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Veganism and plant-based eating: analysis of interplay between discursive strategies and lifestyle political consumerism

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been an increased mobilization around vegan and plant-based diets. The chapter will analyze this mobilization, the evolution of the images and practices of vegan eating and what kind of political consumerism they constitute. We show how vegan eating takes place as an assemblage of several actors and platforms, such as consciousness-raising campaigns, vegan bloggers, pledges and festivals and new vegan foods marketed as ‘cool’ and suitable for everyone. The concepts of boycott and buycott are too narrow to adequately describe veganism as political consumerism. Instead, discursive and lifestyle political consumerism and their interplay characterize the current building of new images and communities. The Internet and social media have a central role in shaping the cultural contents of the ‘veggie trend’. Moreover, vegan eating is not always inspired by other-oriented motives, but also by self-regarding motives, such as health, pleasure and distinction.

Keywords

Veganism, vegetarianism, discursive political consumerism, social media, lifestyle

Introduction

In recent years, veganism and different forms of plant-based diets have undergone a significant change in terms of media attention, consumer interest, commercial opportunities and food products available in developed economies. Veganism has turned from a poorly known vegetarian submovement into a way of life praised by some of the world's top celebrities, business people and politicians (Joy & Tuider, 2016; Doyle, 2016). Veganism is a rather strict lifestyle where animal-derived products are avoided as much as possible in all areas of life. This lifestyle has now evolved into a popular and flexible way of following plant-based diet. Hence, in addition to veganism, various diets where meat, fish, dairy and egg consumption are reduced, but not abandoned, are also currently celebrated as part of more sustainable ways of eating.

It is precisely this variation that characterizes the phenomenon at hand and, as we shall see, plays a role in the ways in which contemporary political consumerism enters people's lives. In the following we analyse both veganism and more 'middle-ground' forms of plant-based eating. The latter includes followers of various solutions, such as vegetarians, who more or less consistently follow a meat-free diet, and flexitarians who are not avoiding meat altogether.

In this chapter, we analyze the evolution of the images and practices of veganism, and examine what kind of political consumerism and consumption veganism, vegetarianism and other forms of plant-based eating more broadly constitute [1]. We conceptualize vegan and plant-based eating as political consumerism (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013), but also as a part of a contemporary celebration of consumer choice (Guthman, 2008), alternative hedonism (Soper, 2008) and cross-national food communities (Bildtgård, 2008) enabled by social media connectivity (van Dijk & Poell, 2013). We first discuss cultural positions and meanings of meat and plant-based eating in Western societies and the adverse effects of meat consumption in order to understand the forms that vegan and plant-based eating currently take. Thereafter, we analyse the contemporary mobilization around vegan and plant-based

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diets, and the ways in which they are presented and promoted by various actors and in various spaces. We demonstrate also how these manifestations resonate with the four forms of political consumerism: boycotting, buycotting, discursive and lifestyle political consumerism (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013; Carvalho de Rezende, 2014) and, in particular, the intersection between discursive and lifestyle political consumerism. Due to the fact that vegan and plant-based choices may and do often have other, non-political, self-regarding and practical motivations, we will also discuss the demarcation between political and non-political veganism and plant-based eating. In the concluding section some ideas for further research on plant-based diets and political consumerism are discussed.

Our focus is on Europe and North America, where vegan and plant-based eating as political consumerism prevails most significantly. In Western societies, food-related consumer choices and political consumerism are located within a nexus of various actors, interests, media publicity, policy initiatives, marketing by food industries and grocery stores, food cultures, as well as activities and messages by food-related NGOs (Jallinoja, Niva & Latvala, 2016). The private realm of food-related choices is deeply integrated with public spaces, such as social media and conventional media. Moreover, the contemporary image of veganism and the increased media publicity around it has occurred as a result of several historical developments, such as the history of vegetarian eating in Western societies. In its current form, its roots may be tracked down to the ‘countercuisine’ and ‘back to the land’ lifestyles from the late 1960s (Belasco, 1989; Johnston & Baumann, 2015) as well as green consumerism from the 1980s (Gabriel & Lang, 2006). In the following sections, we tie the current situation with these historical and cultural underpinnings.

The challenged cultural position of meat-eating

Currently the cultural position of meat is ambivalent. Meat is at the same time praised as a core component of a proper meal and criticized for its adverse effects on the environment, human health and animals. As to the cultural significance of meat in Western societies, meat has for long been socially highly prized (Fiddes, 1991; Freeman, 2014), taken as a token of progress, prosperity and health (Bakker & Dagevos, 2012) and associated with masculinity and strength (Twigg, 1983). For instance, meat holds a focal role in a ‘proper’ meal,

exemplified by rituals such as the ‘head of the family’ slicing the meat at the Sunday dinner table. Meat holds *symbolic value* that can be even more important than its nutritional value (Fiddes, 1991). The same cultural spirit is also exemplified by the meat-praising discourses on television shows by celebrity chefs, which tend to strengthen the value of meat as an archaic element of society and as a masculine food (Buscemi, 2016). Joy (2010) has suggested that current meat-eating patterns are rooted in a belief system in which meat-eating is seen as the ‘natural’ thing to do with no need for reflection. At the same time, the relation to meat is codified by taboos - for example, not all meat is considered edible (Douglas, 1966/1985; Sage, 2014).

In agricultural societies, meat consumption was very low for most people (Smil, 2002). For some time now in Western societies, meat has been a product available for everyone, instead of holding the previous status as a luxury product (Fiddes, 1991). This process, which has been termed a ‘meatification of human diet’ (Sage, 2014), is shown by the increasing consumption of meat during recent decades (de Boer, Helms & Aiking, 2006; Natural Resources Institute Finland, 2017; Allievi, Vinnari & Luukkanen, 2015). However, consumption of poultry, in particular, has increased, whereas that of beef is declining, as shown by Finnish consumption statistics from the 1970s onwards (Natural Resources Institute Finland, 2017) and for Europe since the 1990s (European Environment Agency, 2016).

