

Understanding Vegan and Plant-Based Food Consumption and Marketing: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

With growing global interest in vegan and plant-based food, there has been increasing academic research in this area from both consumption and marketing perspectives. This paper conducts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of 42 peer-reviewed studies on vegan and plant-based food consumption and marketing practices, following the PRISMA guidelines. For the analysis, TCCM framework is used to examine the dominant theories, research contexts, key constructs, and methodological approaches in the literature. The findings reveal that although research in this area is expanding rapidly, theoretical integration remains limited, with many studies depending on behavioural models like the Theory of Planned Behaviour and Theory of Reasoned Action. The literature mainly focuses on consumer motivations such as health, ethical, and environmental concerns, and studies are concentrated largely in Western contexts. The review identifies key research gaps and provides directions for future studies to strengthen theoretical, contextual, and methodological development in vegan and plant-based food research.

Keywords: Vegan Food, Plant-Based Food, Veganism, TCCM, Systematic Literature Review.

Introduction

According to (The Vegan Society, n.d.), "Veganism is a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude—as far as is possible and practicable—all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose; and by extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of animals, humans and the environment." The concept of veganism and the consumption of vegan food products have seen steady growth globally, especially over the past decade. This is due to the changes in dietary patterns, i.e. movement towards healthy diet, environmental consciousness, anti-speciesism along with increased exposure to plant-based food alternatives (FAO, 2019).

At the same time, the food industry has witnessed significant growth in the development and availability of plant-based food products, reflecting changing consumer preferences and increasing demand for alternatives to animal-derived foods (Aschemann-Witzel et al., 2021). There has been significant expansion in the global vegan and plant-based food market (Statista, 2026). According to (Prudence Research, 2024), the size of the global vegan food market was more than USD 32.7 billion in 2023 and is expected to surpass around USD 65.4 billion by 2030, growing at compound annual growth rate of 10.41% during 2022 to 2030.

These developments have positioned vegan and plant-based foods as an emerging area of interest for both academic research and industry practice. Correspondingly, scholarly interest in vegan

and plant-based food consumption has expanded across disciplines such as marketing, consumer behavior, sustainability, and food studies (Malik & Jindal, 2022; Ahn, 2024; Brouwer et al., 2022; Duarte et al., 2025; Kautish et al., 2024). However, the existing body of research is dispersed across different research contexts, theoretical perspectives, and methodological approaches, making it difficult to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how the field has developed and what key themes characterize the literature (Aschemann-Witzel et al., 2021; Miguel et al., 2021).

Therefore, a systematic synthesis of existing research is necessary to organize the growing body of knowledge on vegan and plant-based food consumption and marketing. Systematic literature reviews enable researchers to critically analyze and synthesize prior studies in order to identify dominant research themes, theoretical foundations, and methodological approaches within a field (Paul & Criado, 2020). Such analyses are particularly important in emerging research areas where knowledge is fragmented across multiple disciplines and contexts (Aschemann-Witzel et al., 2021). By providing a structured overview of the existing literature, systematic reviews can help identify research gaps and guide future research directions while also offering valuable insights for researchers, industry practitioners, and policymakers interested in sustainable food consumption and the development of plant-based food markets.

This study aims to provide a systematic understanding of the existing literature on consumer behaviour and market trends in vegan and plant-based food research. Specifically, the study examines the major theoretical frameworks that have been used to explain consumer behaviour in this domain. It further explores the research contexts investigated in previous studies, including the countries, industries, and demographic segments examined in the literature. In addition, the study identifies the key constructs and variables that have been analyzed in relation to vegan and plant-based food consumption and marketing. The review also investigates the methodological approaches employed by researchers in this field in order to understand how studies have been conducted. Finally, based on the synthesis of existing research, the study identifies important research gaps and proposes directions for future research in the area of vegan and plant-based food consumption and marketing.

