

ENDORSEMENT OF SUSTAINABLE VEGAN PRODUCTS BY INDIAN CELEBRITIES AND ITS IMPACT ON CONSUMER PERCEPTION

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ABSTRACT

There is a growing trend and awareness about veganism in India. Veganism is a lifestyle practice of abstaining from using or eating animals or their byproducts directly or indirectly in any possible manner. Sustainability is the practice of efficient consumption of resources in the present moment so that it will have the most negligible impact on the surrounding environment for present and future generations. The recent literature has formed a relationship between sustainability and vegan products. From endorsing to setting up vegan restaurants, celebrities all over Bollywood have contributed to bringing attention to the sustainable nature of vegan products. Therefore, the paper aims to study various sustainable vegan endorsements by Indian celebrities, examine the awareness level of sustainable vegan products among consumers, and study the impact of celebrities endorsing sustainable vegan products on consumer perception in Delhi-NCR. Data were collected from 103 respondents through a semi-structured questionnaire, and regression analysis was done. The first objective was achieved from secondary data. The second objective was achieved by analyzing the mean of Likert statements measuring the awareness level of sustainable vegan products, concluding that people are highly aware of sustainable vegan products in the market. The third objective was achieved by running a regression analysis between vegan endorsement by celebrities (independent) and consumer perception of sustainable vegan products (dependent), indicating an impact of the independent

2229

variable on the dependent variable. Thus, the research led to the fulfillment of all three objectives. The conclusion of the current study supported the claims of previous literature. The research will be helpful for marketers who are planning to launch vegan products in the market to understand consumer perception and prepare marketing campaigns accordingly.

Keywords: Celebrity, consumer perception, endorsement, sustainability, vegan.

INTRODUCTION

The growing awareness concerning the gains of a sustainable, vegan way of living has undoubtedly caught the notice of celebrities during the pandemic. Many studies are available on celebrities and their endorsements, publicity, advertisements, likings, and lifestyle, but none has considered veganism in the above context. Limited studies connect veganism, sustainability, and marketing (celebrity status). The above study has never been done in India before. Thus, the present study has been performed to ascertain the impact of celebrities' endorsement of sustainable vegan products on consumer perception.

The following are the objectives of the paper:

1. To compare awareness level of sustainable vegan products between male and female
2. To assess the impact of awareness of sustainable vegan products on consumer perception

There has been an enormous interest in marketing strategies enhancing sustainable vegan businesses in India. The results will be vital for the vegan industry, sustainable ventures, upcoming vegan ventures, consumers, celebrities, and marketers to choose particular media according to its reach, influence, and popularity.

Theoretical background

Veganism

Veganism is abstaining from eating or using all animal products such as fish, eggs, meat, cheese, honey, and leather (Misachi, 2017). It is an extension of vegetarianism, where one excludes all dairy products from their diet, like milk, cheese, and curd. It excludes products made from

leather, wool, silk, beeswax, animal-tested products, and the like. Donald Watson introduced the term 'vegan' in 1944 by merging 'the first three and the last two letters of vegetarian' because it embarked, as Mr. Watson said, "the beginning and end of vegetarianism."

In compliance with the survey carried out by Rakuten Insight in November 2021 and published by Statista Research Department in 2022, more than 47 percent of Indian consumers agreed that they had consumed plant-based food items because of animal protection and well-being in food production. Additionally, 44.5 percent followed a plant-based diet to become vegetarian or vegan.

Since 30 percent of Indians are vegetarian, many global companies foresee growing their plant-based food business in India because they see significant expansion in this category in the future (Joseph, 2020). Recently, many vegan restaurants have opened in India. Vegan food is not exclusively for people who want to follow veganism; non-vegan people can also try vegan products and follow a vegan lifestyle.

VeganMall, Green, Vegandukan, Thealmart, Vvegano, and Veganonest are new and flourishing online websites that provide exclusive vegan products and related information like recipes and news. Various online and offline platforms have existed worldwide to promote veganism for a long time, such as conferences, chatgroups, meetings, cooking sessions, live shows, travel guidelines, and talk shows. People have come together to support and communicate freely about the vegan lifestyle and its benefits. Various books are now available for vegan recipes in different languages. Awareness has been created on OTT platforms, too, such as Netflix, Amazon, and Disney Hotstar, with the help of documentaries about the meat and dairy industry and related creative engagements.