The high value associated with meat has been reflected in the mostly negative and suspicious public perceptions of followers of vegan and plant-based diets. In the US in the 19th century, it was believed that vegetarianism might make one go insane, become emaciated or die (Iacobbo & Iacobbo, 2004). Negative images of vegetarians as ascetics, weaklings, self-depriving neurotics, food cranks and freaks prevailed in the early 20th century (Iacobbo & Iacobbo, 2004). Analyses of newspaper reporting on veganism in the UK in 2000-2005 (Lundahl & Henkel, 2017) and in 2007 (Cole & Morgan, 2011) show several negative stereotypes of vegans as ascetics, faddists, sentimentalists and hostile extremists. In France, until recently, vegans were regarded as “ascetics who belong to cults and live almost exclusively on soy burgers and sprouts” (Véron, 2016, 290). Similar attitudes have been revealed in television series positioning vegetarians as killjoys (Grant & MacKenzie-Dale, 2016) and marginalized and potentially amusing characters, although more positive characters, such as Lisa on *The Simpsons*, have been reported, too (Freeman, 2014).

Besides this positive cultural image of meat, the adverse effects of the production and consumption of animal-derived foods have been increasingly reported in academic research and in the media. First, animal-derived food has been shown to place a heavy burden on the environment. For example, the carbon footprint of beef and sheep, land use of beef (Nijdam, Rood & Westhoek, 2012; de Vries & de Boer, 2010) and global-warming impact of beef are high (de Vries & de Boer, 2010). Moreover, although the water footprint of any animal product is larger than that of crop products, the average water footprint per calorie is especially high for beef (Mekonnen & Hoekstra, 2012). Second, high consumption of red and processed meat has been associated with increased risk of chronic diseases, such as cancer (World Cancer Research Fund, 2013; Kromhout et al., 2016; Nordic Nutrition Recommendations 2012). Third, in recent years several food scandals, such as foot-and-mouth disease, bovine spongiform encephalopathy, dioxin in milk, eggs and meat have shaken consumers' confidence in the healthiness and reliability of animal-derived products (Villareal Herrera, 2017). Fourth, the meat and dairy industries have been strongly criticized for the suffering caused to production animals (Singer, 1975; Vinnari & Vinnari, 2014).This criticism has intensified in the current mode of human-animal relationships: some animals (pets) are treated with great affection, while others live in highly industrial production systems (Herzog, 2010).

Due to these negative effects, plant-based eating has been proposed as one solution, for example in nutrition recommendations in the Nordic countries (Nordic Nutrition Recommendations, 2012). Furthermore, the idea of ecological public health emphasizes that reduction of meat consumption benefits both the environment and public health (Springmann et al., 2016). Vegetable-based meals on average have lower greenhouse gas emissions and lower overall environmental impact compared to animal-derived foods (Virtanen et al., 2011; van Dooren et al., 2014) and smaller water footprints (Makonnen & Hoekstra, 2012). In addition, legumes, such as beans and lentils, as well as seeds and nuts, have several positive health effects (Nordic Nutrition Recommendations, 2012; World Cancer Research Fund, 2013).

Vegetarianism and veganism in Western societies

In Europe, there are records of vegetarianism from antiquity onwards. Many of the arguments used in the modern defense of plant-based eating were in some form present already in antiquity, examples being kinship to animals, abstinence from excessive consumption and even animal rights (Walters & Portmess, 1999). It seems that these arguments, however, were replaced by new ones or reformulated in medieval times. As Julia Twigg (1983) notes, medieval and modern forms of vegetarianism differ from each other. In medieval times, vegetarianism occurred in the contexts of virtuous religion, of the patterning of fast and feast days and of a straightforward denial of the flesh, whereas in modern societies, it is very much a product of individualisation. Twigg (1983) suggests that modern vegetarianism has traditionally had four major foci: health, animal welfare, ecology and spirituality - the first two being mentioned most often. Studies from the 1990s and 2000s reveal that moral aspects were most frequently stated as motivations for plant-based diets, whereas health was the second most frequently stated motivation and the environment and religious reasons the least often provided motivations (Ruby, 2012). A more recent study among German vegans showed that the greatest reason for becoming vegan were reports on factory farming, the second being climate protection and the third health concerns (Kerschke-Risch, 2015).

Ideas reflecting modern vegetarianism first emerged in the West in the late 18th century (Twigg, 1983; Iacobbo & Iacobbo, 2004). The first vegetarian societies were founded in the UK in 1847 and in the USA in 1850. The beginning of veganism has often been associated with the founding of the first vegan society in 1944, when a group of Vegetarian Society members in the UK coined a new word - vegan - and formed a separate organization, The Vegan Society. The cornerstone of the argument of the new society concerned the cruelty caused by all kinds of farming using animals and the belief that vegetarianism is not enough to alleviate this suffering (Leneman, 1999). Later vegan societies were founded in other countries, for example in the US in 1960 (American Vegan Society), in Sweden in 1976 (Veganföreningen i Sverige) and in Finland in 1993 (Vegan Society of Finland). Besides vegetarian and vegan societies, campaigns raising consumer awareness of the conditions in the meat, poultry, dairy and fur industries and increasing consumer competence in vegetarian eating have been promoted by animal rights and animal welfare organizations (Micheletti &

Stolle, 2016). In Finland for example, in the 1990s, the vegan movement was a part of the "fourth wave" of environmental protest, characterized by eco-centrism and post-materialistic values, and concretized in attacks on fur farms and the liberation of animals there (Konttinen, 1999).

