

And Just Like That:

Small Moments on Screen Can Boost Climate-Friendly Food Norms

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Overview

To avoid the worst impacts of the climate crisis, we need to address what we eat, and how we produce it. Fortunately, when it comes to food, people can make easy choices with meaningful environmental and social benefits, such as eating more plant-based meals.

One in four Americans are eating less meat for a variety of reasons, from personal health to environmental impact to concerns for animal welfare, and even more are considering making a change. However, people tend to underestimate how many others around them are trying to eat more plant-based meals, which can discourage them from taking action themselves.

Film and TV can help fill this gap between perception and reality when it comes to plant-based eating. We are starting to see these real-life food choices reflected on screen in positive ways. In the latest season of Max's *And Just Like That...*, audiences saw the beloved and iconic women of the *Sex and the City* universe welcome plant-based eating. Just like in life, these moments were small – friends ordering a quick bite while out together, or chatting over a meal. But we embraced our inner Carrie and couldn't help but wonder: how might these small moments move audiences at home?



To support creatives who want to highlight everyday climate solutions in their stories, Rare's Entertainment Lab studied the potential impact of easy-to-integrate dialogue in a commonplace film and TV scenario: characters ordering a meal. Using a scene from *And Just Like That...*, we found that seeing a character on screen order a plant-based option increased the audience's beliefs that:

- reducing the amount of meat we consume "is the right thing to do"
- ordering a plant-based option is normal
- more trendsetters are currently reducing meat in their diet and even more trendsetters will be reducing meat in the future
- more trendsetters expect other people to reduce meat in their diet
- plant-based options are associated with health and environmental benefits

Most importantly, we did not see any evidence that including a plant-based order negatively impacted the entertainment value - neither in terms of how much audiences liked the characters nor how much they liked the scene overall.

Together, these findings emphasize the potential of entertainment to capture and catalyze new climate-friendly social norms. Many of the best films and TV shows authentically reflect the realities of modern life, and for many people in 2024, that means trying plant-based alternatives. Seeing our favorite characters choosing plant-based options can help make reducing meat seem positive, beneficial, and mainstream. Such moments across film and TV may inspire audiences to consider eating more sustainably at home and can help usher in the changes to our food systems that we need to best protect people and the planet.

Then & Now

We've come a long way from the 2003 *Sex and the City* episode when the women first met Smith in Raw, a vegan restaurant whose only redeeming quality was attractive waiters. 20 years later, plant-based dining is shown as normal in *And Just Like That...*, a reflection of our changing world!

Study Overview

The Scene: Miranda Casually Orders the Plant-Based Option

In this scene from Season 2, Episode 9 "[There Goes the Neighborhood](#)", Miranda and Charlotte have a conversation about their kids while waiting in line at the fast-casual restaurant Chipotle. As they are talking, Miranda casually places her order for tacos – at first ordering steak before changing her mind and switching to the plant-based option. Notably, her order is not the scene's focus and the characters never discuss it. It's a brief aside before the two characters return to their conversation.

Since Miranda first orders steak before switching to plant-based, we were able to edit the original scene to create two additional versions – one where she only orders steak tacos and one where she directly orders the plant-based option (i.e., doesn't switch her order from meat to plant-based).

Methodology

We recruited 6005 U.S. participants, aged 25-74, via the crowdsourcing platform Prolific. Using Nielsen data, recruitment was quota-matched to approximate the demographic profile of *And Just Like That* Season 2 on gender, age, income, and race (with nested quotas for Gender x Income and Gender x Race). We excluded people with vegetarian, vegan, or pescatarian diets, as they had already adopted the target behavior, and those with incomplete data.

Participants were then randomly assigned to watch one of the three versions of the scene:



The original scene where Miranda switches from meat to the plant-based option
N = 1835



By editing out the steak order, this version shows Miranda directly ordering the plant-based option
N=2222



By editing out the switch to plant-based, this version shows Miranda ordering steak tacos
N=1927

After viewing the video, participants completed a survey measuring audience perceptions and beliefs about reducing meat consumption. Measures included key precursors to behavior adoption, including normative beliefs (*it is the right thing to do*), current norms (*how many people are currently doing it*), dynamic norms (*how many will be doing it five years*), self-efficacy (*can I do it*), perceived normalcy of ordering plant-based, perceived benefits and barriers to reducing meat, information seeking (e.g. *interest in recipes, etc.*), and behavioral intentions (e.g. *likelihood of trying to reduce meat in their diet in the next 12 months*).

We also measured how much participants liked the main characters and enjoyed the clip. This is critical, since we wanted to test whether the inclusion of plant-based mentions had any impact on the entertainment value of the scene.

To hide the purpose of the survey, these questions were embedded within other decoy-items (e.g. questions about other topics like having private conversations in public, alcohol consumption, etc.).

