

# PERCEPTION OF VEGANISM AS A LIFESTYLE CHOICE IN DELHI

## INTRODUCTION

“IT TAKES NOTHING AWAY FROM A HUMAN TO BE KIND TO AN ANIMAL,” said Joaquin Phoenix in a tweet. ((PETA [@peta], 2016)PETA [@peta], 2016)

Would you eat your pet? While it is an odd question to ask, it is used as an argument for adopting veganism by a lot of animal activists around the world. There has been heated debate around the topic of veganism for decades in all fields of social sciences such as Ethics, Philosophy, Sociology, Anthropology, etc.

(*Definition of VEGAN*, n.d.)According to Merriam-Webster, a vegan is a strict vegetarian who consumes no food (such as meat, eggs, or dairy products) that comes from animals and abstains from using animal products (such as leather).

We have seen that Veganism is an upcoming form of lifestyle choice. However, as social scientists, it becomes crucial for us to understand the prevalence of Veganism in society and whether it is a sustainable lifestyle here to stay or just a fad that will disappear with time.

As part of this report, we are trying to substantiate what people understand about Veganism and the reasons for its growth or downfall in the coming future. We have attempted to understand people's general perspective of Veganism as a lifestyle choice, define the topic based on various aspects, understand our sample space, and categorize the subject of Veganism based on multiple factors and conditions. We intend to understand the effect of factors like age, gender, the city they reside in, and education qualification. We hope to understand the background and perspective of the person so that we can understand the conditions and mindset under which a person can shift or not shift to Veganism as a lifestyle choice.

A recent paper published in the (Manchanda et al., 2022)South Asian Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences examines the sustainability, obstacles, and potential of India's current sustainable food consumption. They use Regression model analysis to evaluate the relationship between age, income, gender, price, knowledge, and the current level of veganism in India.

India is seen as a (“India’s Emerging Plant-Based Meat Market Offers Opportunities but Hard Work Lies Ahead,” 2022) potential significant emerging market for plant-based meat products but building a sustainable lifestyle choice for consumers.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Manchanda, Kalra, and Arya (2022): This paper analyzes the impact and feasibility of the growth of veganism in India and presents some policies to help lead to a more sustainable form of veganism in the country. The paper tries to identify the scope of veganism as a culture and the factors that impede its growth.

(Group, 2020)Shende and Godse (2020): This research paper studies the awareness of the vegan diet through social media and how various aspects of social media influence the decision of the masses to convert to this lifestyle. They try to study awareness about the topic in people and further explore the publicly available information on digital platforms, social media, and web portals and how this information encourages people to adopt a vegan lifestyle in one way or another.

## HISTORY OF VEGANISM

(*Veganuary 2022*, n.d.)In 1944, a small group of vegetarians in England first used the term "vegan." Veganism promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives to benefit animals, humans, and the environment. It conceptualizes a way of life that aims to exclude—to the extent that is possible and practicable—all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing, or any other purpose.

It is possible to trace the beginning of veganism in India to the period of the ancient philosophers Mahavira and Acharya Kundakunda. The vegan revolution in India was also influenced by Jain ideals. Because of their strict lacto-vegetarian diet and concern about harming insects, the Jain community even stays away from subterranean plants.

There were several fallacies about veganism in India, including vitamin deficiencies, a lack of variety, and high costs. Although, it won't be long before it becomes a significant aspect of the Indian lifestyle.

## PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECT OF VEGANISM

Veganism has become increasingly popular in recent years, not just as a diet but also as a way of life. Without considering its origins and effects, this movement, which occasionally appears as a "sect," has been imitated, particularly by adolescents. The term "veganism" can refer to more than simply a way of eating.

(*Peter Singer Speciesism - 461 Words | Internet Public Library*, n.d.)In his article "Speciesism and the Equality of Animals," Peter Singer argues that the capacity for suffering is a crucial

quality that grants a human or nonhuman being the right to equal consideration. Singer also argues that humans should apply the principle of equal consideration of interests to both nonhuman and human beings. In other words, he has called and explained how humans are anthropocentric.