Vegans exclude more foods from their diet than vegetarians, as the target is to avoid all animal products. Veganism, however, is not necessarily merely a dietary solution: besides food choices, vegans can be concerned with animal-derived products in all arenas of consumption, from medicine and cosmetics to clothing and building materials (Meindertsma, 2008; Greenebaum 2012), and veganism can promote a philosophical worldview emphasising a more egalitarian relationship between human and non-human animals (Francione, 2010). There are multiple subgroups of vegans, as some eat vegan food for environmental reasons (environmental veganism), some for ethical reasons (ethical veganism) and some for health reasons (health-based veganism). In practice, in modern societies, it is impossible to totally avoid all animal-derived products in all areas of life, and for many vegan identity is fluid and flexible (Stephens Griffin, 2017).

In addition, there are various groups of 'specialized vegetarians' and 'occasional vegetarians' (Stolle & Micheletti, 2016), such as lacto-vegetarians, lacto-ovo-vegetarians and pesco-lacto-ovo-vegetarians. Recently, with the increased interest in plant-based eating, various flexible and compromise solutions for reducing meat consumption have been presented (Twine, 2014), such as flexitarianism and its commercialized variation "Eat Vegan Before 6 p.m." (Bittman, 2013) and "Meatless/Meat Free Monday" (Morris, 2018; Singer, 2017). The most recent addition to the solutions promoted is reducetarianism, which aims to be an inclusive category ranging from vegans to those reducing meat consumption by twenty percent, for example (Kateman, 2017). This diversification of plant-based eating is interesting in its own right, as it resonates with the overall individualism and high value placed on free consumer choices in Western cultures and provides commercial opportunities for the food industry and various lifestyle and nutrition coaches.

The numbers of vegans and vegetarians have been investigated in several countries, but comparing them is difficult due to the large variety of plant-based diets described above and inconsistent adherence to them. It might sometimes be difficult even for the practitioners to determine if they qualify as vegans or vegetarians. Another challenge arises from the

differences between self-reporting and classification with Food Frequency Questionnaires (Vinnari et al. 2008). Finally, survey data are not always representative of populations.

Nevertheless, previous studies have suggested that the proportion of followers of plant-based diets has remained rather low in Western societies (Table 1). The current low prevalences of vegan and vegetarian eating are consistent with the low level of protein intake from vegetables and legumes and consumption of plant-protein products: In 2012 among Finnish men between the ages of 25 and 64, only 2% of the protein intake was from vegetables and 3% from legumes and nuts, and among women the figures were 2% and 4%, respectively (Helldán et al., 2013). In 2013, 6% of Finns ate beans, 4% ate soya chunks, textured soya protein or soya sausages and 3% ate tofu at least once a week (Jallinoja, Niva & Latvala, 2016).

Table 1. Self-reported vegan or vegetarian diet in surveys.

Source	**Year Country**	**Age-groups**	**Percentage of vegans and vegetarians**
Richardson, Shepherd & Elliman, 1994	Not reported The UK	Not reported	2.4% vegetarians 0.3% vegans
The Vegan Society, 2016	2016 The UK	Aged 15 or over	2.2% vegetarians 1.05% vegans
ARS, 2014	2014 Sweden	Not reported	6% vegetarians 4% vegans
ARS, 2017	2017 Sweden	18- to 79-years-olds	6% vegetarians 3% vegans
Vinnari et al., 2008	1997 Finland	27- to 74-year-olds	Women: 4.45% vegetarians Men: 3.79% vegetarians
Vinnari et al., 2008	2002 Finland	27- to 74-year-olds	Women: 4.26% vegetarians Men: 2.11% vegetarians
Jallinoja, Niva & Latvala, 2016	2013 Finland	15- to 64-year-olds	6.8% vegetarians or vegans
Parviainen et al., 2017	1999 Finland	16- to 18-year-olds	Girls: 10.7% vegetarians Boys: 1.4% vegetarians
Parviainen et al., 2017	2013 Finland	16- to 18-year-olds	Girls: 5.7% vegetarians Boys: 0.6% vegetarians
Helldán & Helakorpi, 2015	2014 Finland	15- to 64-year-olds	Women: 4.7% vegetarians Men: 3% vegetarians

HRC, 2014	Not reported The US	Aged 17 and over	1.5% current vegetarians 0.5% current vegans 9.1% former vegetarians 1.1% former vegans

Results from Sweden (ARS, 2017) suggest that among the young vegetarian diets are more common than among older respondents. In Finland, the proportion of vegetarians was highest among adolescent girls already in 1999 (Parviainen et al., 2017) - right after the wave of animal rights activism of the late 1990s (Konttinen, 1999). In 2014, 10.7% of 15-24-year-old women reported that they are vegetarians (Helldán & Helakorpi, 2015). Moreover, in Finland the analysis of food frequency questionnaires shows that women, those with a high level of education and those living in single households follow vegetarian diets more than other respondents (Vinnari et al., 2008). Similar results have been reported from the US (Sabaté, Ratzin-Turner & Brown, 2001).

Although thus far the proportion of vegetarians and vegans in Western populations has remained low, there are indications suggesting growing interest in vegan eating. Worldwide sales of non-dairy milk alternatives more than doubled between 2009 and 2015 (Whipp, 2016). In the US, the sales of plant-based foods grew by 8.1% between August 2016 and August 2017, whereas the sales of all foods declined 0.2% (Simon, 2018). In Finland, major grocery retailer Kesko reported that sales of plant-based milk increased by 47% during one year, while sales of hummus and falafel products increased by 305% (Kesko, 2017). "In Sweden, the proportion of nonvegetarians with increased interest in vegetarian food has increased from 26% in 2009 (ARS, 2014) to 47% in 2017 (ARS, 2017).

