

## Exploring the Psychological Dynamics of Veganism

Veganism, characterized by the abstention from consuming animal products, has gained significant attention in recent years as a lifestyle choice driven by concerns about health, environmental sustainability, and animal welfare. However, the adoption of veganism goes beyond individual dietary preferences; it intersects with deeply ingrained cultural beliefs and practices. The rise of veganism raises intriguing questions about the psychological underpinnings driving individuals' decisions to adopt such a lifestyle.

Veganism can be described in many ways, often negative in the views of non-vegans. However, veganism is generally considered to be a rejection of the commodification of animals (Pederson & Staescu, 2014). Western studies have often focused on the conservatism (Hodson & Earle, 2018). Personality and ideology constructs, such as social dominance and authoritarianism have also been important research foci (Dhont et al, 2016), and an increasing focus on veganism and vegan identity by social psychologists have resulted in several studies in recent years. One meta-analysis of studies of social psychological factors (Vestergren & Uysal, 2022) set the following inclusion criteria: The studies must be (a) included in Web of Science or PsycArticles, (b) written in English, (c) published after 2010, and research veganism or related topics. Thus prominent psychology research might perpetuate a focus on Western concepts.

In both Eastern and Western societies, cultural norms and dietary traditions often hold strong sway over individuals' choices. Certain cultures have a deep historical connection to plant-based diets due to religious beliefs, philosophical traditions, or agricultural practices. For example, Jainism in India promotes non-violence and compassion toward all living beings, leading many adherents to adopt veganism (Shah, 2009). On the other hand, cultural norms that celebrate the consumption of animal products may pose challenges to the adoption of veganism.

Culture plays a pivotal role in shaping our food choices and dietary patterns. Food is imbued with cultural meanings, representing shared traditions, values, and historical experiences. Culture plays a pivotal role in shaping our food choices and dietary patterns. Food is imbued with cultural meanings, representing shared traditions, values, and historical experiences. The emergence of vegan versions of culturally significant dishes demonstrates that dietary choices need not lead to the erasure of cultural heritage but can instead contribute to cultural innovation and evolution (Johnston & Baumann, 2007). Similar to Western societies, the pursuit of health and well-being plays a significant role in Eastern cultures. The perception that a vegan diet can contribute to better health outcomes, such as reduced risk of chronic diseases and improved vitality, can be a driving force behind the adoption of veganism (Sabate & Wien, 2015).

One significant psychological motivation behind adopting veganism in Western societies is rooted in ethical concerns for animal welfare. Many individuals perceive animals as sentient beings capable of experiencing pain and suffering, leading to a moral imperative to avoid contributing to their exploitation and harm. This perspective aligns with the concept of moral identity, where individuals define themselves based on their adherence to ethical principles. It's argued that adoption of veganism thus becomes a way to reinforce a positive self-concept that is aligned with compassion and responsibility (Loughnan & Bastian, 2017).

In Western societies, the decision to adopt a vegan lifestyle can also be influenced by social identity dynamics. Being part of a vegan community provides a sense of belonging and social connection (Piazza et al, 2015). People may adopt veganism to align themselves with

like-minded individuals who share their values, creating a sense of solidarity and reducing feelings of isolation. Additionally, the social influence of friends, family, and online communities can shape individuals' perceptions and attitudes toward veganism.

The concept of cognitive dissonance, which arises when individuals experience psychological discomfort due to inconsistencies between their beliefs and actions, is relevant in understanding veganism adoption. For example, cultural attitudes towards animals vary widely, influencing how individuals perceive their connection with and responsibility toward non-human beings (Nibert, 2012). People who learn about the negative environmental and ethical consequences of animal agriculture may experience dissonance if their dietary choices do not align with this knowledge (Loughnan & Bastian, 2017). Adopting veganism can then serve as a way to alleviate this discomfort and achieve cognitive consonance.

The adoption of veganism in Western societies is a complex phenomenon influenced by a multitude of psychological factors (Shah, 2009). Culture is not only transmitted through tradition but also through social interactions. The decision to adopt veganism can be influenced by peer groups, family dynamics, and social circles (Rozin & Farr, 1987). Ethical considerations, health motivations, social identity dynamics, and cognitive dissonance all contribute to individuals' decisions to embrace a vegan lifestyle. For example, identification with celebrity influencers can provide a way for people to justify maintaining a diet that either excludes or includes animal foodstuffs (Pilar et al, 2021). Understanding these psychological dynamics not only sheds light on the reasons behind the rise of veganism but also highlights the interconnectedness between individual choices, cultural shifts, and broader societal implications. As veganism continues to shape Western dietary landscapes, psychological research will play a vital role in comprehending the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon.

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