Societies have been formed nationally and internationally to spread awareness about veganism and its trademark. The Vegan Society, United Kingdom, founded by Donald Watson in 1944, is the oldest vegan establishment in the World. Satvik Vegan Society (formerly known as Indian Vegan Society), established by Shankar Narayan in 2004 as a registered public charitable trust, is the oldest vegan organization in India. Vegan First is the country's first digital and print magazine for all vegan and related news.

Sustainable vegan products

Saxena and Khandelwal (2010), quoting the USA National Environmental Policy Act (1969), defined sustainability as: "Create and maintain conditions under which [humans] and nature can exist in productive harmony, and fulfill the social, economic and other requirements of present and future generations of Americans". It is not simply about reducing the amount of waste businesses produce or using less energy, but developing processes that will lead to businesses becoming completely sustainable in the future. Businesses are expected to lead in environmental sustainability as they are considered the most significant contributors to environmental activities and are expected to make a significant difference. Many researchers have conducted studies on the sustainable nature of vegan products. This study highlights the importance of celebrity endorsement of sustainable vegan products and its impact on consumer perception.

Consumer perception

As stated by Gregory et al. (1995), perception is a sort of process through which individuals become conscious of and interpret and translate facts and figures concerning the surrounding environment. If each person perceived each and every aspect of life in the same manner, they would be easy to interpret. Individuals frequently presume that reality is objective rather than subjective and that all humankind comprehends the same concepts. However, the opposite is true. Perception differs with every individual. Markin (1995) stated that perception is concerned with how the selection is made and observing sensory data in the environment. In other words, perception is a complicated procedure that, in turn, helps people to choose, arrange, organize and elucidate sensational impulses towards a significant image of the world. Furthermore, comprehension of the perception procedure is essential to the manufacturer or the producer. The choice of the consumer to purchase an item will be primarily affected by the characteristic that the flourishing marketer can lend to the item using manufacturing, packing, country of origin, advertising and different promotional strategies that helps in determining product quality.

H1: There is a significant impact of awareness of sustainable vegan products on consumer perception.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Kritika and Prakhar (2021) aimed to spread awareness and find existing trends in vegan baking in Kolkata and New Delhi. The need for dedicated vegan directories, food bloggers, and decent restaurants has made it difficult for people to access vegan food and made it more expensive. However, with time, the availability of vegan outlets, competition, and growing awareness amongst consumers, vegan baking will be a great opportunity in the future. Phua and Kim (2020) examined the effects of Instagram profile sources (brand v/s non-profit; celebrity v/s non-celebrity) and messages on consumer attitudes towards veganism (egoistic v/s altruistic; positive v/s negative valanced) on Instagram using ANOVA and MANOVA. Brand-initiated, altruistic motives and positive valance messages hold more excellent information value for the perceived customer. In contrast, celebrity and non-celebrity are essential in influencing consumer perceived value as long as there is a strong fit between the celebrity/non-celebrity and the product being publicized. Joe, Jin, and Kim (2019) explored the social impact of celebrity endorsement of veganism on Instagram posts on social media users' health consciousness, attitude towards a plant-based diet, and behavioral intention to become vegan. A pre-test was conducted to select a male and female celebrity based on liking and positive and negative attitudes, followed by a two-way MANOVA. The study demonstrated that consumer eating habits and vegan celebrities' social media presence could influence health communication about veganism. Lundahl (2018) used longitudinal frame analysis (2008-2014) of a major newspaper in Britain, the Daily Mail, to explore and understand the transformation of the appearance of veganism in British media. It changed from being stigmatized to destigmatized and fashionable because celebrities were used as positive deviants. Doyle (2016) explored veganism through the eyes of celebrities as an eating habit and ethical practice. The paper focused on celebrity involvement in ethical consumption and veganism by analyzing two Hollywood celebrity vegans- Alicia Silverstone and Ellen DeGeneres. Silverstone embodies veganism by branding a kind and selfless life. In contrast, DeGeneres signifies veganism as a part of her celebrity life, thus making a more substantial connection between animal rights, ethical consumption, and veganism. Reisch L. et al. (2013) derived a working definition of sustainable food consumption, outlined current food-consumption practices' significant issues and impacts, and discussed various policy

interventions, including information-based instruments, market-based initiatives, direct regulations, and “nudges.” It concluded with a call for integrative, cross-sectoral, and population-wide policies addressing the drivers of unsustainable food production and consumption. Bhaskaran S. et al. (2006) identified and analyzed the beliefs of value-chain intermediaries regarding the production and marketing of food products conforming to environmentally sustainable standards.