Literature Review

With growing global interest in sustainable food consumption, attention toward vegan and plant-based food has increased significantly (Aschemann-Witzel et al., 2021). Existing research highlights environmental sustainability, health consciousness, and animal welfare as key drivers, as consumers perceive such diets as beneficial for the environment, animals, and personal health (Tobias-Mamina & Maziriri, 2021; Miguel et al., 2024; Malik & Jindal, 2022; Ahn, 2024; Brouwer et al., 2022). Ethical motivations also play a crucial role in shaping consumer attitudes toward vegan consumption (Miguel et al., 2021; Ploll & Stern, 2020).

The application of frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Value Attitude Behavior (VAB) model shows that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence intentions to adopt plant-based foods (Povey et al., 2001; Brouwer et al., 2022). Additionally, emotional, functional, and ecological values significantly shape purchase intentions, highlighting the multidimensional nature of consumer decision-making (Duarte et al., 2025; Kautish et al., 2024), while moral and ecological factors influence engagement with such products (do Amaral Moretti et al., 2023).

Research has also examined consumer perceptions and acceptance of plant-based foods, including evaluation of sensory attributes, nutrition, and sustainability (Pointke et al., 2022). Marketing strategies such as labeling and communication influence perceived healthiness, sustainability, and consumption intentions, emphasizing the importance of transparency (Stremmel et al., 2022).

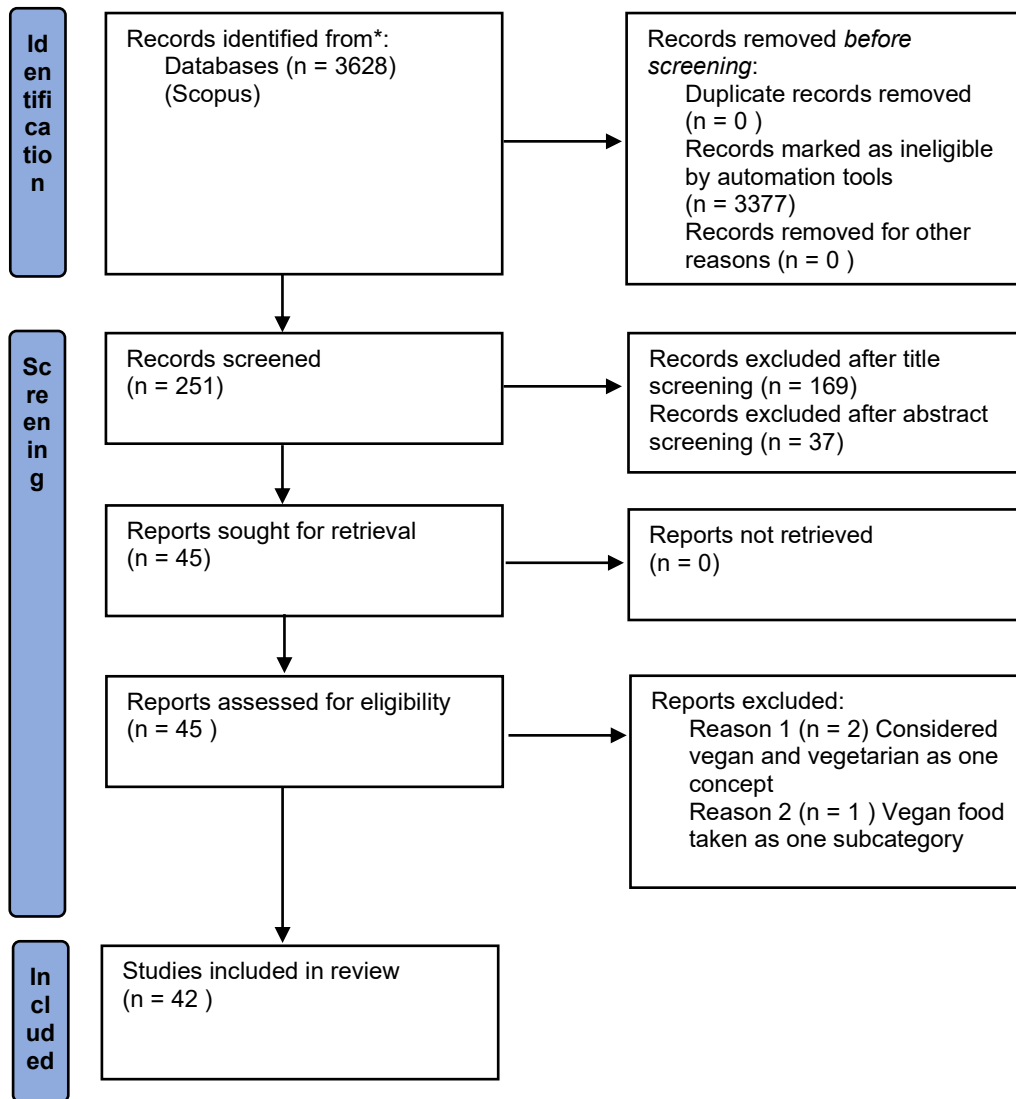
Marketing and market development have emerged as key areas, with studies exploring branding, packaging, retail displays, and digital media strategies (Aschemann-Witzel et al., 2021; Fuentes & Fuentes, 2017). From a business perspective, changing consumer preferences, sustainability concerns, and technological innovation are driving market growth (Aschemann-Witzel et al., 2021), while marketing interventions and campaigns encourage shifts toward plant-based diets (Stancu et al., 2025).

