs and behaviours about animals raised for consumption, offers a promising way to address strategic information avoidance. While the presented experimental research on self-affirmation and information avoidance argued to be valid according to the patients' sense of threat to the self (here: personal health), I argue that research on self-affirmation and exposure to information about animal minds and animal welfare can be similarly hypothesised to be relevant to the self, as this information is potentially threatening to an individuals' moral beliefs and actions. As established above, perceived personally threatening information will then either be wilfully blocked (strategic avoidance) and undesired behaviour will continue, or it sends the individual into MRCD, which is likewise probable to lead to concealing mechanisms which alleviate the psychological distress without inducing the desired behavioural change.

Subsequently, in the present study, I investigated whether affirming an individual's self-worth affects their willingness to expose themselves to information about the mistreatment of animals in modern agriculture. It was hypothesised that self-affirmation

positively impacts the willingness to receive information about animals reared for consumption.

<h2 style="text-align:center">Study 1: Information Avoidance in Social Media Scenario</h2>

Methods

Participants

The sample size was a priori determined. Based on previous studies (e.g., Branković et al., 2023), we expected a small to medium effect size. We conducted a sensitivity analysis using G*Power 3.1.9.7 with $d = 0.35$, 80% power, and $\alpha = .05$ (Faul et al., 2007). The most sensitive measure of the difference between two independent means (*t*-test) showed that we needed 102 participants per group (204 total).

For this study, participants were recruited at the University of Twente through convenience sampling, as well as through the SONA system, which rewards students with participation credits. Additionally, each participant had the chance to win a 50€ voucher if they opted in for a raffle. The research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the BMS faculty at University of Twente (request/approval nr. 240397).

With 88 initial participants, the target of 204 participants had not been reached. Data screening showed that it was necessary to delete the answers of four participants due to incompleteness. Further, we deleted responses of one participant who identified themselves as vegan, another participant who revoked consent after debriefing, and one participant due to being underage. The final sample consisted of 81 participants (30.9% male, 69.1% female). Age ranged from 18 to 57 years ($M = 23.02$, $SD = 5.06$). Nationalities include German (43.21%), Dutch (27.16%), and others (29.63%), such as Spanish, Greek, and Chinese.

Materials

Ranking and Writing Task. In line with the research conducted by Branković et al. (2023), to affirm the participants' self through strengthening their moral self-perception, we

presented the experimental condition with ten values that participants needed to rank from "very important to me" to "not at all important to me" (see Appendix A). The control condition ranked colours by favourite. The following writing task, in which participants of the experimental group were required to write about a time they displayed their highest ranked value, aimed to instil a sense of strengthened self-worth. The control condition was asked to write about the significance of their favourite colour, instead.

Vignette. In the first study, we presented the following hypothetical situation: "Imagine you are on Instagram, and you find the profile of a good friend from your time in secondary school. You want to know what your old friend's life is like now and want to catch up, so you consider following your friend. When looking at your friend's profile, you notice posts about the suffering of farm-animals with the aim to increase awareness that animals feel pain and emotions. You were not aware before that your friend is involved with animal welfare. Following your friend would mean that you will see such posts in your timeline from time to time. What do you do?". We offered two response options ("I follow this old friend" and "I do not follow this old friend").

The situation in which participants should immerse themselves needed to be relatable. Using social media can be a daily occurrence for many people, therefore we decided to situate the vignette on the platform *Instagram*. Unlike choosing content about animal suffering in modern agriculture through the means of advertisement posts (e.g. for a petition or an informative film), which people might be more inclined to ignore compared to friend's posts, we decided to provide an incentivising, albeit realistic scenario in which participants come across the social media profile of an old friend and their posted contents about animal suffering.

By specifying that participants should imagine that they were not aware before that their old friend is concerned with animal suffering-related topics, we aimed to create a

situation where participants were newly confronted with the possibility of exposure to this type of information. This, consequently, would result in participants having to make an active decision whether they are willing to expose themselves to information about animal cruelty in modern agriculture, and possibly balance the incentivising setup that is created through wanting to reconnect with an old friend.

Information Avoidance Scale. To measure the degree and tendency of information avoidance in both the experimental and the control condition for later comparison, we made use of the Information Avoidance Scale by Howell and Shepperd (2016). The scale consists of eight items with stem sentences. Only the specific content of information needs to be filled in by the user. The IAS uses a 7-point Likert scale to indicate agreement with the statements. Items 3, 5, 7, and 8 have reverse phrasing (positive instead of negative), which needed to be considered for scoring. Consistently with the vignette, we focused on the theme of animal suffering. The eight items as used by us can be seen in Appendix B.