Key Findings

Overall, we found that the inclusion of plant-based options positively influences viewers' beliefs regarding meat reduction, including perceived normalcy, current trends, future trends, and social expectations, without affecting the entertainment value of the content. The full table of results can be found [here](#).

Note: There were no systematic differences between the "Plant-Based Only" condition and the "Switching" condition. To simplify the summary of key findings, we combined the results for these groups into a single "Plant-Based" condition.

Entertainment Value

Of major practical concern, the type of food Miranda ordered did not significantly influence the audiences' overall liking of the clip or the specific character. This result is promising evidence that integrating plant-based options into storylines can be done without compromising the content's appeal, detracting from the scene's entertainment value, or negatively affecting audience perceptions of the characters.

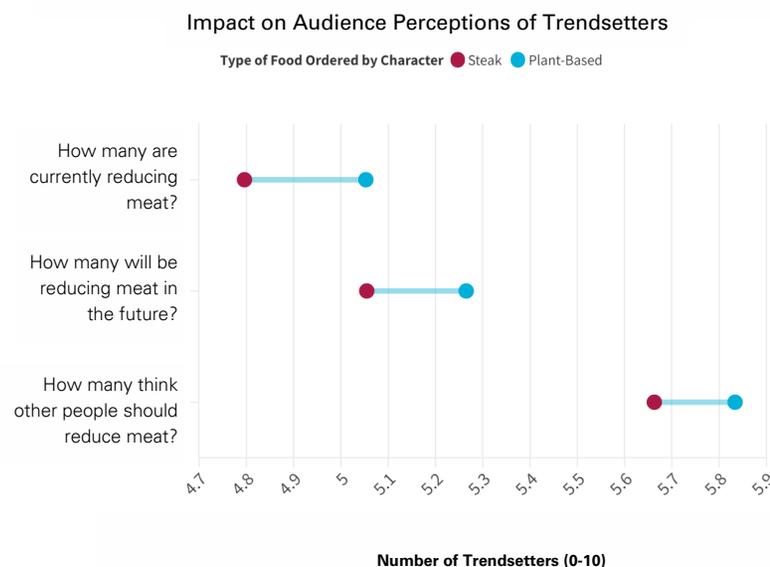
Audience Beliefs and Expectations

Social Norms

Watching either clip where Miranda orders a plant-based option significantly boosted the audience's perceived social norms around reducing meat, including the audience's beliefs about:

- **Is it the right thing to do:** Participants exposed to plant-based orders were more likely to say that people "should reduce the amount of meat they consume because *it is the right thing to do*" by 4 percentage points.
- **What trendsetters are doing now and what they will be doing in the future:** Relative to those who saw a meat order, participants exposed to plant-based orders on screen: (a) thought that more trendsetters are *currently* reducing their meat consumption; and, (b) thought even more trendsetters will be trying to reduce their meat consumption *in the future*.
- **What trendsetters expect other people to be doing:** Participants exposed to plant-based orders also increased their belief that more trendsetters - those influential in setting social norms - think that other people should also reduce their meat consumption.

Effect of Character's Food Order on Perceived Social Norms Around Meat Consumption



Perceived Normalcy

Compared to those who saw Miranda order steak tacos, participants who saw her order a plant-based substitute were more likely to report that it is normal “for people to order plant-based substitutes at restaurants these days” – indicating that plant-based ordering was viewed as more socially acceptable and frequent.

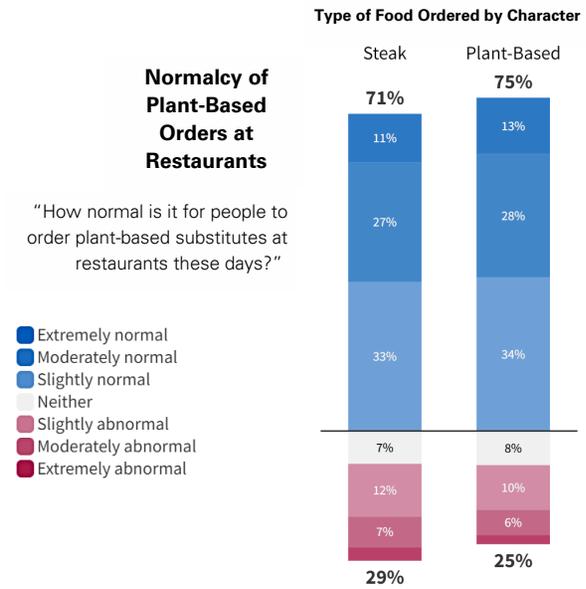
Perceived Benefits

Exposure to the plant-based ordering scenes increased perceptions of the health and environmental benefits of reducing meat consumption, but did not affect perceptions of keeping up with current trends, appearance, or social benefits.