(“What Is Really Veganism?,” 2020) Another critical factor is understanding how anthropocentric we are as humans and how we often discriminate against non-humans. In other words, veganism advocates rethinking the relationship between humans and animals as one of cohabitation rather than slavery. We believe being human entails having some control and supremacy over non-humans, particularly natural resources and animals. Vegans are not excluded by this, as most plant-based foods need water to develop, frequently an excessive amount. Therefore, it puts human life in jeopardy rather than animal life, which raises the question of whether or not we should view man as superior to or inferior to animals.

*(Veganism, Vegetarianism, and Prasadarianism | ISKCON Seshadripuram Bangalore - Sri Jagannath Mandir, n.d.)* Veganism and vegetarianism are essential principles to authenticate one’s actions, ways, and decisions—the Vaisnava devotees of Lord Krishna emphasize on few significant aspects of eating. First is understanding that eating is the last process in an agricultural act. Eating is believed to be intrinsically linked to agriculture, and not accepting it makes our understanding flawed and incomplete. If there is violence in our food, if the environment has been exploited and harmed, animals were slaughtered, artificial pharmaceutical fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides were used, and if we have helped in a holistic process or not, all of these factors directly relate to how our food is produced. They said that since the link to animals in farming was seen as the root of all violence, it was necessary to eliminate animal involvement to prevent violence. However, this view is materially shallow and thoroughly explains why veganism is a relatively contemporary movement without any Vedic theistic basis.

## METHODOLOGY

To understand the above questions, we circulated a google form-based questionnaire. Considering the subjectivity of our topic, we kept multiple long answer-type questions so that people could explain their points of view on the topic of Veganism. Our survey included two parts, the first for people who do not follow Veganism and thus to understand their perspective and their reasons for not taking it up as a lifestyle choice. The second part was for those who follow Veganism as a lifestyle choice. We questioned them on their reason for choosing Veganism, the difficulties they face or don’t face as vegans, if they know more vegans, whether it is something they believe will stay, and whether they would recommend this to other people to follow.

Our purpose for questioning Vegans on these aspects was to understand their lifestyle, which would, in turn, help us understand whether Veganism is a feasible option that will grow in India, seeing its response and popularity, will eventually fade away, or remain a choice taken up only by a niche part of the population.

Floating Google forms felt like the apt way to conduct our survey as it helped us spread our reach to all parts of the country, and we managed to send it to Indians currently residing in other parts of the world. Moreover, Google forms helped us gather an ample sample space, with responses going up to 220 in our case. Our respondents ranged from all age groups and had Vegans and Non-Vegans. To achieve a diverse reaction, we circulated our google form through social media like Instagram and sent it across various WhatsApp groups and discord channels. We particularly targeted and sent our form to Vegans through discord groups and known people in our friends and family.

Veganism is a form of lifestyle that was being taken up by some of our friends and family. It seemed like a growing and upcoming form of lifestyle. We felt that it would be interesting to analyze the growth of such a lifestyle that otherwise is a niche lifestyle choice. We felt that studying Veganism would be interesting as it might eventually change our perspective regarding our personal food choices.

While ideating and asking around on the topic, we realized that Veganism is of multiple types and a lifestyle often confused with Vegetarianism. Hence, we decided to take up the perspective aspect of the topic. This would also help us understand a larger audience, giving us a larger sample for our research. We initially set out to do our research all over the country, that is, in India. We circulated our google form far and wide and managed to gather 220 google form responses on our topic. We have responses from Mumbai, Lucknow, Bangalore, Ahmedabad, Gorakhpur, Jaipur, Pune, and several international respondents worldwide. However, because the majority of our team of researchers is currently situated in the country's capital city, New Delhi, we noticed that our sample consists of 57% of people in Delhi NCR (121 out of the 220 responses).

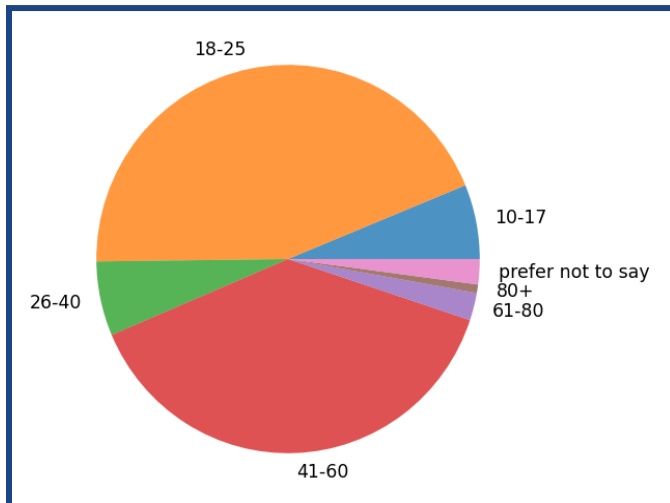
This led us to re-analyse our research topic and modify it to a Perspective of Veganism as a lifestyle choice in Delhi. We reduced our sample size to 132 from 220 so that our research could be more accurate.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