The components of the vegan mobilization

It has been estimated that a significant change from negative to positive images of veganism has happened during the past decade and in some countries during the past two to five years, as veganism has gone from an unknown vegetarian submovement to a publicly celebrated way of life (Joy & Truider, 2016; Cole & Morgan, 2011). It is noteworthy that during this period it has been especially veganism and plant-based eating, not vegetarianism, that have

been at the focus of media publicity and consumer interest. For instance, between 2010 and 2011, reporting on veganism in the *Daily Mail* changed, focussing more with celebrity vegans in a positive way (Lundahl, 2017). In the UK, according to the Vegan Society, a significant change occurred in 2013: there was an increase in the number of people signing the online pledge to go vegan for a week or a month, a rise in footfall at VegfestUK (a festival dedicated to presenting vegan food, products and lifestyle) from previous years, and the national and international press was covering veganism more often and more positively than in the past (de Boo, 2014). Moreover, Forbes.com in the US named high-end vegan dining the top food trend of 2013. A similar 'veggie trend' has been reported in France, where vegan products form an expanding market and the number of vegan cookbooks and blogs has significantly increased (Véron, 2016).

In this section, we present in more detail the building blocks of this change and analyze how veganism and plant-based eating are shaped as an assemblage of various actors and their interactions. The cases presented below show that in the current mobilization of veganism it is not only a question of raising consciousness about the negative effects of meat consumption. Additionally, changing the images of both animal-derived and vegan foods, increasing competences in vegan cooking and shopping, and building and strengthening communities and connectivity have a central role in the mobilization of veganism. The role of social media is central. It is important to explore this nexus of various platforms and actors, since the possibilities of consumers to become "agents of sustainable change" depend on the environment where consumer choices are made (Bakker & Dagevos, 2012). In particular, the cases below illustrate how various actors have used discursive strategies to strengthen their arguments and bring their cause to the public sphere, but also that vegan options easily available to consumers to "buycott" are gaining increasing popularity.

First, consciousness-raising campaigns by animal rights activists in several European countries as well as the US, Australia and Mexico have targeted the meat and dairy industries, aiming to transform their "happy meat" image. Activists have filmed at animal production facilities, showing poor living conditions and maltreatment of animals and distributed these videos on the Internet (Véron, 2016; Vinnari & Laine, 2017). Anti-branding campaigns by PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) against Kentucky Fried Chicken and Burger King ("Kentucky Fried Cruelty" and "Murder King") (Seijts & Sider, 2006) have had similar aims. Similar example from Finland using "scare" and "shame"

tactics is an outdoor poster campaign by the Finnish animal protection organization Animalia in 2005 illustrating the cruelty to farm animals caused by over-efficient methods in livestock farming (Kuoppamäki, 2008). Another example is "The Meatrix" (2003), a short computer animation inspired by the movie "The Matrix", criticizing industrial agricultural practices. By 2008, over 20 million people had watched the online video (Wolfe, 2009). These campaigns, using well-known brands as message boards, resemble culture jamming (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013).

Besides these NGOs and activists, a central group of actors in contemporary consciousness-raising are commercial production and entertainment companies. Documentaries such as "Cowspiracy" (2014, updated version, executively produced by Leonardo DiCaprio on Netflix 2015), "Food, Inc." (2008) and "Forks over Knives" (2011) have frequently been mentioned as turning points in life when 'going vegan'. These documentaries comment on the environmental, health and animal welfare issues related to the meat and dairy industries in an entertaining fashion by using individual testimonies, science-based evidence and emotional rhetoric. They may be categorized as spectacular environmentalism, as they are "designed through visual means, to get our attention and pique our environmental imaginaries in ways that work to get us to feel, to connect and to "do"" (Goodman et al., 2016, 681). Central here is the utilization of social media in marketing and distribution via Netflix, a streaming platform providing video-on-demand online and Youtube. Both are popular especially among the young and enable easy access to almost the same products globally and hence enable the formation of global food communities around the new images of factory farming and the vegan lifestyle. Furthermore, Netflix documentaries are not merely located on its online platform, but are utilized in building awareness and communities independent of Netflix, e.g. on social media platforms and at showings of the documentaries at local animal rights events.

Second, social media, vegan food bloggers and vloggers have been central mobilizers in cultivating a new image of veganism and plant-based eating as part of a desirable lifestyle, building new competences in plant-based cooking and extending the consumer communities interested in vegan food. The popularity and mainstreaming of these actors is exemplified by *Saveur* magazine, which awarded a vegan food blog the Best Food Blog Award in 2013 (Priestley, Lingo & Royal, 2016). The following year, as well, several of *Saveur*'s finalists for best cooking blogs specialized in meat-free recipes (Johnston & Baumann, 2015). In

Finland in spring 2017, the vegan food blog *Chocochili* was second on the "Top 10 food blogs list" (Cision, 2017). On Youtube, several vegan vloggers are relatively popular, such as "Cheap Lazy Vegan", with 350,000 subscribers, and "Hot For Food", with 380,000 subscribers (December 2017). In Finland, one of the most popular vloggers, with 340,000 subscribers, is "mmiisas" cooking vegetarian food (December 2017).

Véron (2016) suggests that in France vegan food bloggers have had an important role in building the new vegan community that thus far had been scattered. Vegan food bloggers have updated the image of vegan lifestyle, contributed to building a sense of belonging and shared identity and provided support, practical tips and information. These blogs have been transgressions against the traditional paradigm of meat-based cooking, and many recipes have revisited traditional French recipes based on meat and dairy products.