The impact on environmental and health benefits is particularly noteworthy since the scene did not explicitly address these topics. This suggests that even passive exposure to plant-based options can strengthen the audience’s pre-existing associations with the benefits of a plant-rich diet.

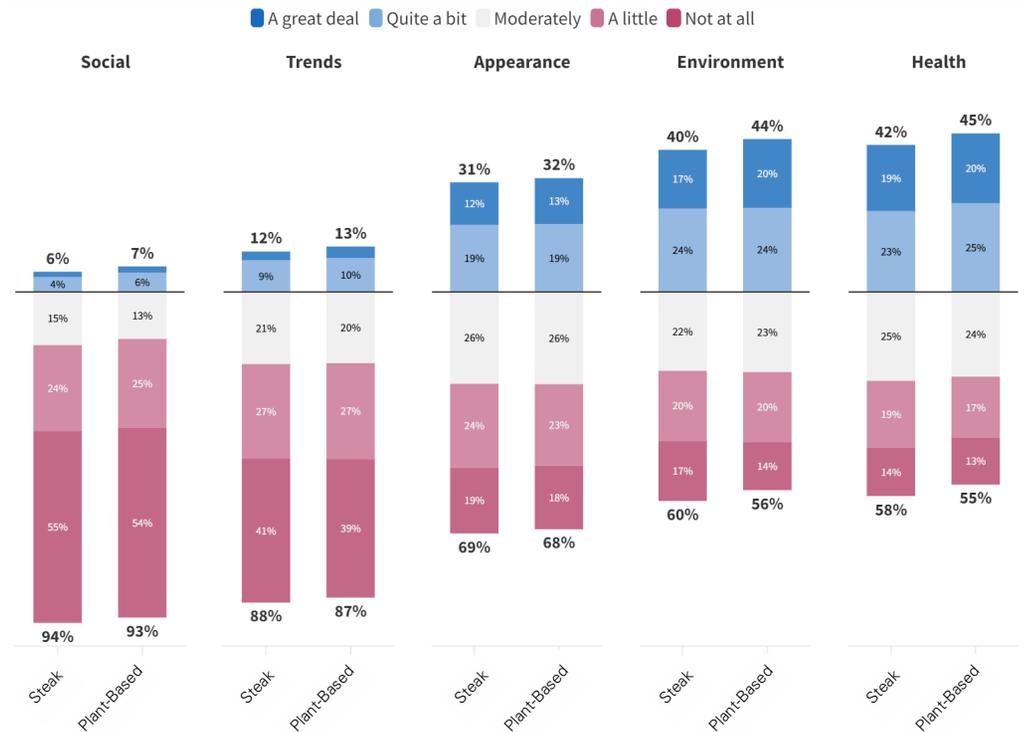
Overall, audiences were more likely to associate reducing meat with health, environmental, and appearance benefits, suggesting that audiences may resonate more with characters or storylines that emphasize these aspects.

On the other hand, we see strikingly low levels of pre-existing associations with “social trends” (i.e. what trendsetters are doing) and “social benefits” (i.e. being more positively received by those around you). These levers can be profoundly important in encouraging people to consider new behaviors, which suggests there may be untapped opportunities for storylines to highlight these benefits with large potential for impact.



Ratings of Perceived Benefits of Reducing Meat Consumption

“Imagine reducing the amount of meat in your diet. To what extent do you believe you would experience the following benefits?”



Type of Food Ordered by Character

Behavioral Capacities and Intentions

We did not see any impact on the audience's self-efficacy i.e., no increase in their confidence that they could adopt the behavior in their own lives. Nor did we find any effect on people's stated intention to reduce meat consumption or willingness to receive more information. The lack of change in behavioral intentions is not surprising since the ordering scene is fleeting, interspersed with unrelated dialogue, and constitutes only a small part of the entire clip.

Overall, large amounts of social science research have shown that perceived social norms are a critical precursor to behavioral adoption. This research demonstrates that – with even brief positive depictions of plant-based foods and vegetarian or vegan characters – TV shows and movies can not only reflect real-world dietary interests and trends, but also help further normalize these choices and can make them feel more socially accepted (and, expected). Additionally, these positive portrayals of plant-based choices can also increase the audience's perceptions about the personal and social benefits of reducing meat. These findings confirm that small changes in the behaviors of our favorite characters on screen have the power to increase support for climate-friendly cultural norms and can inspire large-scale shifts towards more sustainable food choices at home.

Supplementary Materials

[Full Survey Instrument](#)

[Full Table of Results](#)

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Rare's Entertainment Lab supports the entertainment industry to reflect the realities of our changing climate and highlight the sustainability solutions all around us.

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