Our Google form can easily be divided into multiple parts and can be analyzed on various aspects, the first and foremost being Vegans and Non-Vegans. We will examine our sample on

the basis of age, education qualification, place of residence, gender, education qualification, etc. These aspects can also help us narrow down the class aspect of our respondents.

### Age Composition



The Age composition of our respondents varied from 10 to 80+. The majority of the respondents are from the age groups of 18-25 and 41-60

We have 8 responses from the age group 10-18

We have 56 responses from the age group 18-25

We have 8 responses from the age group 26 - 40

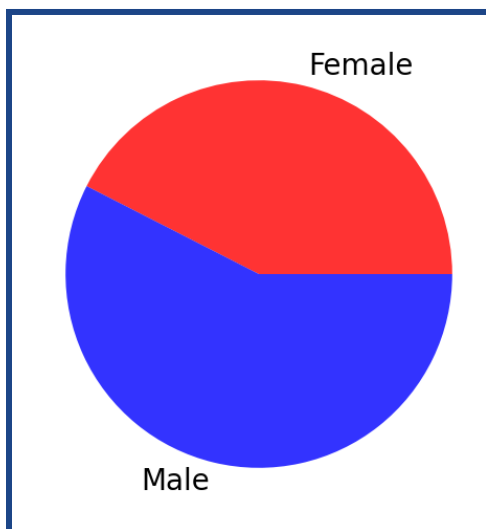
We have 49 responses from 41 to 60 (Vegans majorly from this group)

We have 3 responses from 60 to 80

We have 1 response from 80+

Prefer not to say- 2

### Gender

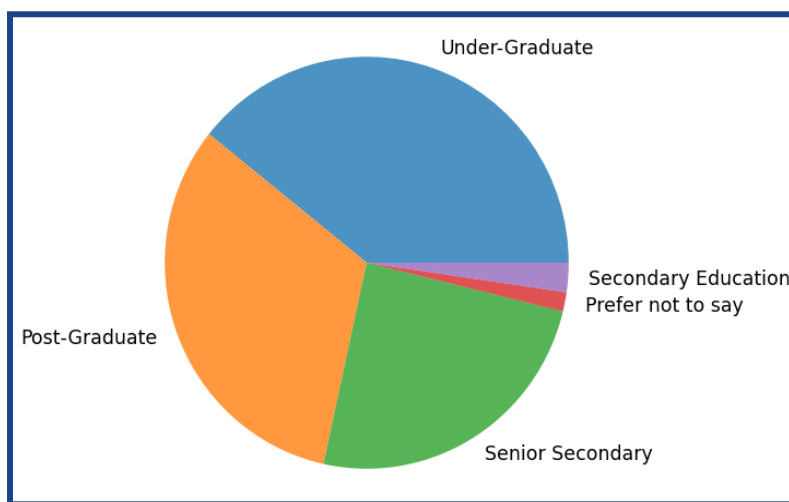


Female: 53

Male: 74

In the responses based on gender, we can see that 59% of our respondents were male, and 41% were female.