Design and Procedure

The research made use of a between-subject experimental design. Participants were randomly assigned to either intervention or control group. Each participant made a behavioural choice whether they would follow a friend on social media who posts about animal mistreatment (see Vignette) and subsequently filled in a scale that measured information avoidance. Data collection took place from April 04, 2024, until May 14, 2024.

Participants accessed the study via the online survey platform *Qualtrics*. They were provided with information on the study procedure and purpose of the research and asked to give consent digitally. Once briefed, we asked demographic questions about age, gender, and nationality, before moving onto the experimental intervention of the study.

For the self-affirmation intervention, participants in the experimental group were given a list of values (such as being connected with friends and family, solidarity in society,

creativity, etc.). Participants proceeded to rank these values from most to least important personally, followed by a short writing task on a time they applied or showed their highest ranked value in a real-life situation. We gave guidance about the form of content we wanted participants to provide ("Please write a few sentences about your first-ranked value: Why is it important to you? If you struggle to come up with an example, you could, for instance, describe a situation from personal experience or a historical event that showed how your first-ranked value is important to you"). Simultaneously, the control group ranked colours from favourite to least favourite and moved on to a similar writing task about the favourite colour. Here, again, we provided guidance ("Please write a few sentences about your favourite colour: Why is it appealing to you? Is there a specific object you relate to this colour?").

Following the ranking tasks, we asked participants of both groups to carefully read and immerse themselves into the description of a situation, proceeding to inform participants that they will be asked to make a decision. Once they made a hypothetical behavioural choice, all participants were then asked to indicate agreement with eight statements on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" on strategic information avoidance (e.g. "I would rather not know about the suffering of animals meant for consumption.").

Then, participants moved on to a check for the exclusion criterion. We provided a brief description of veganism ("Vegan people do not consume any products derived from animals [meat, dairy, eggs, fur, leather, etc.]"), after which we asked the participant whether they consider themselves to be vegan. Next followed the option to leave remarks about the study, noting that "this is not mandatory, nor does not influence [the participant's] previously given answers in any way", and a debrief explaining that during the initial study description, information had been left out. We clarified that the research specifically is about moral

decision-making and exposure to information in the context of consumption of animal products, and that this information was withheld to not influence responses.

Results

Prior to conducting the planned analyses, the data was assessed to see if parametric assumptions were met. Specifically, we analysed whether the data met the requirements of linearity with a jitter plot. We considered normality by assessing the bell curve shape of a histogram of the data and through means of the Shapiro-Wilk test and examined homogeneity of variance with the help of the Bartlett's test. Results indicated a good fit of the data for parametric testing.

Effect of Self Affirmation on Behavioural Choice

To test whether participants in the experimental condition opted to expose themselves to information ("I follow this old friend") more often than in the control group, we conducted a *Chi*-square test. The results revealed a significant relation between self-affirmation and exposure to information ($\chi^2(1) = 7.18$, $p = .007$), see Table 1 for the distribution of behavioural choices per condition. As predicted, participants in the experimental group were significantly less likely to make the behavioural choice of avoiding information compared to the experimental group.

Table 1

Distribution of Behavioural Choices per Research Condition of Study 1

Research Condition	Behavioural Choice		Total
	Exposure	Avoidance (%)	
Control	24	17 (*41.46%*)	41
Intervention	35	5 (*12.50%*)	40
Total	59	22 (*27.16%*)	81

Effect of Self Affirmation on Mean Information Avoidance Scores

To test the hypothesis that self-affirmation decreases information avoidance tendencies, we conducted a two-sample *t*-test to compare the mean scores of both research conditions on the Information Avoidance Scale. Results showed that there was no significant difference between the experimental condition (*M* = 3.35, *SD* = 1.10) and the control condition (*M* = 3.52, *SD* = 1.01), *t*(79) = 0.70, *p* = 0.48, 95% *CI* [-0.30, 0.63]. As opposed to our prediction, participants' mean scores on the Information Avoidance scale in the experimental condition were not significantly lower compared to the control condition.