METHODOLOGY

The research design is the structure that contributes direction and systemizes the research (Dangi & Dewen, 2016). For the present study, a descriptive design has been applied. The study primarily consisted of people living in Delhi-NCR as the target population (age ten and above). Primary and secondary data have been collected for the present research. A part of the secondary data collected (past research papers published) has been shared in the literature review section. The rest of the secondary data (for the fulfillment of objective 1) about endorsing sustainable vegan products have been collected from various celebrities' internet and social media accounts. The celebrities were chosen based on followers (more than 10 million) on Instagram. The primary data (for fulfillment of objectives 2 and 3) for the present research has been gathered through a structured questionnaire. Snowball sampling is applied to choose samples for the study. The study period is from June 2023 to August 2023. Out of 110 samples collected, 103 were found helpful for the study after removing missing or incomplete questionnaires. A structured questionnaire, based on a literature review and expert opinion, is employed to collect data. The initial part is constructed with the demographic profile of respondents, including gender, age, occupation, and education. The rest of the questionnaire included information about celebrities and their sustainable vegan endorsements, awareness about vegan products, and consumer perception of sustainable vegan products. Proper care is taken to minimize bias while designing the questionnaire. All relevant information has been collected, and essential information has been discarded. The questionnaire is constructed using the appropriate statements in line with the objectives. The pilot study (carried out with ten respondents) resulted

in the exclusion of 2 statements and adding 1 statement to analyze the relationship effectively. The study collected a large volume of raw data, which went through cleaning, adjusting, editing, coding, classification, tabulation, and a graphical representation for further analysis. The present work uses frequency, percentage, mean, correlation, and regression tests.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To fulfill objective 1, celebrities with sustainable vegan product endorsements were chosen according to the criteria mentioned in the research methodology. Following is the information collected about various Indian celebrities and their vegan endorsements (Table 1):

Virat Kohli invested his funds in Blue Tribe, a local vegan mock meat brand. With the celebrity couple with them, the company aims to have an environment-friendly impact on society. Genelia and Ritesh Deshmukh launched their vegan brand, Imagine Meats, with the help of Good Food Institute and others. Recently, they collaborated with Starbucks, the coffee chain, to introduce a vegan menu in their offerings. Shahrukh Khan endorsed their brand once it entered the market. Alia Bhatt invested and acted as a brand ambassador of Phool. Co is an IIT Kanpur-backed start-up that developed alternatives to animal leather from recycled flowers. John Abraham invested in a Mumbai-based low-calorie, high-protein ice cream brand, NOTO. It offers many vegan ice cream options to its health-conscious consumers. The Bollywood actress and entrepreneur Sonam Kapoor Ahuja has been named PETA's Person of the Year 2018 for her promotion of cruelty-free fashion through her brand Rheson. She has been endorsing her brand's vegan products. Varun Dhavan invested in cloud kitchen aggregator Curefoods. According to the contract, Dhawan also became the brand ambassador of Curefoods and EatFit. He is also involved with Fast&Up, which manufactures immunity-boosting and nutraceutical supplements. Actress Rakul Preet Singh made her initial investment in Well-being Nutrition, D2C nutrition, and health start-ups. She also became the brand ambassador for the start-up. Gaurav Kapur invested and acted as a brand ambassador for Flatheads, which manufactures bamboo and banana sneakers to reduce the environmental impact. Katrina Kaif launched a vegan makeup brand, Kay Beauty. The brand is very famous for its cruelty-free and vegan ingredients. Many celebrities took to social media to endorse and advertise the brand. Deepika Padukone appeared as a brand

ambassador for Oziva Nutrition, a plant-based fitness brand. Shilpa Shetty entered a contract with plant-based nutrition Fast and Up to act as their fitness ambassador. Thus, objective 1 is achieved, and further analysis is done.

