



REDUCING DEMAND FOR WILD MEAT— A COMPILATION OF FORMATIVE RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND FINDINGS ACROSS CAMPAIGNS

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CONTRACT INFORMATION

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COVER PHOTO: The primary threats to civets are habitat destruction and overhunting for its wild meat. It is popular in wild meat restaurants in China and Vietnam. Photo Credit: Adobe Stock

BACK COVER PHOTO: According to IUCN, all species of pangolins are now threatened with extinction largely due to illegal wildlife trafficking in China and Vietnam. Photo Credit: Adobe Stock

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Fifteen percent of bushmeat consumers eat wild boar in Nigeria. Photo Credit: Adobe Stock

Introduction

For a behavior change campaign to be effective, it must be built on a foundation of formative research. Learning what drives wild meat consumption—taste preference, affordability, and cultural connections, for example—can help identify the barriers to change and help tailor campaigns for the local context. Such formative research can clarify which behaviors to target, and which images, messages, and emotions are likely to prompt participation and change among particular community members.

The following brief summarizes seven case studies that highlight the different drivers of wild meat consumption and trade in different regions: Nigeria, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Brazil, Vietnam, and Thailand. The case studies examine value chains as well as the social and biological drivers of wild meat use and provide suggestions and ideas for how to include formative research into the campaign design process. People in each region have distinct purposes for consuming and/or selling wild meat, and these drivers must be understood **before** behavior change campaigns are built.

Conducting Formative Research: Baseline Consumer Data

The first step in understanding the consumption and trade of wild meat is to establish baseline data for the attitudes, values, motivations, and behaviors of wild meat consumers and buyers. The following section features case studies from Nigeria, Cameroon, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Understanding Urban Consumption of Bushmeat in Nigeria (WILDAID 2021)

This study reached four major cities in Nigeria via 2,000 surveys sent to mobile phones. It gathered data about participants' socioeconomic backgrounds, the frequency they consumed wild meat, and the reasons for their preferences. The survey did not find significant differences in consumption rates among the four cities nor any clear trends by age or income. Findings suggested, however, that wild meat had become more expensive than farmed animals in recent years, a potential indicator that the market here is dominated by wealthier consumers.

Key Takeaways

- Seventy-one percent consumed wild meat at some point in their lives, and 45 percent did so in the past year.
- Fifty-one percent of those who consumed it in the past year prefer the taste of wild meat to domesticated meat.
- Twenty-eight percent believe wild meat is healthier because it is always fresh and chemical-free.
- Seventy-five percent intended to eat wild meat in the future despite COVID-19 links to the wild meat trade.

Areas for Future Research

The authors encountered widespread doubt and misinformation about the COVID-19 pandemic. Many Nigerians did not believe the pandemic was real and doubted the credibility of statistics from health authorities. For example, 44 percent of respondents thought COVID-19 was spread through contact with wild animals, while 43 percent thought it was spread through lab experiments or research. This mindset could impact how messaging campaigns are perceived or believed, therefore merits further study.

Understanding Consumer Demand for Bushmeat in Urban Centers of Cameroon with a Focus on Pangolin Species (Nguyen et al. 2021)

This study compared consumer preferences and perceptions of wild meat with domestic meat and examined barriers to wild meat consumption. Researchers interviewed 597 customers at wild meat restaurants and street stalls in two urban centers in Cameroon, asking them to name and rank their three favorite wild meat species and share the reasons for their preferences. The study also gathered demographics such as gender, age, religion, education, and monthly household income, but these were not found to have a strong correlation with wild meat preference.

Key Takeaways

- Ninety-one percent said they consumed wild meat, with 55 percent saying they ate a wild meat dish at the restaurant that day.
- Wild meat preference appeared to be influenced by affordability, availability, culture, health, prestige, and taste rather than demographic factors.
- Cultural influences included local or family traditions and habits.
- Health influences included assumptions about wild meat's nutritional value, e.g., fat-free, protein- and vitamin-rich, and natural. Medicinal reasons such as aphrodisiac or antibiotic qualities were also cited.
- The taste was the top reason cited for preference for a particular species and was the main driver for consuming wild meat over domestic meat.

Areas for Future Research

The authors found cultural influences, prestige, and taste far outweighed demographics in terms of driving the demand for wild meat consumption. While taste might remain a fixed personal preference, a closer study of cultural influences and perceptions of prestige could provide insights into what types of messaging could reduce demand.

How Do Local Folks Value Wild Meat, and Why It Matters? A Study in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (van Vliet et al. 2021)


This study aimed to identify differences in rural versus urban values on wild meat. In interviews with 517 urban dwellers and 480 villagers, researchers adapted methodology from Dayer, Stinchfield, and Manfred (2007) that relied on personal stories and emotional prompts such as happiness, sadness, anger, and fear to reveal people's values regarding wildlife and consuming wild meat. Notably, researchers identified an urban-rural disparity in wild meat consumption, with the latter having a much higher consumption.