Many blogs also spread vegan recipes and ideology to readers not committed to a vegan lifestyle, and some vegan bloggers have explicitly aimed to reach society beyond the vegan readers (Véron, 2016). This widening sphere of vegan eating is easier with the new image and discourse of flexible plant-based eating. For example, the writers of the American vegan food blog *Thug Kitchen* associated veganism with self-oriented interests relating to health, wellbeing, lifestyle and personal choice, as well as relaxed and flexible cooking, instead of discussing politically charged issues of veganism, such as animal cruelty and environmentalism (Priestley, Lingo & Royal, 2016). The writers even distanced themselves from the word 'vegan' and instead referred to plant-based recipes (Priestley, Lingo & Royal, 2016).

Third, vegan pledges, organized by vegan and animal rights organizations (e.g. PETA, the Vegan Society in the UK, The Vegan Society of Finland) have encouraged consumers to try vegan eating for a certain period of time, provided peer support and platforms for community building, increased competence in vegan cooking, shopping and lifestyle and reshaped the public image of veganism. Some cities, such as Ghent in Belgium, San Francisco and Baltimore have declared certain days of the week meat-free (Sage, 2014). In Norway the army introduced a 'Meat Free Monday' programme in garrison canteens (Saul, 2013). Celebrities such as Al Gore, Ellen DeGeneres, Oprah Winfrey, Beyoncé, Jay-Z, Gwyneth Paltrow, Jennifer Lopez and Lewis Hamilton, who have taken a pledge or otherwise gone vegan, have gained visibility in the media (Doyle, 2016; Lundahl, 2017) and some, such as

Beyoncé, have themselves reported their vegan experiences on social media. In Finland, The January Vegan Pledge, organized annually since 2014, has listed celebrity participants on its web page (http://vegaanihaaste.fi/supporter/).

An interesting example of such a pledge in Finland is the Meatless October (Lihaton lokakuu) that was first organized in 2013 by two journalists and media personalities, Riku Rantala and Tuomas Milonoff. What makes it a poignant example of the rise of veganism is that even though one organizer was a vegetarian, the other was not. This represented a break from the marginalized circles of vegans, presenting the meatless pledge as 'cool' and suitable not only for stereotypical, puritan vegetarians and therefore probably reaching larger numbers of consumers than would otherwise have been possible at that time. All in all, Meatless October has been a carefully planned project with social-media connectivity on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, a cookbook, events and Meatless October recipes by the food industry. Here too, the discursive strategies of the pledges and related media publicity promote plant-based eating and lifestyle as relaxed, trendy and suitable for everyone.

Fourth, both consumer interest in and the "buycott" potential of plant-based eating are dependent on supply and attractive marketing of new plant-based products and vegan meals at restaurants and fast-food chains (Jallinoja, Niva & Latvala, 2016; Niva, Vainio & Jallinoja, 2017). Central to product development are the substitutes for meat, dairy and egg products, such as plant-based Beyond Meat burgers and Just Mayo mayonnaise. But not only analogue products as such, but their marketing as 'cool' and suitable for a youthful and ethical lifestyle and identity are important here (Banaji & Buckingham, 2009), suggesting that building of the new image of vegan products and their consumers is a central discursive strategy here. Many brands, like Swedish Oatly, which produces dairy substitutes (Fuentes & Fuentes, 2017), and Oumph!, which produces meat substitutes, use trendy images and slogans. Oumph!, has distanced itself from the word 'vegan' and instead refers to 'epic veggie eating' (Lidell, 2017). Likewise, Oatly products are advertised as 'totally cool for both vegans and non-vegans' and the marketing draws from several discourses: animal rights, global warming, local produce, and healthiness (Fuentes & Fuentes, 2017). As with the pledges and bloggers, the aim is to widen the group of potential consumers of vegan products outside the strict vegan communities.

Moreover, Oatly has a Facebook page, a Twitter account and a Youtube channel that "offer an opportunity not only to market to, but also to interact with, the consumers" (Fuentes & Fuentes 2017, 10). Hence, social media plays a significant role: both food industry and consumer groups promote new products and help consumers to find vegan food. It seems that consumers of these products are their eaters and advocates at the same time, and part of social-media communities promoting the new image of vegan eating. For example, in Facebook groups like "Pulled Oats Radar" and "Vegan Helsinki", consumers help each other to find new products and restaurants as well as report their eating experiences.

Finally, vegan fairs and festivals, organised in many cases by vegan activists, have been mushrooming in many countries. For example, www.vegan.com/festivals lists 81 events in the US and 57 elsewhere. Examples in Europe are VegFestUK, held since 2002 in Bristol and since 2013 in London, Veganes Sommerfest in Berlin since 2008, Vegomässan in Sweden since 2008, VegFest in Tampere, Finland, since 2007, and Vegemessut in Helsinki, Finland, since 2017. During the 2010s, they epitomize many characteristics of the current rise of veganism by bringing together the components presented above. At festivals, likeminded people gather and are taught new cooking skills. Discursive strategies are used to reconfigure the image of veganism into a versatile and flexible lifestyle and pleasurable cooking and eating instead of mainly a question of animal rights. For example, at the Vegemessut in Helsinki in 2017, the speakers, who were not all vegans, included representatives of animal rights organizations, a vegan food blogger preparing seitan, a nutrition scientist, celebrity chefs cooking vegan meals, a well-known musician participating in the January vegan pledge, a vegan athlete and representatives of vegan-food companies.

Together these activities and actors have changed the image of veganism and factory farming, increased consumers' opportunities to buy, cook and eat affordable and tasty vegan food and helped to build communities and identities. What has been characteristic of the recent rise of vegan and plant-based eating is its presentation as an inclusive movement, allowing various levels of involvement and philosophical engagement. However, despite the contemporary movement and mobilization around veganism, animal-derived foods still have by far larger market share compared to plant-derived ones, suggesting that 'going vegan' has not thus far become a mass phenomenon.