### Education Qualification



Undergraduate - 51

Postgraduate- 42

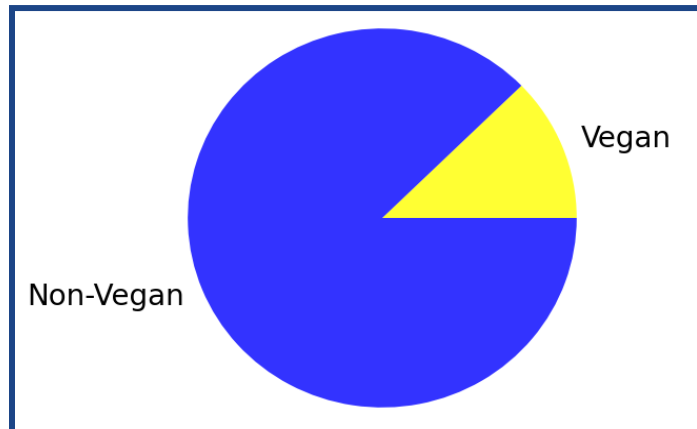
Senior Secondary - 32

Prefer not to say- 2

Secondary education- 3

Based on the education qualification, the maximum number of respondents were those who have completed their undergraduate degree. Post which the maximum number of respondents is those who have completed/completed their post-graduation.

Do you follow Veganism?

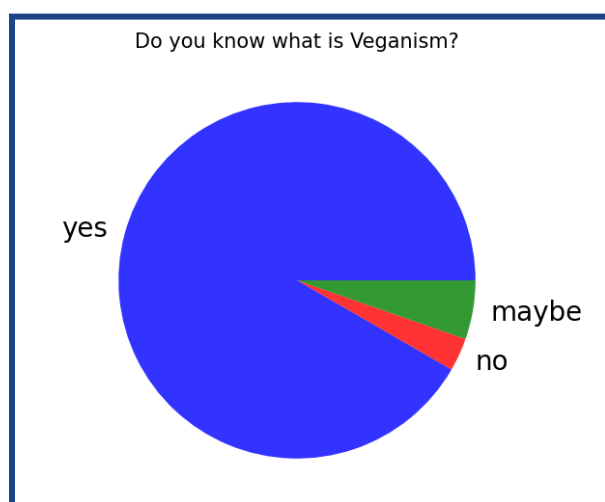


1. Non-vegans: 115

2. Vegans: 17

This means that if we scale up this data, we could say that roughly around 12.8% of people do claim to follow Veganism as a lifestyle in Delhi. Whereas the majority that is 87% of people, do not follow Veganism, thus making it a niche lifestyle choice, followed by only people from well-off positions. However, when we saw this data in detail, we realized that some people claimed to be Vegans; however, their understanding of Veganism was that of Vegetarianism. They considered themselves to be vegans because they followed a vegetarian diet. This implies that Vegans account for only 15 people, 11.3 % of the sample.

### General Perspective of Veganism



The major concepts we came across while analyzing what people understood from veganism, we can say that most people who claimed to know what veganism also knew in layman's language what veganism stands for. Due to major misconceptions, or maybe a lack of communication skills, people confused Veganism with vegetarianism or a plant-based diet. This, to some extent, is true; however, not completely right. Around 6% of the people out of the people who answered what they understood had a misconception of Veganism being equivalent to vegetarianism.

### Perspective and Response of Non-Vegans to Veganism

Out of 132, 115 people do not follow Veganism. This accounts for 87% of the sample, which can be scaled up to Delhi. When we questioned people who do not follow Veganism as to why they did not opt for this form of lifestyle, the majority answered that they did not opt for it because they preferred the other forms of diet over Veganism is why they did not shift to it. People emphasized that they were fond of dairy products, were non-vegetarians, could not spare them, or would prefer to continue eating them. Other perspectives included people saying they did not like the taste of Vegan food. They felt Vegan food was pointless, didn't believe in veganism or weren't convinced enough to shift to veganism as a lifestyle choice. Some responses went to the extent that they don't believe in animal rights and said that plants are also life givers as they provide oxygen, that harming them is also not valid. Hence, it is nothing but human nature to consume non-vegetarian food. They claimed that statistically, everyone couldn't shift to Veganism, as there aren't enough resources on earth for everyone to change. Reasons such as Vegan food being expensive and unavailable easily were reasons for not opting.

We tried to understand how they felt about veganism if they had to follow it personally, and only 10 people out of the 132 were open to taking up Veganism in the future. The rest of the people were doubtful, and around 51% were against the idea of taking it up in the future. Their reason for such stern refusal was the same as for not initially taking it up. One of the significant drawbacks of the Vegan diet that came forward was the lack of protein sources.