Despite this growing body of research, the literature remains fragmented across theoretical perspectives, contexts, and methodologies, lacking an integrated synthesis (Miguel et al., 2021; Stremmel et al., 2022). Therefore, this study conducts a systematic literature review using the PRISMA method and TCCM framework to organize existing knowledge, identify research gaps, and suggest future research directions.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to examine existing research on vegan and plant-based food from consumer behaviour and marketing perspectives. To ensure transparency and rigor in the review process, this study follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Page et al., 2021).

Figure 1: PRISMA Framework Adopted by this Review



Identification: The literature search was conducted using the Scopus database, which is widely recognized for its extensive coverage of high-quality peer-reviewed journals across multiple disciplines and is commonly used in systematic literature reviews (Paul et al., 2021).

A structured keyword search strategy was developed to capture studies related to vegan and plant-based food consumption as well as consumer behaviour and marketing aspects. The search string used in Scopus was:

Title-Abs-Key ("vegan food*" OR "plant-based food*" OR "vegan diet" OR "veganism")
AND
("consumer*" OR "purchase*" OR "market*" OR "adoption"
OR "demand" OR "willingness to pay" OR "attitude*" OR
"buying behavior" OR "buying behaviour" OR "purchase
intention" OR "purchase behavior" OR "purchasing behavior" OR
"industry" OR "firm*" OR "strateg*" OR "positioning" OR
"segmentation" OR "innovation" OR "supply chain" OR
"distribution" OR "pricing" OR "competitive" OR
"commerciali*").

Initially, 3628 papers were identified.

To ensure quality and relevance, only peer-reviewed journal articles published in English were included (Paul & Criado, 2020). The search was limited to subject areas relevant to the study, including Business, Management and Accounting; Psychology; Economics, Econometrics and Finance; Social Sciences; Environmental Science; Decision Sciences; and Multidisciplinary fields. These disciplines were selected because research on vegan and plant-based food consumption often spans consumer behavior, sustainability, marketing, and economic perspectives. After applying database filters, 3377 articles were removed. Since a single database was used, no duplicates were found.

Screening: Following the PRISMA screening process, after conducting title and abstract screening, 206 articles were removed. And finally after full paper screening, 3 more papers were removed.

Inclusion: Finally, 42 articles were retained for the final review.

Key information from each selected study was extracted and organized in a review table. The findings were then synthesised using the TCCM framework, which examines literature across four dimensions: Theory, Context, Characteristics, and Methodology (Paul & Rosado-Serrano, 2019).