Exploratory Analyses

Factor Analysis of Information Avoidance Scale. We additionally conducted an exploratory factor analysis, as the Information Avoidance Scale by Howell and Shepperd (2016) does not provide full statements, but rather sentence stems, and therefore requires the researcher to fill in the blanks. Due to concerns about decreased validity of the results, we decided to explore whether the scale, as used by us, loads on more than one factor (information avoidance), which could influence the results of the *t*-test. Despite our efforts, we could not find discernible factors nor influences on the results of the *t*-test. For a detailed overview of the analyses, please refer to Appendix C.

Effect of "Connectedness" as Highest Value on Information Avoidance. During data screening, it was found that that the context of the vignette (connecting with a friend) overlapped with one of the values in the experimental condition ("being connected with friends and family"). When a participant chose this value as their most important, they had to perform a short writing task on it as well. This could have potentially led to a priming effect in participants with regard to the following behavioural choice. We used logistic regression to investigate whether participants in the experimental condition, who ranked "being connected with friends and family" as their highest trait, showed a significant difference in behavioural

choice compared to participants in both conditions who did not prioritise this trait. However, results of logistic regression suggested no significant effect of choosing "being connected with friends and family" as highest value on the behavioural choice ($\beta = -0.25$, $SE = 0.98$, $z = -0.25$, $p = 0.80$).

Study 2: Information Avoidance in Media Streaming Scenario

Study 1 painted a mixed picture, as we found an effect of self-affirmation on a hypothetical behavioural choice, but not on overall information avoidance scores. To fathom and further contextualise the results of our first study, and explore generalisability, we conducted a systematic replication study.

Methods

Participants

The required number of participants stayed the same as in study 1. In study 2, the initial sample consisted of 315 participants who were recruited through the study participant pool system *Prolific*. The respondents participated voluntarily and received monetary compensation of 1.50GBP. The research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the BMS faculty at University of Twente (request/approval nr. 240802). Participants who identified themselves as vegan were excluded, as they already ceased consumption of animal products. Given that the aim of this research was to gain insight into the role of self-affirmation on avoidance of information about animal suffering in modern agriculture, with the ultimate goal of facilitating a societal transition towards less consumption of animal products, vegans were excluded as they do not meet the target demographic. Data screening showed that it was necessary to delete the answers of 14 participants due to incompleteness, and the answers of another nine respondents, as they identified themselves as vegan.

The final sample consisted of 292 participants (65.1% female, 40.8 male, 0.34% non-binary/third gender, 0.68% preferred not to disclose their gender). The age of participants

ranged from 18 to 83 years ($M = 38.6$, $SD = 13.13$). Participants' nationalities were British (64.0%), German (8.9%), US American (4.8%), Irish (4.5%), and others (17.8%), such as Turkish and Belgian.

Materials, Design, and Procedure

The ranking and writing tasks as well as the Information Avoidance scale were taken over from the first study. Phrasing and presenting remained the same. The research design and procedure were similar for both studies. Data collection took place from May 08, 2024, until May 09, 2024. A different vignette had been used in the second study to test the effect of self-affirmation in a different situational context.

Vignette. We presented the following hypothetical situation: "Imagine you are scrolling through your favourite streaming platform, looking for something new to watch. You stumble upon a highly rated documentary series. The series explores various aspects of animal agriculture and will expose the cruelty towards and exploitation of animals. You're intrigued by the premise and consider watching it to gain insights into this topic. What do you do?". We gave two options to choose from, either to either indicate willingness to watch the documentary series, or to indicate no willingness to watch the documentary series.

During creating the vignette, we took into consideration that the hypothetical situation should be relatable to create valid data. We therefore chose to use the scenario of using a media streaming service, as this can be an everyday activity for many people. Similarly, we paid attention to making the description of the situation as clear and concise as possible to avoid any ambiguity. To this end, we did for example exclusively refer to the content of the documentary series to be about *animal suffering*, not *animal welfare*, as the latter could be mistaken to show flourishing, well-treated animals. This distinction was important to us, as we were particularly interested in people's avoidance of information that *challenges*, as opposed to *solidifies*, their current moral considerations of animals.

Results

The following section presents the results of analyses conducted to investigate the hypothesis that self-affirmation decreases avoidance of information about animal suffering in modern agriculture.

