

# Vegetarianism and Veganism

## Connecting multiple motives and behavioural perspectives towards social innovation diffusion

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**Abstract** - This research deals with an analysis on the recent increase in vegetarian and vegan food practices. The aim of the study is to define the motives of vegetarians and vegans and the development of this dietary movement by analysing the internal and external factors that influenced them. Two main perspectives will be applied: First, the internal motives and the behaviour of vegetarians and vegans will be described. The motives that triggered their dietary change and the expression of those motives in other activities will provide insights into the behavioural scope of vegetarians and vegans. Second, the nutritional practices will be evaluated from a social innovation perspective, where the development of this movement will be analysed and described. This approach will include a description of the characteristics of individuals that partake in vegan and vegetarian practices, as well as the advancement of vegan and vegetarian segments in food stores. Together this thorough analysis will shed light on the relation between motives, behaviour and social innovation with regard to vegetarianism and veganism.

### INTRODUCTION

Studies observed that more and more individuals choose a vegetarian or vegan diet over the conventional diet, which includes animal products (Beardsworth and Keil, 1992; British Nutrition Foundation, 2005; Lusk and Norwood, 2009; Kerschke-Risch, 2015). This indicates that vegetarianism and veganism is becoming more popular and, thus, is losing its marginal position (Ruby et al., 2013). Furthermore, the acceptance of the alternative food practices increased to such an extent that even food stores respond to this development. However, various internal as well as external factors appear to be important for a change in nourishment practices. Scholars have been analysing vegetarianism and veganism from various perspectives and the motives as well as the impact of the changed dietary patterns are a reappearing theme. However, these past studies date back to the 80s and due to the new dynamics of the vegetarian and vegan practices, additional research is required for an accurate description and understanding of the current trend. Because of preceding developments of vegetarian-

ism and veganism, it is now possible to look back and evaluate the growth of the movement.

Two new aspects can now be considered. First, research has already established a selection of several motivational triggers that cause individuals to become vegetarian or vegan (see Beardsworth and Keil, 1992; Fox and Ward, 2008), yet the expression of these motives aside from the nutriment practices has not been discussed. The contribution of this research will be to shed light on the relation between the motives and the related behaviour that is not tied to the nutritional practice and, thus, demarcating the behavioural commitment of the vegetarian or vegan identity. Second, an analysis of the recent development regarding the growth of vegetarian and vegan products in food stores and the community itself will be conducted. This approach focuses on the investigation of vegetarianism and veganism from a social innovation perspective. This innovation-based perspective will characterise the movement through adopter categories as introduced by Rogers (1995).

Therefore, these main research questions will be addressed: How do vegetarians and vegans express their motives for becoming a vegetarian or vegan in other behavioural commitments aside from the nutritional practices? How is vegetarianism and veganism developing from a social innovation perspective?

This short paper will introduce the methods used in the research, as well as the expected results of the analysis.

### METHODS

The methodological approach of this study firstly consists of a literature review in order to define theoretical foundations as well as to examine the current knowledge in the fields of vegetarianism and veganism, associated motives and behaviour. Secondly, the empirical research phase consists of a mixed-mode survey among vegetarians and vegans. The vegetarian and vegan population is reached through various sampling strategies: snowball sampling at issue-specific fairs, an e-mail distribution at the University of Graz, vegan groups on social media platforms, as well as a survey distribution using vegetarian and vegan restaurants. This sampling strategy creates several common limitations that are related to the sampling and the self-administered surveys as an empirical research tool (see Verschuren et al., 2010).

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The survey will consist of several sections that question the participants' motives, the behavioural commitment and their nutritional practices. Beside other questions, respondents are asked to assess the relevance of certain motives for their diet by a pairwise rating system (Meixner and Haas 2002; Ameseder et al. 2008). In this procedure respondents state how much one motive is overruling the other. Additionally, the survey data is used by means of a social innovation analysis: characteristics of vegetarians and vegans will be described at the different stages of the diffusion curve.

Furthermore, an analysis of the market development is added. A market observation is carried out to gather information about vegetarian and vegan product ranges in different conventional food stores in Austria. The necessary data is extracted from an external database about product launches (via Datamonitor's Product Launch Analytics). This observation of the amount of product launches aims at identifying the point in time when the topic of vegetarianism and veganism started to gain importance for the food retail sector. This way, the development of the supply of especially indicated vegetarian and vegan products will be evaluated.

#### EXPECTED RESULTS

Through the pairwise rating system the key motives for becoming a vegetarian or vegan will be identified. The relation between these motives and the behaviour beyond the dietary context is analysed through further multivariate statistical means. The correlation between internal motives and behaviour outside of the nutritional context can illustrate the overall commitment to the motivational conviction. In this way, the importance of the different motives and their behavioural expressions provides a statistical description of the behavioural scope of vegetarians and vegans.

Based on the data from the survey and the observation study, the diffusion process of vegetarianism and veganism will be described. The adoption of vegetarian or vegan diets and the development of the corresponding product supply will be subject of a relational analysis. In this context, both the survey respondents as well as the companies in the food industry can be associated with Rogers (1995) diffusion theory and classified as innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. The results of the social innovation curve will highlight the recent development of vegetarianism and veganism in Austria (see Fig. 1).

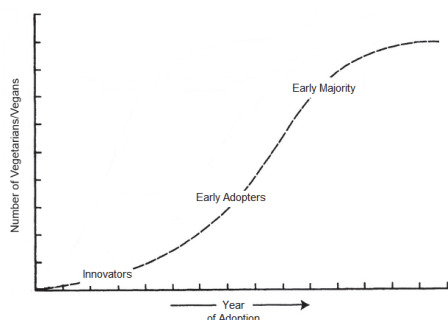


Figure 1. Innovation curve (adopted from Rogers, 1995).

Through an additional curve of product launches it will be illustrated how this process has been manifested in food stores.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Because of the increase in popularity of vegetarianism and veganism, the role that these alternative food practices play in shaping our nutritional landscape also becomes more and more important. This research will offer further understanding about the growth of the trend and the behavioural scope of vegetarianism and veganism. The new perspectives applied on the development of vegetarianism and veganism make this research study particularly relevant.

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