Findings

Following the TCCM study, paper reviews main theories, contexts, characteristics, and methodology in existing research on consumption and marketing related to vegan and plant-based food.

Theory

According to the theoretical dimension of the papers reviewed, it has been found that such research has applied a limited but diverse set of theoretical frameworks. From the final corpus of papers reviewed, several studies have explicitly used theoretical frameworks, while many do not involve any specific mention of theory.

Several studies involved the use of classical behavioral theories to explain consumers' intentions towards vegan and plant-based food. For example, theories like Theory of Planned Behavior and Theory of Reasoned Action have been used to explain how attitudes, norms, and perceived behavioral control influence intention towards such foods (da Fonseca et al., 2025; Mahasuweerachai et al., 2025; Chopra et al., 2025).

The Push–Pull–Mooring (PPM) framework has been applied to analyze how different factors shape behavioral decisions (Yu et al., 2025). The COM-B model has been used to examine facilitators and barriers affecting adoption (van Oppenraaij et al., 2025).

Some studies have used value-based frameworks related to sustainable behavior. The Value–Belief–Norm theory has been employed to study how personal values influence vegan food behavior (Kautish et al., 2024). Additionally, frameworks such as the awareness-to-action perspective explain how environmental awareness can lead to behavioral change (Lopez & Torres, 2024).

Some studies have applied marketing and communication theories to explain persuasion and consumer perception, including the Stimulus–Organism–Response model, signaling theory, and Elaboration Likelihood Model (Wang et al., 2024; Zhou et al., 2024).

A few studies have also adopted sociological perspectives to study veganism. Taste-related perspectives have been used to understand how culture impacts vegan food adoption (Perrin et al., 2024). Overall, sociocultural perspectives remain underexplored.

Context

The papers reviewed cover diverse contexts, highlighting the multidimensional nature of vegan and plant-based food consumption. A major proportion of studies have examined general consumer populations, focusing on attitudes, purchase intentions, and behavioral motivations (Mikulić & Tonković, 2025).

An important context is the foodservice and hospitality sector. Several studies have analyzed vegan restaurants and food experiences, including customer perceptions and consumption motives (Hernandez et al., 2024; Yun et al., 2025). These studies highlight how restaurant environments influence experiences and satisfaction.

Digital environments also play a key role. Studies have examined the influence of social media and electronic word-of-mouth on plant-based food perceptions (Ma & Zhang, 2025; Lee & Kim, 2024), indicating that digital platforms significantly shape consumer behavior.

The reviewed studies cover a range of geographical locations, including both developed and emerging economies. However, a larger proportion of studies are concentrated in developed regions, while emerging markets remain comparatively underrepresented. This indicates uneven geographical representation and scope for future research.

Some studies also examine social environments influencing vegan behavior, such as community and cultural influences (Nair & Thomas, 2024; Lopez & Torres, 2024).

Characteristics

This analyse the main constructs and variables that have been studied in the literature.

- **Independent Variables (Drivers of Vegan Consumption)**

Several recurring predictors are identified across studies. Animal welfare concerns are among the most important motivations (da Fonseca et al., 2025). Environmental sustainability is another key driver, including factors such as environmental concern and ecological responsibility (Kautish et al., 2024).

Health motivations also influence vegan food decisions, particularly perceptions of healthier alternatives and long-term wellbeing (van Oppenraaij et al., 2025). Social factors such as peer influence, subjective norms, and social identity further impact dietary choices (Teangsompong & Sawangproh, 2024).

Marketing-related factors, including digital exposure and communication strategies, also play a role in shaping consumer behavior (Wang et al., 2024).

- **Mediating Variables**

Mediators explain how motivations translate into behavior. Key mediators include attitude toward vegan food, perceived behavioral effectiveness (Peterson et al., 2024), and emotional responses such as pride and guilt (Zhang et al., 2024).