Key Takeaways

- Ninety-four percent of respondents consumed wild meat at some point in their lives.
- Thirty-eight percent claimed to eat it on a weekly basis, but less than three percent said they ate it daily.
- On average, 29 percent of urban respondents said they consume wild meat, but among rural respondents, that average jumped to 59 percent.
- Concern for safety (34 percent) was the most frequently cited value of the respondents' feelings towards wildlife and was linked to the ability of certain animals (i.e., chimpanzees, elephants, and leopards) to injure and kill people. Concern for safety showed a statistically significant positive association with emotions such as fear and negative association with happiness and sadness, which may lead respondents to justify the hunting of these wild animals and using them as a food source.
- Nutrition/taste (33 percent) was the second most frequent value and relates to the taste and value of wildlife as a source of food and nutrition. According to these respondents, wild meat is considered to have higher nutritional value and tastier flavor than alternative protein sources. These respondents showed a positive association with happiness and a negative association with anger and fear.
- Caring/respect (11 percent) was the third most frequent value and translates to the respondent's personal attachment to wildlife and their willingness to prevent animal suffering. The respondents who associated wildlife with caring and respect values were less likely to consume wild meat. Generally, they showed a positive association with sadness and a negative association with fear.

Areas for Future Research

Place of residence (rural/urban) was among the most useful variables in explaining the different VOs among respondents. For example, rural residents were more likely to choose concern for crop/livestock destruction due to the risks inherent in their proximity to habitats and their reliance on crop and livestock production for livelihoods. Given the much higher rate of wild meat consumption by rural respondents, further research into mitigating their concerns (e.g., personal safety, crop destruction) could help inform efforts to lower their demand for wild meat.



Imperiled tortoises and freshwater turtles such as the yellow-footed tortoise can be found in the Amazon Basin of South America, and they are among the top five most consumed and traded species in urban areas in the Amazon. Photo Credit: Adobe Stock

Conducting Formative Research: Social and Biological Data

Beyond establishing baseline data on wild meat consumers, it is essential to investigate the social and biological factors that influence wild meat consumption in specific communities and regions. The following section features case studies from Brazil, Vietnam, and Thailand that explore these factors.

Social and Biological Correlates of Wild Meat Consumption and Trade by Rural Communities in the Jutai River Basin, Central Amazonia (El Bizri et al. 2020)

This study was designed to determine the frequency of wild meat consumption, the types of animals consumed, and patterns of the wild meat trade in the Jutai River Extractive Reserve in the state of Amazonas, Brazil. During 51 interviews in 16 communities, researchers asked participants several questions about their households: the number of people, how many were hunters, how often they consumed wild meat, what kind, and how they obtained it.

Regarding the wild meat trade, respondents were asked whether their household sold wild meat, and if so, whether they sold it in the city, to their community, or to neighboring communities. If respondents sold wild meat, they were also asked to disclose the species, whether they sold entire specimens or in kgs, and the prices.

Key Takeaways

- All respondents said they ate wild meat and the household average was 2.8 to 3.2 days per month.
- Frequency of consumption positively correlated with the number of hunters in the household. The majority of households hunted wild meat themselves.
- Probability of selling wild meat also correlated with the number of hunters in the household (e.g., households with more than three hunters were 100 percent likely to sell).
- Sixty-three percent said they sold wild meat in urban markets, usually through relatives living in the city. Respondents rarely reported buying or trading wild meat with their fellow community members.
- On average, wild meat sold for between \$4.4 to \$6 per kg in the city, and the most commonly sold species was the yellow-spotted river turtle.

Areas for Future Research

The findings regarding the frequency of consumption in the reserve (about three times per month) and the number of reserve hunters selling in urban markets (63 percent) indicate that the majority of demand for wild meat is in the city. This may call for evaluating whether a messaging campaign would be more effective by targeting city-based consumers instead of families and hunters in the reserve. therefore merits further study.



Duikers are commonly hunted and consumed in Democratic Republic of Congo and many other countries in Africa.
Photo Credit: Adobe Stock

Urban Consumer Demand for Wild Animal Products in Vietnam (Drury 2011) and Who eats wild meat? Profiling consumers in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (Olmedo et al. 2021)

These two studies investigated the social context of the consumption of wild meat in urban centers. The first study (Drury 2011) featured structured interviews with city dwellers and semi-structured interviews with well-known wild meat consumers in central Hanoi. During the structured interviews, respondents were asked whether they ate, bought, or received wild meat in the last 12 months. Those who reported eating wild meat were then asked to describe up to five occasions during the time period. For the semi-structured interviews, the authors sought a more in-depth understanding of wild meat consumption in the city by allowing interviewees to pursue their own narratives instead of asking them specific questions. The study revealed strong connections between wild meat and perceptions of masculinity, power, and wealth.

