

Title: Plant-based vs. animal proteins: Implicit and explicit measures, psychological predictors, and the role of sports

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Background: Recent research in nutrition have highlighted how food choices, and the adoption of a healthy and sustainable diet, require an in-depth analysis of psychological factors, both cognitive and personality-wise. The objective of the study was to map automatic and explicit attitudes toward plant-based proteins in relation to personological features.

Methods: We developed a qualitative/quantitative methodology consisting of three successive steps. The first two steps involved the validation of the personalized Implicit Association Test (p-IAT): in the first one we created a database of protein food pictures, and in the second one we identified the attributes for categorization by conducting 4 focus groups. The third study will involve the administration of the final version of the study, with p-IAT and questionnaires (lifestyle, eating habits, sports activity, decision-making style, big-5, value orientation) in relation to consumption intention.

Findings: Linear regression models will be conducted considering the d index, explicit attitudes, and consumption intention as outcome variables, together with up to 10 predictors (e.g., gender, age, diet, physical activity, personality traits). Based on available evidence, we expect to find more positive attitudes toward animal than plant-based proteins, and that this effect is even more pronounced among sporty people.

Discussion: Protein intake may be influenced by certain preconceptions that lead people to choose more often the consumption of meat and other animal (so-called noble) proteins than plant-based options, which are healthier and more sustainable. This study will shed light on people's attitudes to promote targeted psychological actions to encourage healthier food choices.