- **Moderating Variables**

Moderating variables influence the strength of relationships between predictors and outcomes. These include credibility of endorsers (Zhou et al., 2024) and consumer characteristics such as individual differences affecting message interpretation (Shao & Jeong, 2024).

- **Dependent Variables**

Most studies focus on behavioral outcomes such as purchase intention (Chopra et al., 2025), adoption of vegan diets (Rahman & Abdullah, 2024), and repurchase intention (Koh et al., 2024). The literature mainly emphasizes understanding adoption behavior.

Methodology

The reviewed studies employ a mix of quantitative, qualitative, and experimental approaches. Quantitative research dominates, with most studies using survey-based designs and structured questionnaires (Mahasuweerachai et al., 2025; Chopra et al., 2025). Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) is widely used for testing relationships between variables.

Some studies also use experimental designs to establish causal relationships, particularly in marketing contexts (Kumar & Gupta, 2024; Katare & Zhao, 2024).

Qualitative approaches provide deeper insights into social and cultural aspects. These include interviews and ethnographic methods to understand consumer experiences and community practices (Khatri & Singh, 2024; Nair & Thomas, 2024).

Additionally, some studies analyze digital discourse to explore emerging vegan cultures (Hernandez et al., 2024).

Research Gaps and Future Research Directions

On the basis of analysis of the 42 reviewed papers, several research gaps have been emerged in the literature on vegan and plant-based food consumption and marketing.

The existing literature shows limited application of theoretical frameworks. Although some studies use theories like TPB and TRA, they do not fully capture social and psychological motivations related to plant-based consumption. In marketing literature, the use of theoretical models is also limited, leading to fragmented theoretical development.

Current research mainly focuses on general populations, emphasizing attitudes and intentions. Contexts are largely restricted to hospitality, food retail, and digital platforms, while other areas remain underexplored. Moreover, most studies are concentrated in Western economies, with limited attention to emerging markets such as India.

Most studies examine key drivers like ethical, environmental, and health factors, while psychological aspects such as identity, emotions, and moderating or mediating variables are less explored. Marketing-related constructs, including branding, product attributes, and pricing perceptions, also require further attention.

Methodologically, the literature is dominated by quantitative, cross-sectional survey designs using techniques like SEM, which may not fully capture evolving consumption patterns. Qualitative and experimental approaches remain limited.

Future research should strengthen the theoretical foundation of plant-based consumption by integrating multiple behavioral and sociological frameworks rather than relying on isolated models. More studies are also needed in emerging and rural contexts to address geographical imbalance and improve generalizability. Research should move beyond purchase intention to examine long-term behavioral change, including actual consumption and habit formation, using longitudinal and experimental designs to establish causality. Additionally, future studies should explore underexamined factors such as cultural influences, identity, and socio-economic differences. The role of digital media, influencers, and evolving marketing strategies also requires deeper investigation, particularly for sustained adoption.

Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive understanding of the existing literature on vegan and plant-based food consumption and marketing through a systematic review of 42 research articles. The findings highlight that while interest in plant-based consumption has grown significantly, the literature remains fragmented across theoretical frameworks, research contexts, and methodological approaches. The review reveals that consumer behavior is primarily driven by ethical, environmental, and health-related motivations, with additional influence from social and marketing factors.

From a theoretical perspective, only a limited number of studies apply established frameworks, indicating a lack of theoretical integration. Contextually, research is concentrated in developed economies and general consumer populations, with relatively limited attention to emerging markets and diverse socio-cultural settings. The analysis of characteristics shows that while key drivers are well explored, psychological and marketing-related constructs require deeper investigation. Methodologically, the dominance of quantitative and cross-sectional designs suggests the need for more diverse and robust approaches.

Overall, this study contributes by systematically organizing existing knowledge using the TCCM framework and identifying key research gaps. It offers valuable insights for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers, while also providing clear directions for future research to advance understanding in this evolving field.

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