

**Prompt 1: Introduce your Topic**

I have chosen to analyze vegan Communities of Practice (CoP). Veganism is a lifestyle in which one commits to the abstinence from animal products in both diet and daily practices (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). While this does constitute a broad, worldwide ‘community’, there are many subsets with their own values and priorities. For my project, I have elected to analyze lexical differences between Communities of Practice which choose veganism for (1) animal welfare purposes; (2) environmental reasons; and (3) personal health benefits, and then I have analyzed how those terms have mostly been rejected when applied to the advertisement of vegan/plant-based products. I have done so by gathering data from top websites dedicated to these three separate motivations and then by applying the language from those data sets to the websites of top vegan/plant-based products.

This topic relates to the course in numerous ways. It is a thorough exploration of the language used in related Communities of Practice to communicate their ideologies, and it also shows how the food retail industry has chosen to supply vegan items while reframing the language used to do so. As a lifelong vegetarian-turned-vegan who has worked in a vegan bakery for the past three years, this topic is very close to me. I value the information that I have collected, as it has given me insight into different ways to discuss the lifestyle I have chosen in order to thoroughly communicate values with neutral terminology.

**Prompt 2: State your Thesis**

Through my data, I will explore the terminology used by different vegan Communities of Practice, and I will examine how the lexicon and values of vegan CoP have been reframed or ignored in the advertisement of foods free from animal products. I will demonstrate how the

word “vegan” represents a lifestyle and belief system, whereas “plant-based” represents a choice available to consumers.

### **Prompt 3: Describe your Data**

For my data, I visited two websites representative of each vegan community of practice. I chose them by selecting the top organizations’ websites from Google.com after searching for “vegan \_\_\_\_\_ (animal/environmental/health)”. I then visited eleven websites for brands which exclusively sell vegan or vegetarian products, which I found by searching “top vegan food brands” and working through the list.

From here, I read the ‘about’ pages and ‘mission statement’ pages, compiled a list of commonly used phrases or terms related to their ideologies, and then I used the “find” function in the internet browser in order to collect data on the number of instances each term occurred on each of these pages. After that, I took the top most-used terms from each of the three CoP and applied them to each vegan brand’s website to see if there was a correlation in the frequency of usage. The list of words applied to each data set is as follows: Abuse, animal (agriculture), calcium, calories, climate (change), consequences, consumption, cruel, cruelty-free, death, diet, earth, emissions, environment, exploit, flesh, global (warming), greenhouse, health, horrific, humane, industry, kill, nutrition, pain, planet, plant-based, pollution, protein, quality of life, rainforest, skin, slaughter, suffer, sustainable, synthetic, vegan, and welfare.

The data collection was relatively straightforward, though there were some technical aspects that required troubleshooting. In the tables below, note that any derivation of the words listed were also accounted for (e.g. “death” also includes data for “die, dying, dead”, etc.). Some of the words in the data set were often used in conjunction with others, and so I have noted that in the parenthetical (e.g. “climate” and “climate change” are accounted for under the same set).

The “find” function was also an imperfect tool and required that I sift through each instance to ensure it was (1) applicable and (2) a unique instance on the page, e.g. not being counted when it was part of the website domain name. Additionally, some of the websites contained extensive information and resources, whereas others had limited information. As a result, the overall sample size of data from table to table varies but can still be analyzed in terms of ratios (e.g. at GreenVegans.org, the usage of ‘vegan’ versus ‘plant-based’ is 13:1).

My data, retaining the ten most-commonly used terms from each website (with the exception of items which had equal frequency), as well as the number of instances of the usage of the term “plant-based”, is as follows:

**Table (1): Vegan for Animal Welfare – Collected from PETA.org (People, 2020)**

Term	Frequency Used
Vegan	41
Cruel	36
Kill	34
Abuse	27
Death	23
Suffer	23
Humane	16
Skin	16
Slaughter	11
Pain	10
Plant-Based	2

**Table (2): Vegan for Animal Welfare –**

**Collected from FriendsOfAnimals.org (Friends, 2020)**

Term	Frequency Used
Vegan	17
Kill	9
Diet	7
Welfare	6
Exploit	4
Health	4
Suffer	4
Humane	3
Planet	3
Plant-based	2

**Table (3): Vegan for Environmental Preservation – Collected from GreenVegans.org (Green, n.d.)**

<b>Term</b>	<b>Frequency Used</b>
Vegan	26
Sustainable	20
Consumption	19
Earth	16
Environment	14
Global (Warming)	8
Animal Agriculture	7
Suffer	7
Health	7
Pollution	5
Plant-Based	2