Plant-based eating, veganism, discursive strategies and lifestyle politics

How can veganism and plant-based eating be conceptualised as political consumerism? We begin with the perspective of the four forms of political consumerism identified previously - boycotting, buycotting, lifestyle and discursive strategies (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013) - and move on to analyze what is particular in vegan and plant-based eating as political consumerism.

Some scholars, in political consumption studies, have identified features of all four forms of political consumerism in veganism and plant-based eating. For instance, Micheletti and Stolle (2012, 106) note that vegetarians buy vegetarian or vegan products (buycott) and reject meat products (boycott), engage in discourses on vegetarianism/veganism and try to change their lifestyles. In a similar vein, Carvalho de Rezende (2014) studied vegetarianism as a form of political consumerism and noted that it is a “boycott practice of which consumption is just one moment” (Carvalho de Rezende, 2014, 395) but also a “lifestyle political practice” (Carvalho de Rezende, 2014, 396), since it requires multiple changes in daily life, adopting new habits, breaking norms related to proper eating and confronting existing social structures.

However, as the examples in the previous section suggest, the notions of boycotting and buycotting are too narrow as such to adequately describe the contemporary rise of vegan and plant-based eating. In fact, Guthman (2008) goes so far as to suggest that boycotting and buycotting represent the forms of collective action of yesteryear and that the actors involved in contemporary food activism use more contemporary methods. Indeed, more than boycotting or buycotting, the modes of alternative consumption more broadly, and even anti-consumption have for a long time been tied to the vegan lifestyle (e.g. Konttinen, 1999). Guthman (2008) further suggests that contemporary food activism intersects with neoliberal rationalities such as consumer choice, localism, entrepreneurialism and self-improvement - consumer choice being the most central organizing theme. Others have stressed that the discursive turn in political consumerism indicates “how political activism is emerging in the current age of globalization, Internet communication, a more open and fragmented media environment, individualization and enhanced consumer choice” (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013, 202). In the following sections we will analyse in more detail this mode of alternative

consumption that is tied both to the celebration of consumer choice and individual hedonism and to communities enhanced by social media.

Consequently, although veganism and plant-based eating can be conceptualized as boycotting and buycotting, we contend that it is political consumerism in the forms of discursive strategies and lifestyle, as well as their interplay, that most poignantly characterizes the current rise of veganism.

Looking at the building blocks of the vegan mobilization in the previous sections, we can locate several examples of discursive strategies, from the consciousness-raising campaigns of the animal rights activists to the vegan pledges recruiting consumers and celebrities to try vegan eating. These discursive strategies may be roughly categorized into two groups.

The first group would include those aiming to transform the image of the meat, poultry, fishing and dairy industries and their products by revealing the cruelties of, and environmental problems caused by, these industries. These activities would thus count as a discursive strategy of political consumerism but also as emancipatory politics (Giddens, 1991) - where the emancipatory aim is extended to farm animals and fish. This type of argument is in line with the utilitarian perspective, which claims that evaluations of well-being should be extended not only to humans but to sentient non-human animals (Singer 1975) (see Craven and Micheletti in this volume).

Others, such as food bloggers and consumers posting pictures of their vegan meals on Instagram, concentrate on the aesthetics of vegan food. They use another kind of discursive strategy, namely reimagining vegan and plant-based eating as a ‘cool’, trendy, desirable and even normalized and mainstream lifestyle and vegan food as delicious. However, the demarcation between these two types of discursive strategies is blurry, as they are often used simultaneously. Even the animal rights movement has started to apply methods close to the new discursive strategies of political consumerism, instead of merely employing the previous strategies of infiltrating farms and releasing video material filmed there (Lundbom, 2016). They increasingly use messages about the importance of veganism for one’s health and fitness, too (Micheletti & Stolle, 2016).

The above analysis of discursive strategies has already suggested a connection with lifestyle and lifestyle political consumerism. Many vegans themselves highlight that veganism is a lifestyle - not a diet - as it concerns all areas of life (Greenebaum, 2012). In previous studies, too, vegetarianism and veganism have been termed alternative lifestyles and lifestyle movements actively promoting a lifestyle as a means for social change (Haenfler, Johnson & Jones, 2012). In the new discursive strategies presented in this chapter, the focus is on a lifestyle and self-image that simultaneously promote hedonism, self-care and consciousness of the adverse effects of the meat and dairy industries.

A closer look at the concept of lifestyle in contemporary societies suggests that lifestyle is "a more or less integrated set of practices which an individual embraces […] because they give material to a particular narrative of self-identity" (Giddens, 1991, 81) and hence, lifestyle-related decisions are about how to act but also about whom to be (Giddens, 1991). In analyses relating to political consumerism, lifestyle politics has been defined as using one's private life to take responsibility for the allocation of common values and resources (Micheletti & Stolle, 2013, 41) and as the ways in which people are made to reflect on their lives and their life narratives because of wider political and social processes (Spaargaren & Oosterveer, 2010). For Giddens (1991, 214) lifestyle politics refers to "political issues which flow from processes of self-actualisation in post-traditional contexts", where globalising processes and self-realisation are mutually interdependent.

What seems to have happened, in addition to the emergence of veganism as an all-encompassing, strict lifestyle concentrating on anti-consumerism and criticism of factory farming, is that another lifestyle with more blurry boundaries is being promoted and built. In the latter constellation, lifestyle is increasingly and more openly about self-identity and related habitus and aesthetics.