Table 1 Indian celebrities and vegan brands that they endorse

Virat Kohli	
Ritesh and Genelia Deshmukh	
Alia Bhatt	
Katrina Kaif	

John Abraham	
Shahrukh Khan	
Sonam Kapoor Ahuja	
Varun Dhawan	 
Deepika Padukone	
Shilpa Shetty	




	
Rakul Preet Singh	
Gaurav Kapur	

Table 2 displays the demographic information about the respondents. Sixty percent of the respondents were female, while 40 percent were males. All the respondents belonged to the Delhi-NCR region. Most respondents were 20-30, proving that veganism and celebrity endorsement of sustainable vegan products are popular among the young generation. The top three social networking platforms were WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook chronologically. The maximum of the students were post-graduates, while the second-highest were graduates. Approximately 45 percent of the sample consisted of students, 33 percent were self-employed, and 22 percent were working.

Table 2 Demographic information of the respondents

Variable	Frequency	(%)
Gender		
Male	41	39.80

Female	62	60.20
Age group		
Less than 20	26	25.20
21-30	64	62.10
31-40	07	6.80
41 and above	06	5.80
Education		
High school	21	20.40
Graduate	34	33.00
Post-graduate	42	40.80
Others	06	05.80
Occupation		
Student	46	44.70
Self-employed	34	33.00
Job	23	22.30
Unemployed	0	0

Source: Primary data

In the analysis of celebrities and their sustainable vegan endorsements section, it was found that Virat Kohli, the famous vegan cricketer, had the maximum number of followers (72), followed by Shahrukh Khan (61). Alia Bhatt had 58 followers, whereas Deepika Padukone had 49 followers. Katrina Kaif had 45 followers. These were the top 5 celebrities followed by

2239

respondents. They were followed by Sara Ali Khan, Shraddha Kapoor, Shilpa Shetty, Ritesh Deshmukh, Sonam Kapoor Ahuja, and John Abraham (Table 3). Seventy-two percent of the sample knew that all or some celebrities mentioned endorsed vegan products. Seventy percent of the sample acknowledged that they had seen the mentioned celebrities endorsing sustainable vegan products. Instagram was the most viewed social media application, with 80 respondents seeing celebrity endorsements of vegan products. Newspaper and Facebook had 42 and 36 respondents, respectively. Magazines and Twitter had the same number of respondents (23). Pinterest had 18 respondents, while 21 respondents chose the ‘other’ option.

Table 3 Frequency of respondents following different celebrities

Name of the celebrity	Frequency	Percentage
Sonam Kapoor Ahuja	25	24.27
Virat Kohli	72	69.90
Shahrukh Khan	61	59.22
John Abraham	16	15.53
Katrina Kaif	45	43.68
Sara Ali Khan	42	40.77
Alia Bhatt	58	56.31
Shraddha Kapoor	32	31.06
Ritesh Deshmukh	25	24.27
Deepika Padukone	49	47.57
Shilpa Shetty	26	25.24
Do not follow any celebrity	12	11.65

The awareness about sustainable vegan products was analyzed through mean (Table 4). The overall mean of the eleven awareness statements was 3.50, which belonged to the high category. It means that the respondents' mean awareness of sustainable vegan products is high. Thus, the second research objective is also achieved, stating that consumers' awareness of sustainable vegan products is high.

Table 4 Analysis of Likert statements about awareness of sustainable vegan products

S.no.	Statement	Very low (1)	Low (2)	Moderate (3)	High (4)	Very High (5)	Mean	Standard deviation
1.	Meaning of veganism	5	3	5	28	62	4.35	1.04
2.	Meaning of sustainability	13	25	36	15	14	2.92	1.20
3.	Range of sustainable vegan products	20	35	20	25	3	2.57	1.14
4.	Different sustainable vegan brands available in the market	8	10	12	40	33	3.78	1.22
5.	Sustainable Vegan product variants	5	24	11	33	30	3.57	1.26
6.	Identification of sustainable vegan products	5	13	15	26	44	3.88	1.23
7.	Production of sustainable vegan products	17	28	27	23	8	2.77	1.19
8.	Ingredients of sustainable vegan products	12	23	22	33	13	3.12	1.23

9.	Cost/price of sustainable vegan products	0	14	22	28	39	3.89	1.06
10.	Benefits of sustainable vegan products	5	11	18	24	45	3.90	1.22
11.	Downfalls of Sustainable Vegan Products	8	10	13	32	40	3.80	1.26