Key Takeaways

- Twenty-three percent of respondents reported consuming wild meat in the last 12 months.
- Men were significantly more likely to report eating wild meat, and both men and women considered wild meat to be “manly” food.
- Many of the consumers were from high-income families and considered wild meat to be an expensive luxury only consumed by the wealthy.
- Eating wild meat was associated with powerful individuals such as businessmen, financial professionals, and government officials.
- Fifty-nine percent of the instances of wild meat consumption took place in restaurants, which many considered a public demonstration of wealth and status. Respondents further described using wild meat to show respect and demonstrate competence in business relations and negotiations.

The second study (Olmedo et al., 2021) conducted 400 street surveys near restaurants known to sell wild meat in Ho Chi Minh City. Researchers intercepted customers who visited these restaurants and asked them to fill out questionnaires on tablets. The questionnaires asked about demographics, food consumption, food satisfaction, restaurant selection, and animals consumed. Respondents also rated the taste, freshness, quality, health value, and price of wild meat on a five-point Likert scale. Their findings suggest that wild meat in Ho Chi Minh City may not only be a rare delicacy consumed by wealthy people to show their status but also a more generic specialty dish for any consumer who enjoys its taste, quality, and freshness.

Key Takeaways

- Ninety-five percent reported consuming wild meat the last time they frequented a wild meat restaurant.
- Most consumers ordered wild meat in addition to other types of food such as domestic meat or seafood.
- Fifty percent were considered “up-and-coming professionals” between 26-35 years old and earning an above-average income.
- Thirty-two percent represented “classic consumers” (i.e., they were middle-aged, 36-55 years old, and earned an average income).
- Eighteen percent were students between 18–25 years old who fell into the lowest income category.
- Taste was rated the most important attribute of food in restaurants, yet it was not consistently rated positively, suggesting taste is not the only motivation for consuming wild meat.

Areas for Future Research

A comparison of these two studies suggests that even within the same country, a messaging campaign might not succeed with the same method in different locations. The elitism and power factors so prevalent in the Hanoi study, for example, appear to level out into an everyman taste for wild meat in the Ho Chi Minh City study.

Wild Meat Consumption in Thailand: A Research Study to Explore Opportunities to Change Wild Meat Consumption Behavior (Bergin et al. 2021)

This final study aimed to develop a better understanding of wild meat consumer profiles, purchasing habits, motivations, and potential deterrents. The first phase of the research explored wild meat consumers' perceptions and attitudes through two focus groups: one with participants ages 25-39 and another with participants ages 40-55. The second phase used the focus group information to create an online survey emailed to 1,300 participants (selected based on gender, education, and region to accurately represent the urban population of Thailand). The survey asked consumers their reasons for eating or not eating wild meat, what kind they buy and where, what they knew about the wild meat trade, and what might influence their decisions to consume it in the future. The survey also gathered demographic information: gender, age, marital status, birthplace, residency, travel behavior, education, income, and employment.

Key Takeaways

- Of the 32 percent of respondents who had eaten wild meat in the past 12 months, 43 percent said they ate it once or a few times a month, while 22 percent reported eating it once a week or more.
- The typical wild meat consumer was 18–30 years old, earned a high income, and traveled frequently.
- Respondents described eating wild meat as a social event with family and friends.
- Fifty-eight percent believed their wild meat passed through farms and thus posed a lower risk of diseases than animals taken directly from the wild.
- Taste and curiosity were cited as the main reasons for trying different wild meat. Respondents often took trips outside of the city, particularly to Chiang Rai province, to find certain species.
- Due to COVID-19, 18 percent of respondents did not expect to continue eating wild meat in the future, but 32 percent said they would keep eating it.
- Of those who said they would continue to consume wild meat, 74 percent said they would eat it less than before the pandemic, while 12 percent intended to return to their previous habits.
- Those who did not want to eat wild meat again in the future cited stopping animal cruelty and preserving nature as their reasoning.

Areas for Future Research

Despite the 32 percent of respondents who said they would continue eating wild meat in the future, a much higher number of 74 percent said they would eat it less than before the pandemic, which may indicate a messaging opportunity for encouraging post-pandemic behavior changes.

Further Reading

The following resources provide additional information on wild meat consumption and trade and offer insights to designing and implementing behavior change campaigns.

- [USAID Wild Meat Collaborative Learning Group](#)
- [Change Wildlife Consumers' Behavior Change Toolkit](#)
- [CIFOR Bushmeat Database](#)
- [IIED Wild Meat Toolkit](#)

Visit the [Combating Wildlife Trafficking Collaborative Learning Group](#) site for more information on designing social and behavior change campaigns.



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