Here, it is vital to note the importance of the Internet and especially social media - not only in the increased mobilization around veganism but in everyday social practices and the shaping of cultural content (van Dijk, 2012; van Dijk & Poell, 2013). All the cases presented in the previous section indicate the significance of social media in the rise of veganism and animal rights activism during the 2000s and 2010s. This observation is all the more central given that surveys have shown that veganism and vegetarianism are more common among the young (ARS, 2017). In many cases, related to social media and conventional media, celebrities and

media personalities play a role in the change of veganism from a marginalized lifestyle into 'eco-chic' consumption (Lundahl, 2017). Stolle & Micheletti (2013), too, note the importance of the Internet in encouraging the growth of discursive political consumerism. They further note that "the Internet is *the* infrastructure or architecture for individualized responsibility-taking" and it enables choice editing, choice architecture, and new kinds of group formation (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013, 38). For example, with the rise of online communities and networks, local festivals and national Facebook groups are inspired by similar activities in other cities and countries. These are the cross-national food communities of late-modern societies enabled by social media (Bildtgård, 2008).

On social media and in the food blogosphere, consumers compete for attention and followers, and potentially introduce and adopt new practices and images of eating. Various institutions, actors and activists are confronted with the logic of social media and its platforms - programmability, popularity, connectivity and datafication (van Dijk & Poell, 2013). Hence, vegan vloggers and bloggers, too, have to adopt these techno-commercial processes of social media and the food blogosphere in particular (Poell & van Dijk, 2015).

To summarize, veganism and plant-based eating are clearly spheres of lifestyle political consumerism: they incorporate a way of eating that is informed by concerns for broad political issues on a global scale and integrate these concerns within the practices of everyday life. All in all, veganism as political consumerism consists of, on the one hand, emancipatory and lifestyle-related discursive strategies, and on the other hand lifestyle politics.

Political or non-political consumerism?

The analysis of the components of vegan mobilization in previous sections has suggested that not all eating and promotion of vegan products is unambiguously political consumerism. Moreover, recently, as vegan eating has become fashionable in many Western cities, the aesthetic components of lifestyle politics probably increase in importance while the political component somewhat loses its edge. Here we may recognize 'light-veganism' as a means of distinction by the middle class (cf. Guthman, 2003; Lundahl, 2017).

In these various flexitarian solutions environmental concerns play a larger role than animal rights issues. Furthermore, among foodies flexitarianism overshadows strict vegetarianism, as maximizing food pleasures and consumer choice are more important than environmental or animal rights issues (Johnston & Baumann, 2015). Moreover, in foodie discourse, humanely raised animal products serve as "a resolution between the demands of ethical responsibility and gourmet desire" (Johnston & Baumann, 2015, 139).

Plant-based eating may also be connected to healthism, especially among the middle class, where eating organic salad mix has been "in some sense performative of an elite sensibility" (Guthman, 2003, 53). Celebrities, such as Beyoncé, taking a vegan pledge may be mainly motivated by "spiritual or physical cleanse" and health aspects and consider veganism as a short-term fix for restoring the body to its admired state (Lundahl, 2017, 218). Micheletti and Stolle (2012), too, note that although solidarity values and concern for others are important to vegetarians, values relating to health and quality of food are even more important. They further suggest that due to these self-regarding health values, not all forms of vegetarianism can be considered lifestyle politics (Micheletti and Stolle, 2012).

There is an ongoing debate over whether veganism should be political and never be detached from animal rights (Greenebaum, 2012) and whether the 'veggie trend' overruns the discussion of animal rights (Véron, 2016). Vegan food bloggers have been criticized for aestheticizing vegan eating (Véron, 2016) and many ethical vegans criticize those who follow a vegan diet for health reasons or don't even consider those following a vegan diet for health reasons to be true vegans (Greenbaum, 2012, see also Arppe, Mäkelä, & Väänänen, 2011). Moreover, some have raised the concern that vegan substitutes for animal-derived foods might be merely another example of the co-option of alternative movements for commercial purposes (Fuentes & Fuentes, 2017). The Meat Free Monday campaign has been shown to lack materials about the suffering of animals in industrial agriculture, and to instead strengthen the neoliberal food ethics of individual taste, freedom and increased options (Singer, 2017). In the UK, newspaper coverage of Meat Free Monday only occasionally commented on the adverse consequences for animals of meat production (Morris, 2018). In Sweden, between 2006 and 2013, reporting on environmental problems of meat production more often suggested reformist solutions such as reduction of consumption, instead of more radical solutions such as vegetarianism or veganism (Benulic, 2016).

However, others argue that tolerating those “going vegan” for health or aesthetic reasons, helps to build bridges between the justifications of veganism and the mainstream cultural ethos of meat consumption (Greenebaum, 2012). Bakker and Dagevos (2012), too, warn about juxtaposing responsible and irresponsible consumers. Hence, we could also argue for a less stringent bordering of plant-based or vegan eating as either other-regarding political consumerism or self-regarding food choices. This perspective gains support from previous research on consumer society and political consumerism.

According to Gabriel and Lang (2006), in modern consumer societies, several diverse representations of consumers prevail concurrently: For example, consumers can be seen as choosers, communicators and explorers for new products, experiences and fulfillment. They are identity-seekers, who build identity and boost self-esteem with goods, and hedonists who gain pleasure from the consumption of stylish, “cool” products. Finally, consumers may also be seen as rebels who consume with more style, consume less or differently, and consumer activists explicitly seeking to alter the meanings of consumption, progress and quality of life (Gabriel & Lang, 2006). The current rise of vegan and plant-based eating coheres with all these representations. Moreover, in contemporary political consumerism or political activism, different strands - animal welfare/rights, health, food, ethics, fair-trade - are interlinked, and these linkages are recognized by companies, too (Gabriel & Lang, 2006). When consumers choose foods, many prefer brands that have a triple message: “a good product in its own right, has extra special connotations and by consuming it you can feel good” (Gabriel & Lang, 2006, 166).