Effect of Self Affirmation on Behavioural Choice

In line with our predictions and the results from study 1, we performed a *Chi*-square test to evaluate whether participants in the intervention group made the behavioural choice to avoid information less often than participants in the control group. Results, however, showed no significant effect of self-affirmation on the behavioural choice outcomes ($\chi^2(1) = 0.20$, $p = .65$). See Table 2 for the distribution of behavioural choices per research condition. Contrary to our prediction and the results of study 1, participants in the intervention condition were not significantly less likely to avoid information in a hypothetical scenario.

Table 2

Number of Behavioural Choices per Research Condition in Study 2

Research Condition	Behavioural Choice		Total
	Exposure	Avoidance (%)	
Control	95	57 (*60.00%*)	152
Intervention	92	48 (*52.17%*)	140
Total	187	105 (*56.15%*)	292

Effect of Self Affirmation on Mean Information Avoidance Scores

To test the hypothesis that self-affirmation decreases information avoidance tendencies, we conducted a *t*-test on the mean scores of the IAS for both research conditions. After reversing items 3, 5, 7, and 8, results revealed no significant difference in means between the control condition ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 1.16$) and the intervention condition ($M =$

3.53, $SD = 1.22$), $t(290) = 0.05$, $p = 0.96$, 95% CI [-0.26, 0.28]. Contrary to our hypothesis, participants in the intervention group did not show significantly lower mean scores on the IAS.

General Discussion

The primary aim of this research was to investigate the role of self-affirmation on an individual's choice to expose themselves to information about animal suffering in modern agriculture. The hypothesis posited that self-affirmation would decrease information avoidance, thereby addressing the moral dissonance through behaviour change. The results from two studies provided a mixed picture regarding the effectiveness of self-affirmation as a tool for reducing information avoidance related to animal suffering.

Summary of Findings

In Study 1, participants in the self-affirmation intervention more often chose to expose themselves to information about animal suffering on social media. However, as opposed to our hypothesis, information avoidance scores did not differ between the experimental and control condition. This indicates that while self-affirmation might influence specific behavioural choices, it does not necessarily change the general tendency towards information avoidance. Study 2 was conducted in the context of choosing to watch a documentary about animal suffering. The self-affirmation intervention did not affect participants' avoidance of information when compared to the control condition. Similarly, self-affirmation did not decrease information avoidance scores.

Interpretation of Results

In study 2, we could not replicate the effect of self-affirmation on the behavioural choice found in study 1. This discrepancy suggests that the effectiveness of self-affirmation may be context dependent. In Study 1, the context of reconnecting with a friend on social media might have provided additional social incentives that led to reduced information

avoidance. The desire to stay connected with a friend could have interacted with the self-affirmation intervention, and consequently lowered the barrier to engaging with uncomfortable information that challenges current behaviour. That might also be why, despite an effect on the behavioural choice, there was no effect on general information avoidance tendencies. In stark contrast, the more solitary and less socially motivated context of choosing to watch a documentary in Study 2 did not provide the same kind of external motivation, which potentially reduced the impact of the self-affirmation intervention. Future research could address this by presenting a hypothetical scenario in which participants are asked whether they would watch a documentary on the treatment of farm animals if accompanied by a friend.

These findings are in line with existing literature on self-affirmation. It was found that the context and the perceived relevance of the information play crucial roles in determining the effectiveness of the intervention. Howell and Shepperd (2012) and Branković et al. (2023) found self-affirmation to be effective in reducing avoidance of health-related information when the information was perceived as personally relevant and threatening. Similarly, the perceived threat to moral self-worth might be contextually influenced, impacting the efficacy of self-affirmation. Aligning with these insights, we originally hypothesised that non-vegan participants evaluate information about animal suffering in modern agriculture to be of high personal relevance as it questions the moral self-worth. However, it seems as though social context-dependent situational cues posit a strong additional factor that determines the relevance and threat of information.

Limitations

Several limitations should be noted. First, the sample size in Study 1 was smaller than needed for strong results due to challenges in recruitment. This limitation might have affected the power of our statistical tests and the generalisability of our findings, which might be why

we could not replicate the findings in Study 2. Further, the use of hypothetical scenarios might not have accurately captured real-world behaviours despite efforts to create relatable everyday scenarios. Future research should consider different research designs and real-world interventions to further place these findings into context.