We further tried to understand where we're our respondents came from and what is their current form of diet. So 53% of our respondents were Non - vegetarians, 15% were eggetarians, and 22% were vegetarians. On the other hand, 10% preferred not to disclose their choice. This made us realize that, since most of our respondents were Non-vegetarians, it becomes slightly more difficult to leave animal products and shift to Veganism compared to a Vegetarian, who, except for dairy products, doesn't consume very many non-vegan products.

Next, we questioned people that as Non-Vegans or people who haven't restricted their diet to plant-based products and what they feel about this lifestyle choice or form of diet.



Most people felt that Veganism is a sustainable, environment-friendly, and animal-friendly form of diet. They again said that it is difficult to follow veganism as a form of diet, not feasible for everyone to shift to it, and that it offers limited choice in food. Around 48.4% of people felt that it offers limited choice in food and that it is difficult to easily find vegan food. They don't deny the benefits of this form of diet, but due to the multiple constraints, this is not a very popular form of choice for people. Around 18% of non-vegans felt that Veganism is a fad, 23% of people felt that it was a sustainable form of lifestyle that is here to stay and the rest of them want to wait and watch what Veganism brings in the future.

#### Perspective and Response of Vegans on various aspects of their Lifestyle.

When we studied the responses to the Google form, we calculated that out of the 132 responses 17 people followed Veganism. This means that if we scale up this data, we could say that roughly around 12.8% of people do claim to follow Veganism as a lifestyle in Delhi. However, as mentioned above, these responses come from people living in urban cities and most probably with affluent backgrounds. Therefore, we could reframe to say that approximately 13% of people above a certain economic threshold, living in coming up metropolitan cities follow Veganism. Our vegan respondents were majorly people who have been following Veganism for around 5 years or more(8/15), thus making their perspective legitimate and something that can be used as a source for the perspective of Vegans in general.

Another commonality among vegans is that they are all either undergraduates or post graduates. This shows that Veganism is being adopted by people who are educated to a certain degree.

The reasons given by Vegans for opting for this as a lifestyle choice included it being an environment-friendly form of lifestyle, to prevent animal cruelty, or due to friends and family. If we consider the reason for taking it up due to friends and family it means that people have opted for the lifestyle not because of any ethical reasons, but due to peer pressure, or for it being a fad. This means that these people might opt out in a similar manner, if their friends and family decide to change their food habits.

When we asked for Vegans' perspectives on their food choices they said that they prefer it as Veganism is sustainable and it is animal friendly. They feel that it is an easy form of lifestyle, and they don't need to take many decisions, as they always know what to eat. This implies that veganism restricts the elements or ingredients that one can eat. Other reasons include spirituality and the belief that it is the best form of diet for humans.

Then to further understand what would have influenced them to shift to Veganism, we asked them if any close family member followed Veganism, that out of 15, 10 of them had other family members who followed Veganism. These family members were mostly close relatives, like

parents or children. Moreover, the main point of influence for them as parents, friends, or as people put it was a personal choice.

We realized through our survey that Vegans majorly already knew about veganism as a food choice. Only a few of them discovered it, either from social media or movies. Except for one of our respondents, none of them follow celebrities or any famous influencers.

Coming to the availability of Vegan food, people who followed Veganism were those who could easily order them online on platforms like Amazon. They felt that finding ingredients for Vegans is not very difficult, and they would simply replace animal-based products with that something plant-based. The regular everyday meal for a Vegan is almost the same as that of an average North Indian. Their regular meal included dal, vegetables, fruit, wheat(roti)/ rice, and corn. With this observation, we could say that almost all Indians consume a Vegan meal on a day-to-day basis. The only substitutes they use are dairy products, where they majorly use almond milk, soy milk, or coconut milk.

Finally, we asked Vegan people if they would suggest this as a lifestyle choice to others, and a majority of them (11/15) would promote this as a lifestyle choice. Then 12/15 of them felt that Veganism is a sustainable option, which is here to stay and it isn't a fad, that would fade away with time. These responses imply that people who have taken up Veganism are satisfied with it and don't intend to go back or change to other forms of eating habits. They believe that it is ethical, environment friendly, and would help reduce cruelty.

#### Fieldwork Interview - [Interview - Google Docs](#)

As part of our fieldwork for our project we went to a Vegan restaurant: Greenr, in GK - II, N-block market, to conduct an interview with the restaurant manager and to understand their perspective on the growth of veganism. Considering the fact that restaurant owners have their livelihood based on the fact whether people shift to Veganism as a form of diet or not, we felt that their perspective on this topic will really help us get an insight into this topic.