Indeed, cultured and ‘clean’ meat are marketed as ‘clean eating’, where clean refers not only to healthiness but also to moral cleanliness. Likewise, ‘eco-chic’ refers to products that are both eco-friendly and trendy (Lundahl, 2017). Many vegan products also interest consumers ‘buycotting’ or preferring ‘free-from’ products, such as ‘hormone-free’, ‘non-GMO’, ‘gluten-free’ and ‘antibiotics-free’ that are currently marketed as generally healthy and desirable (Sexton 2016). Likewise, Oatly is marketing its vegan products as alternatives in numerous ways - sustainable, healthy, small-scale, Swedish - and hence “drawing on multiple points of difference vis-à-vis the conventional dairy industry” (Fuentes & Fuentes, 2017, 16). Consumers of Oatly products also refer to these varying alternatives (Fuentes & Fuentes, 2017).

Others have noted that many consumers get pleasure from consuming differently and from committing to more socially just and environmentally benign modes of consumption (Gabriel & Lang, 2006; Soper, 2008). Consumers may be driven by altruistic and self-interested concerns at the same time (Bakker & Dagevos, 2012). Soper (2008) calls for acknowledging 'alternative hedonism' as a self-interested form of altruism and as a 'moral form of self-pleasuring' in which the focus is on a post-consumerist vision of the 'good life', pleasure and self-realization (Bakker & Dagevos, 2012, 571). Moreover, human needs are never just nutritional needs or driven by some other rationally justified cause; they always hold an aesthetic or symbolic component (Soper, 2008). In a similar vein, Sassatelli (2015) criticises the current scholarly discussion on political consumption for forging a master narrative that one-sidedly focuses on the responsibilities of consumers as market actors and forgets that ethical consumption choices also contain aesthetic, quality and pleasure-seeking ideas. Sassatelli stresses that 'intrinsic pleasures' are fundamental in consumption but that such pleasures are not necessarily only individual or against collective virtue. Moreover, we may look at the practices of vegan and plant-based eating in terms of what Stolle & Micheletti (2013, 37) regard as contemporary political consumers' opportunity "to craft their own ethical compass and choose very much their own fashion of participating in politics without following an organizational model or script".

Giddens, too, has noted that people may follow modes of actions that are at variance with each other. Giddens terms these segments lifestyle sectors, "time-space slices" within which the sets of practices adopted are "reasonably consistent and ordered" (Giddens, 1991, 83). Following Giddens, we may think about veganism and plant-based eating as variously segmental: it would seem that veganism, at least when inspired by ethical concerns, probably represents quite a consistent and pervasive lifestyle that permeates the "time-space slices" of everyday life. But in some cases lifestyles of plant-based eating may be quite flexible, allowing for exceptions for social reasons or because of 'cravings', for instance.

It is precisely this variety of justifications, discourses and interpretations of veganism that has given impetus to the vegan lifestyle that until recently was marginalized with a relatively rigid boundary between plant-based foods and the forbidden animal-derived foods (for the boundary, see Arppe, Mäkelä & Väänänen, 2011). But, because of this mixture, veganism does not simply appear as political consumerism *par excellence* - concentrating on affecting

the markets - but also as a movement of self-realization, identity building, healthism and the aestheticized food of foodies.

Conclusions and future directions

The contemporary focus in food discourses on the hedonistic aspects of plant-based foods has begun to transform the image of vegan and plant-based eating from dull, restrictive and marginal into fun, flexible and pleasurable. Analysis of vegan and plant-based eating as political consumerism has shown an assemblage of interacting actors and activities that together are forming the increased mobilization and interest in plant-based eating and changing the image of veganism. As we have shown, in this process the Internet and especially social media are major platforms. Social media has enabled the activists to reach groups of people who otherwise would not have been easily reached (Poell & van Dijk, 2015). However, social media and its algorithms are designed to produce “instant moments of togetherness” but not long-term efficacy; hence, the future challenge for political consumerism is how to raise political awareness and build durable networks (Poell & van Dijk, 2015).

Consequently, future research in political consumerism must explore the formation of short-term and long-term vegan connectivity on social media and in real-life, and their potential for making eating more sustainable in the long term. The logic of social media itself and the way it changes political consumerism need to be closely analyzed, e.g. with longitudinal data following the evolution of social media debates and conventional media. As regards survey methods, there is a need for more fine-tuned survey questions to identify the many forms and levels of engagement of vegan and plant-based eating, the length of time people have followed these diets and their reasons for abandoning them.

Furthermore, theoretically oriented analyses should explore the ways in which new discursive strategies build lifestyle and taste-based communities in late modern societies. Studies should analyse the interplay of rational justifications of, and the affective responses to, the awareness of factory farming and the prospects of climate change (cf. Goodman et al., 2016). Moreover, how does the therapeutic turn in identity politics and ‘it’s all about me’ politics (Furedi,

2017) conflict with the other-oriented goals of political consumerism and veganism in particular? These analyses might provide a more in-depth understanding of the development of veganism as a form of consumption that is often at the same time political and non-political, at the same time a tool for neoliberal self-realization and community building, as well as altruistic other-regarding activity (cf. Soper, 2008). Moreover, research inspired by practice theory (Shove, Pantzar & Watson, 2012) is needed on the multiple ways that consumers and various groups of gatekeepers and stakeholders maintain and transform images and practices of meat and vegan consumption as either normal or deviant.

Finally, future studies of the kind suggested above must analyse this area in the coming years, as the contemporary fad-like characteristic of vegan eating will probably fade. Even now, vegan and plant-based eating are criticized by various stakeholders, such as the meat, poultry and milk industries, celebrity chefs and other actors with power in media. Will the assemblage and communities that are now supporting the rise of veganism dissolve, making it harder for political consumers to promote their cause, or will the current high tide manage to make permanent changes in the overall food scene?

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