To achieve the third objective, a simple linear regression was conducted to investigate the effect of the endorsement of sustainable vegan products by Indian celebrities (independent variable) on consumer perception (dependent variable) (Table 5). The scatter plot confirmed normal distribution and linear relationship between variables. It explained that a strong positive relationship exists between dependent and independent variables, confirmed by the Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.862 (Table 6). Simple linear regression displayed a significant relationship between endorsement of sustainable vegan products by Indian celebrities and consumer perception of sustainable vegan products ($p < 0.05$). The slope coefficient of the endorsement of sustainable vegan products was 1.51, so the consumer perception increases by 1.51 for every increase in the sustainable vegan endorsement by celebrities. The R^2 was 0.744 or 74.4%, which means that 74% of the variation in the consumer perception of sustainable vegan products was explained by only celebrity endorsement of sustainable vegan products, keeping other factors constant. Thus, the third objective is also achieved, stating that celebrity endorsement of sustainable vegan products impacts consumer perception. Thus, the research was successful in the achievement of all three objectives.

Table Classification of respondents based on whether they have seen any celebrity mentioned above endorsing sustainable vegan products

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative
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			percentage
Yes	72	69.91	69.91
No	31	30.09	100

Source: Primary data

Table 5 Analysis of Likert statements about perception of consumers regarding sustainable vegan products

S.no.	Statement	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)	Mean	Standard deviation
1.	Vegan products are pocket-friendly.	16	14	14	36	23	3.35	1.37
2.	Vegan products are value for money.	18	13	9	32	31	3.43	1.47
3.	Vegan products makes me feel good.	8	23	8	24	40	3.63	1.39
4.	Vegan products are healthy and nutritious.	12	20	14	39	18	3.30	1.29
5.	Vegan products are free from additives and artificial ingredients.	23	14	13	28	25	3.17	1.51
6.	Vegan products are easily available in the market.	15	11	16	39	22	3.40	1.33
7.	Vegan products can be easily identified through their labels.	18	9	6	52	18	3.42	1.35

8.	Vegan products are produced and packaged in an environment friendly.	15	11	19	29	29	3.45	1.38
9.	Vegan products are produced in a sustainable manner such that animal rights are preserved.	8	21	7	39	28	3.56	1.29

Source: Primary data

Table 6 Test Statistics for Regression Analysis

S.no.	Test Statistic	Value
1.	Correlation	0.862
2.	R ²	0.744
3.	Adjusted R ²	0.741
4.	Standard error of the estimate	0.411
5.	Durbin Watson	2.057

CONCLUSION

The paper aimed to study various sustainable vegan endorsements by Indian celebrities, examine the awareness level of sustainable vegan products among consumers, and study the impact of celebrities endorsing sustainable vegan products on consumer perception. The study considered a population from Delhi-NCR. The data was collected through a descriptive research design. The first objective was achieved from secondary data. The second objective was achieved by analyzing the mean of Likert statements measuring consumers' awareness level of sustainable vegan products. It concluded that people are highly aware of sustainable vegan products in the market. The third objective was achieved by running a regression analysis between sustainable vegan endorsement by celebrities (independent variable) and consumer perception of sustainable vegan products (dependent variable). The results showed that the independent variable impacts

the dependent variable. Thus, the research led to the fulfillment of all three objectives. The research will be helpful for marketers who are planning to launch sustainable vegan products in the market to cater to customer needs better. There has been an enormous interest in marketing strategies enhancing sustainable vegan businesses in India. The results will be vital for the sustainable vegan industry, upcoming vegan ventures, consumers, celebrities, and marketers to choose particular media according to its reach, influence, and popularity.

IMPLICATIONS

The proposed study is concerned with celebrities' endorsements of sustainable vegan products. It does not consider other facets of a vegan market, like branding, marketing, production, and managing sales. There are unlimited topics in marketing that can be studied concerning veganism and sustainability aspects. Furthermore, the population is also limited due to time restrictions.

The research will act as a base for future marketing research related to sustainability and veganism. Particular sustainable vegan products or brands can be studied in depth. Studies about the branding of sustainable vegan products can be made. Attitudes and perceptions of consumers concerning culture and diet can also be studied. The impact of veganism on the market can also be studied. Pricing, branding, advertising, and other marketing channels related to sustainable veganism can also be studied.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The research will be helpful for marketers planning to launch sustainable vegan products in the market to cater to customer needs better. There has been an enormous interest in marketing strategies enhancing sustainable vegan businesses in India. The results will be vital for the vegan industry, upcoming vegan ventures, consumers, celebrities, and marketers to choose a particular media according to its reach, influence, and popularity.

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