Moreover, a plus point of this visit was that we could try out some Vegan food ourselves :)

During the interview with the manager of Greenr, GK, we found out that there are multiple outlets of Greenr throughout the country. The one we visited was located in Greater Kailash. Their first outlet was in Vasant Vihar. Apart from these, they're open in Gurgaon and Mumbai as well. Their founder is currently in California.

The owner told us how the cafe used to be relatively emptier back in 2019. Although, over covid, more and more people converted to veganism. They get quite a lot of regulars now, which even include non-vegans(vegetarians) as well.

Initially, people came over to try vegan food at Greenr, but lately, they are well-versed with the vegan options available. They specifically go for vegan food like milkshakes and, surprisingly, pizza. Greenr has many options for vegan products, even alternatives for non-vegan products like almond or coconut milk. Most of their food items are made in the kitchen instead of packaged alternatives. The most intriguing part is that they make their own cheese using almond milk.

## CONCLUSION

When we set out to do our project report we felt that Veganism is a very niche form of lifestyle choice. We felt that maybe only 4-5% of people follow Veganism in our city, but the data suggested that around 11.3% follow veganism, which is double of what we estimated. We also thought that it would be a difficult task to locate multiple vegans, however, as our form was circulated over social media channels like discord, WhatsApp and Instagram, we received overwhelming responses from everywhere. Other than that most of our assumptions came out to be true. We felt that people who follow veganism would support it as a lifestyle choice, whereas on the other hand, non-vegans, especially people who are non vegetarians, would defy Veganism as a lifestyle choice. Other than that, vegans are mostly from a well to do background, with a certain amount of education level, and it is not something that people commonly follow.

Lastly, the major themes of our paper were to understand whether Veganism is growing or is it just a fad. We realised that people who are following it, will continue to do so , as they believe it to be a sustainable form of living that is here to stay. Secondly, the majority of our respondents who were vegans, had this as a food choice for 5 or more years. Thus, it becomes highly unlikely for them to go back. On the other hand, if we see the perspective of Non-vegans, majorly they defy it, and don't intend to take it up in the near future. Thus, we can say that Veganism, or people who are Vegans, might remain constant, and be a niche part of society. Growth can not be seen, as non-vegans inclined towards it are limited.

If we further analyze our data and correlate it to Sociological concepts, we see that Veganism is a form of Stratification. As mentioned above, only the rich or a niche form of society are following it. Their overall lifestyle, on which restaurants they go to eat, what they eat, from where they purchase their products, etc are different from the majority of the population. Secondly, we can see how network society influences people to opt for Veganism. We saw that around 66% of Vegans have some family or friend member who also follows veganism. Moreover, we found that there are multiple websites and discord channels where vegan people connect and talk to each other, forming a network society. Thirdly, we can see the presence of Glocalisation, as there are a certain number of people, who follow veganism, in the form of Indian meals. We can say that daily major parts of Indian food are a form of Vegan food, as it does not have any animal-based products. Lastly, we can highlight the presence of mass behavior in Veganism, how one follows veganism and the majority of the family starts to follow it. The perspective of all the

near and dear ones changes, and gets influenced. The same can be noticed for Non-vegans. It is rare to find people who are Vegans and don't have any other known vegans in their circle.

Finally, we would like to conclude that doing this research made us realize as researchers that Veganism is here to stay, but may not grow that much in the near future.

### **LIMITATIONS OF OUR RESEARCH**

Prior to moving on to the analysis of our data, we would like to inform our readers that, being college students, our sample space might be fairly biased and does not account for respondents from all strata of society. If we focus on the approach of collecting data we can say that our respondents are limited to people who are proficient with using technology and can easily fill out surveys on tools like Google forms. Secondly, our respondents are all who can read and write in English. Lastly, considering the fact that the majority of our team of researchers are currently situated in the country's capital city, New Delhi, we can notice that our sample consists of 50% of people situated in Delhi NCR.

Finally, we noticed that the responses to the subjective questions were fairly lower than that to the objective-type questions. The subjective questions only had  $\frac{1}{3}$  of respondents answering compared to the objective questions.