**Table (4): Vegan for Environmental Preservation**  
– Collected from Cowspiracy.com  
(“Cowspiracy”, n.d.)

<b>Term</b>	<b>Frequency Used</b>
Consumption	30
Environment	29
Animal Agriculture	29
Emissions	20
Industry	12
Greenhouse	12
Rainforest	10
Vegan	9
Plant-based	9
Sustainable	9
Planet	9

**Table (5): Vegan for Health Benefits – Collected  
from VeganHealth.org (“Tips”, 2018)**

Term	Frequency Used
Vegan	38
Diet	38
Nutrition	28
Protein	22
Health	20
Calories	8
Calcium	4
Plant-based	3
Animal	2
Benefits	2
Environment	2

**Table (6): Vegan for Health Benefits – Collected  
from HappyCow.com (“Team”, n.d.)**

Term	Frequency Used
Vegan	84
Health	50
Diet	36
Nutrition	19
Plant-based	11
Environment	7
Animal	7
Benefits	6
Suffer	6
Protein	5
Earth	5

From here, I was able to determine the top instances in common between the individual CoPs. For animal activists, the top terms were “vegan” (58), “kill” (43), and “suffer” (27). “Vegan” was used 58 times, whereas “plant-based” was only used four times, which represents a 14.5:1 ratio. For environmental preservation, the top instances in common were “consumption” (49), “environment” (43), and “animal agriculture” (36). “Vegan” was used 35 times, and “plant-based” was used 11 times, which is nearly a 3:1 ratio. As for health-motivated vegans, the top terms were “vegan” (122), “diet” (74), and “health” (70). “Vegan” was used 122 times, and “plant-based”

appeared 14 times – nearly a 9:1 ratio. Next, I applied these terms to the eleven aforementioned vegan food product brands. This data and its analysis are represented in the tables below.

**Table (7): Vegan Food Product Advertisement**

	Vegan	Plant-Based or Plants	Kill	Suffer	Consumption	Environment	Reference to Animal Agriculture	Diet	Health
<b>SoDelicious</b> (So, n.d.)	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
<b>Oatly</b> (Oatly, n.d.)	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
<b>Beyond Meat</b> (Beyond, n.d.)	0	2	0	0	0	0	4	0	4
<b>MorningStar</b> (MorningStar, n.d.)	4	8	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
<b>Daiya</b> (Daiya, n.d.)	2	8	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
<b>Follow Your Heart</b> (Follow, n.d.)	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
<b>BOCA</b> (BOCA, n.d.)	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Earth Balance</b> (Earth, n.d.)	5	2	0	0	0	1	2	2	0
<b>Silk</b> (Silk, n.d.)	1	5	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
<b>Violife</b> (Violife, n.d.)	9	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
<b>Impossible</b> (Impossible, n.d.)	0	1	0	0	0	3	2	0	0
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>

**Table (8): Vegan Food Product Advertisement “Vegan” vs. “Plant-Based”**

	Number of Brands
<b>“Vegan” Only</b>	1
<b>“Plant-Based” Only</b>	3
<b>Uses both but “vegan” more often</b>	2
<b>Uses both but “plant-based” more often</b>	5

The language used among advertisers tends toward an alignment with the environmental vegan CoP, perhaps because it is less visceral than animal rights and more collective than personal health. It can also be used to project a vision of philanthropy through the brand’s promoting of itself as environmentally-friendly.

In this data set, it is important to note that the brand “Violife” represents an outlier. Of the brands surveyed, it is the only one that folds the word “vegan” into its immediate appearance and advertising – directly beneath the brand name “Violife” on all packaging, it also says “100% Vegan” in nearly equal size. If we exclude “Violife” from the table 8 data set, note that the total instances of the word “vegan” drops to 17 while the phrase “plant-based” remains at 33, which represents a nearly 1:2 ratio. This also removes the “vegan” only qualifier from table 8.

Even with the inclusion of the outlier, it is clear that the term “plant-based” is more pervasive than “vegan” in the advertisement of food free from animal products, while the inverse is true among vegan CoP. When the outlier is removed from consideration, “plant-based” becomes obviously favored. It is used inclusively, as though to welcome in people from outside the vegan CoP. For example, the MorningStar Farms page boasts, “MorningStar Farms is plant-based goodness made for everyone” (MorningStar, n.d.). Even when “vegan” is used by brands, it is sometimes in a way that negates the CoP, like on BOCA’s page: “[Y]ou don’t need to be a

vegetarian or vegan to enjoy!” (BOCA, n.d.). Veganism is an often-stigmatized CoP (Markowski & Roxburgh, 2019); to see this stigma pervade in advertisement so closely related to that CoP is a unique phenomenon which I will discuss further below.