Additionally, the conducted measurements in the present studies assume an effect of self-affirmation on strategic avoidance across the entire general population. However, this conflicts with Onwezen and van der Weele's (2016) results stating that 27% - 28% of the general population can be classified as strategic avoiders. As discussed earlier, Onwezen and van der Weele (2016) moreover stated feelings of responsibility as an identifier of strategic avoiders. In the present studies, due to participant recruitment constraints, no additional measures of responsibility were included to differentiate strategically avoiding participants from participants falling into other costumer classifications, which could have distorted results. Future research ought to include such a measure. This allows furthering the present research by investigating the difference of effect of self-affirmation on strategic avoiders versus other consumer clusters.

Lastly, we were not aware of the overlap between the context of the hypothetical scenario (connecting with a friend on social media) and one of the rank values (being connected with friends and family) in the experimental design in study 1 prior to data collection. Through participants' comments on the study, this was made apparent to us. In line with the procedure as used by Branković et al. (2023), we experienced why replication studies need to be mindful about a possible priming effect and choice of values and scenarios. Therefore, this should be another main consideration in future research.

Implications for Future Research and Practice

The mixed results of this research indicate that while self-affirmation has potential as a tool to reduce information avoidance about animal suffering, its effectiveness may be

highly context specific. Future research should explore various contexts and additional moderating factors, such as the presence of social incentives, the immediacy of the information, and individual differences in baseline moral values and self-concept stability.

Practically, these findings suggest that interventions aimed at reducing information avoidance about animal suffering should consider incorporating self-affirmation techniques alongside other strategies that enhance the perceived relevance, threat, and social incentives for engagement. For instance, framing information within social contexts, such as community events or social media groups, might enhance the effectiveness of self-affirmation interventions.

Conclusion

This research contributes to the understanding of the role of self-affirmation in reducing information avoidance related to moral dilemmas, specifically concerning the consumption of animal products. While self-affirmation shows promise in certain contexts, its application should be carefully tailored to the specific social and personal dynamics highly nuanced real-life situations display. By integrating insights from moral psychology and information communication strategies, future interventions can more effectively align individuals' behaviours with their moral values to ultimately create a change towards more ethical consumption practices.

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Appendix A

List of Values Presented during the Ranking Task in the Experimental Condition

Living in the present moment

Being connected with friends and family

Trust among people

Loyalty and integrity

Religious values

Solidarity in society

Sense of humor

Contribution to society

Democracy

Creativity

Appendix B

Items on Information Avoidance Scale as Used by Us

1. I would rather not know about the suffering of animals meant for consumption.

2. I would avoid learning about immoral animal farming practices.

3. Even if it will upset me, I want to know how animals meant for consumption are treated badly. (reverse coded)

4. When it comes to the mistreatment of animals in the food industry, ignorance is bliss.

5. I want to know about immoral practices of farming animals meant for consumption (reverse coded)

6. I can think of situations in which I would rather not know about the suffering of animals meant for consumption.

7. It is important to know about mistreatment of animals in the food industry. (reverse coded)

8. I want to know about the suffering of animals in the food industry immediately. (reverse coded)

Appendix C

Exploratory Factor Analyses, Study 1

Factor Analysis of Information Avoidance Scale

Using the varimax rotation method, we conducted a two-factor exploratory factor analysis after reversing items 3, 5, 7, and 8. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure (KMO = 0.84) and Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha = 0.84$) indicated good suitability of the data for the analysis. Results showed a good fit for the model using two underlying factors, as supported by a scree plot showing a clear break after the second Eigenvalue. Factor loadings revealed that items 3, 5, 7, and 8 relate to Factor 1, with loadings ranging from 0.52 to 0.90. Factor 2 is composed of items 1, 2, 4, and 6, with loadings ranging from 0.50 to 0.66. Factor scores were strongly correlated with their respective factors (Factor 1: r = 0.93; Factor 2: r = 0.83), indicating good convergent validity.

Effect of Self-Affirmation on Information Avoidance Scale Means for Factors 1 and 2

Following exploratory factor analysis, we predicted that self-affirmation decreases information avoidance tendencies (factor 1), but not desire to receive knowledge (factor 2). To compare whether the mean scores on the Information Avoidance scale differ between conditions when accounted for the previously established factors 1 and 2, we conducted another *t*-test. There was no significant difference between the experimental group and the control group for both factors. Hence, participants in the intervention condition's mean scores on the Information Avoidance scale were not significantly lower than those of the control condition, even after correcting mean scores according to underlying factors.