Therefore, considering the biases in our analysis and findings of this paper may or may not be scaled up to the context of the whole country. It is just a small attempt for college students to understand this style of living in a deeper sense and analyze the patterns it forms in our sample.

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## ANNEXURE

This form has been made by the students of IIIT Delhi for research purposes. The intent of this form is to do a survey on multiple participants on the topic of Veganism. We assure that all the data collected will remain confidential and will only be used for the research paper. The findings during the survey will only be shared with the college students, our Faculty and our Research group. We assure our participants that anonymity will be maintained while presenting the findings.

The following form will only need 5 minutes of your time. We thank you for your time, patience and effort.

Age

10-17

18-25

26-40

41-60

61-80

80+

Prefer not to say

Gender

Male

Female

Prefer not to say

Other:

Which city do you reside in ?

Your answer

What is your education qualification?

Secondary Education

Senior-Secondary Education

Under-Graduate

Post- Graduate

Ph.D

Prefer not to say

Other:

Do you know what veganism is?

Yes

No

Maybe

What do you understand with the term Vegan or Veganism?

Your answer

Do you follow Veganism as a lifestyle choice?

Yes

No

VEGANS-

Since how long have you been following Veganism?

less than 1 month

2-6 months

6 months - year

2-4 years

More than 5 years

Other:

What made you decide or choose Veganism as a form of diet over others?

Influencer/ Celebrity

Animal Cruelty

Environment Friendly choice of lifestyle

Due to friends or family

Other:

What do you think about Veganism as a lifestyle choice?

It is a sustainable form of living

It is not environmentally feasible for everyone to shift towards veganism

It is animal friendly

It offers limited choice in food

Difficult to find the food items

It is an easy form of lifestyle, I always know what to eat

It is a great form of diet

Other:

Do your parents or any close family member follow veganism ? If yes, who?

Who would you say had a crucial role in helping you decide that you want to follow Veganism?

Or would you rather call it a personal choice ?

Celebrity / Influencer

Parents

Friends

Close Relative/ Family member



Personal Choice

Prefer not to say

Other:

Did you always know about Veganism or did you discover this as a form of lifestyle?

Yes

No

Other:

Do you follow any famous influencer or dietician who are known to be Vegan's and you take inspiration from them? If yes, who?

How convenient it is for you to find Vegan products?

Very Convenient

1

2

3

4

5

Difficult

Where do you get the vegan products from?

Your answer

On a regular day, what does your diet include?

Your answer

What is your go to as an alternative to dairy products ?

Almond milk

Soy Milk

Coconut milk

Hemp Milk

Rice milk

Other:

Do you think Veganism as a lifestyle choice will remain prevalent in the long run or is it just a fad or a phase that will lose its shine with time?

It is a fad

It is a sustainable form of lifestyle that is here to stay

Will wait and watch what it brings

Other:

Would you recommend turning vegan to other people?

Yes

No

Maybe

If yes, why?

Your answer

Thank you for taking out time to fill out our form.

Your answer

#### PERSPECTIVE OF VEGANISM-

If you do not follow veganism, why not ? (From the above question)

Your answer

If you don't follow Veganism, then did you ever consider following it or taking it up as a lifestyle choice or do you plan to take it up in the future ?

Yes

No

Maybe

If no, why not? (From the above question)

Your answer

Currently in which category of the food choice division would you put yourself in?\*

Vegetarian - (a person who does not eat meat or fish)

Vegan

Gluten-free (A gluten-free diet is an eating plan that excludes foods containing gluten. Gluten is a protein found in wheat, barley, rye and triticale)

Eggetarian (A vegetarian who also eats eggs and egg products)

Non-Vegetarian

Other:

What do you think about Veganism as a lifestyle choice?

It is a sustainable form of living

It is not environmentally feasible for everyone to shift towards veganism

It is animal friendly

It offers limited choice in food

Difficult to find the food items

It is an easy form of lifestyle, I always know what to eat

It is a great form of diet

Other:

Do you think Veganism as a lifestyle choice will remain prevalent in the long run or is it just a fad or a phase that will lose its shine with time?

It is a fad

It is a sustainable form of lifestyle that is here to stay

Will wait and watch what it brings

Other:

Thank you for taking out time to fill out our form.