#### **Prompt 4: Develop a Conceptual Framework**

My research demonstrates that the word “vegan” is a means to identify with others in a vegan Community of Practice who maintain a similar lifestyle, belief system, and moral code; “plant-based”, on the other hand, represents a choice available to consumers without their having to reconsider their own framework.

Frames of references refer to one’s overall understanding of a concept and the parts that construct that concept within one’s own mind. These segments may be reliant on one’s experiential circumstances and histories. For example, someone raised in a traditional, omnivorous American context may relate the concept “agriculture” to “beef” or “food”. In a vegan CoP, “agriculture” may evoke more emotional and ethical concerns, like “suffer” or “consumption” (see tables 5&6).

By observing tables 1-6, we can gain an understanding of the frames of reference through which different vegan CoP operate. Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate an animal rights-based frame of reference. They use words that emphasize the experiences and sensations of animals being farmed: consider the frequency of the word “kill”, as well as the words “welfare” and “humane”. In table 1, PETA even demonstrates frequent usage of the word “skin”, which draws parallels from the non-human animal to the human experience. Further research could be conducted into the agricultural industry’s own lexicon; it seems unlikely that these words would make frequent—if any—appearances in a similar study, as they operate under a different frame of reference. Tables 3 and 4 represent an environmental frame of reference, and the lexicon



primarily reflects global issues and concerns. Tables 5 and 6 are indicative of a personal health perspective, and they primarily focus on individual nutrition.

The stigma that is often associated with veganism could be linked to linguistic relativity. Linguistic relativity is the concept that language develops primarily as a response to culture, and the language that is built from that culture then continues to perpetuate the values and rituals of that CoP. By participating in and encouraging behaviors which promote the well-being of animals, the planet, and oneself, a language has developed that frames a vegan lifestyle within a moral and ethical context. This relativism exists within its own feedback loop; when someone from a vegan CoP is removed from his or her context, it can result in broken social conventions (Markowski & Roxburgh, 2019). People from outside of the vegan CoP can also feel threatened by the language used within a vegan CoP lexicon, as much of the language relates to morals and values in a way that are not universal. Non-vegan CoP may construe this as their own morals or values being called into question or invalidated. As a result, brands and advertisers have had to step outside of the linguistic relativity of the vegan CoP. In this reframing of “vegan” to “plant-based”, they have found a more neutral and common ground through which they may appeal to consumers.

### **Prompt 5: Engage with the Literature**

Freedman & Jurafsky’s “Authenticity in America: Class Distinctions in Potato Chip Advertising” (2011) was largely influential in my solidifying a topic of discussion. In this piece, the researchers collect language from potato chip packaging in order to study class identity language in advertising. Their focus on “authenticity” made me consider what sort of narrative that brands free from animal products are trying to create. From my research, they appear to be

selling a view of the world that is more wholesome and “for the greater good”, though without getting into the negative realities of the mass-produced food retail industry.

It is interesting, too, that Freedman & Jarofsky discuss linguistic negation in advertising as a means to emphasize bad qualities in other brands. I was reminded of this when visiting the outlier of the brand data set, Violife, who mentions a “guilt-free diet”, implying that other diets necessitate guilt (Violife, n.d.). Freedman & Jarofsky’s piece also helped me consider the identity that these brands want to perpetuate versus the identity they want to shift away from — like MorningStar Farms asserting, “No futuristic franken-food or all-or-nothing activism” (MorningStar, n.d.). I was surprised at what a common tactic it was to separate the brand from the vegan stigma.

Lakoff’s 2010 piece “Why it Matters How We Frame the Environment” also influenced my project. In this work, he discusses environmental framing and explores how the issues surrounding environmental preservation are presented to the public. He argues that it necessitates a stronger framework on which to build the understanding of environmental issues in order to enact change. He mentions Michael Pollan inventing words like ‘sun-based’ and ‘oil-based’ in order to work around preconceived notions of organic farming; it is my supposition that the phrase “plant-based” arose in much the same way. Lakoff also made me consider how important it is to put aside one’s own personal attachments to a subject in order to find the most effective means of communicating a cause.

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