

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON MILLENIALS FOOD PREFERENCES IN A PLANT-BASED ENVIRONMENT IN GERMANY

Research dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
MSc in International Business – Global Brand Management

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28th August 2020

Candidate Declaration

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I certify that the dissertation entitled:

submitted for the degree of: **MSc in International Business – Global Brand Management** is the result of my own work and that where reference is made to the work of others, due acknowledgment is given.

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Dedication

To my grandma, mom and dad.

Acknowledgement

First of all, I would like to thank my family for their support in every way. Every day you give me stability whilst showing me the way into the world.

I would also like to thank Kathy for her constant support and advice, her suggestions in the process of creating this dissertation and her words that have always encouraged me to believe in myself.

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Thanks to every single one who accompanied me on this Master degree and who gave me a second home in Dublin. Cheers, to a new chapter, that I would not have started and finished without you!

Many thanks,

Mareike

Abstract

The impact of Social Media on Millennials food preferences in a plant-based environment in Germany

Mareike Uhde

In this study, it is shown that German Millennials are partly influenced by plant-based food content on Instagram depending on their personal attitude towards food and an healthy lifestyle. Plant-based brands can have an impact on Millennial's overall brand image by engaging their target audience with recipes and product recommendations and also when they cooperate with that have a more authentic and reliable image than the brand itself. The dissertation focused on exploring the Millennial generation in Germany, their usage behaviour of different Social Media platforms, especially in regard towards Instagram and how this is related to their perception of plant-based food brands. Today, social media has an important position in most marketing strategies and must be taken into account in all areas of the marketing mix. Many external factors in connection with product properties such as price, appearance or manufacturing process influence the perception of consumers, whereas social media offers the platform to communicate directly to the consumer and to convey product-related and natural messages. Millennials use social media mainly in their free time, where they are very receptive to latent advertising. However, this study shows that there must be a certain amount of interest in the plant-based topic in order for the content on Instagram to be visible to the user in the first place. Once contact and interest have been established, social media influences the consumer on several levels in different ways. The Millennials need of self-presentation in particular plays a major role on this platform. If the user identifies themselves with plant-based food and has built it into his lifestyle, he adorns himself with this content on the outside. Influencing those who are looking for inspiration rather than information focus more on individual content than on brand content when using content. This decisive factor, combined with the fact that the image-heavy platform encourages user emotions and commitment, shows how important the right visual language is in this context. However, this research does not give a uniform picture, seeing as the personal interests of the participants in regard to plant-based food diverge very strongly. The trend towards the importance of look and feel in a photo, however, is clearly evident and can be counted as a research result. The main problem that arises from this research is the lack of information and research that has been achieved in regards to the individual and the lack of in-depth research that could not be implemented due to the complexity of the researched target group.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

Social Media as we know it today, has a huge impact on our everyday lives - especially when it comes to the way we inform ourselves and communicate. Today, people are not only influenced by offline advertisements like pictures and videos with product recommendations, there is now a social component which affects us indirectly. (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010) With this work, the author wants to find out what this factor is and how it influences preferences about plant-based food. Therefore, this research is looking for indications which show the scope of influence Social Media has in a Millennials life and decisions also regarding their purchase behaviour in the German plant-based food market.

Furthermore, the author is looking for indications how important the communication on Instagram, the colour and arrangement of food in a picture is, to create a valuable impact on a decision to eat or not eat a product. (Apkon, 2013)In this work, the product that will be focussed on in the data collection process is meat substitutes, from Garden Gourmet, of Swiss FMCG enterprise Nestlé.

The topic of this research deals with the elements of impact, Social Media has on the Millennial generation and its consumption behaviour of meat substitutes measured in a quantitative research with an exemplary posted picture of the 'Sensational Burger' by Garden Gourmet. The work will focus on the consumer's perspective and how they perceive and interact with brands or individual content on Instagram and how important it is for brands and especially Garden Gourmet to find the right tonality to influence a purchase behaviour in a vegan environment in Germany.

The designed title is therefore:

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON MILLENIALS FOOD PREFERENCES IN A PLANT-BASED ENVIRONMENT

1.2 Research Purpose

Social Media changed the way of communication from person to person but also from brands to their consumers. The platform which established itself in the past ten years as main information tool, especially for the Millennial generation, is also perceived as more trustful than traditional media when it comes to advertisement. The reason being that, is that Social Media advertising and product placements come with an ambassador. In the early years of Social Media, when people shared their opinions on products and brands – the influencer market was born.

The aim of this work is to investigate whether Social Media content has an impact on consumer behaviour when it comes to their food choice. The main goal of this work is to empirically examine to what extent the consumer confidence in a food brand Social Media profile can be explained. Over the past years, Social Media has long secured a place in the new marketing mix as a communication tool. The ongoing establishment in our everyday social life also changes people's purchase behaviour. Also, sales channels are going to be established via Social Media. This offers companies and brands extremely attractive and innovative opportunities for monetization directly with their target audience online. (Court et al., 2009)

With this work, the author searches to identify elements regarding the assumption that Social Media has influence on an Millennials behaviour.

Furthermore, this work will focus on possible uses, future perspectives and potentials, Social Media has as a sales channel. Critical success factors, strategies and criteria are worked out for the successful practical use of commercial instruments and shopping solutions in Social Media, especially on the social network Instagram.

The leading research question of this work is:

**What is the impact Social Media having on Millennials food preferences
in connection to plant-based food on Instagram in Germany?**

1.3 Significance of the Study

Looking at the rise and scope of Social Media and the influences each platform has on an individual's purchase and usage behaviour, brands and companies need to use Social Media to understand their target audience and to adapt their products and communication for a better brand experience. (Appel et al., 2020) As each individual uses Social Media in different ways also to differentiate between personal use and business use like an influencer uses for example Instagram for advertisements. The influence of those factors on their food behaviour as well their purchase behaviour when it comes to a plant-based food decision, is the main research objective. To provide this study with a significant purpose, the author will focus on the German plant-based food market and its target group of Millennials who use Social Media and especially Instagram on a daily basis.

Furthermore, the author will focus in the industry of vegan food and especially meat substitutes. The reason being that is, that the newest research from the German federal environment agency shows, that meat substitutes have a significant and positive impact on our environment.

According to this study, plant-based meat substitutes perform best in this perspective. (Örtl, 2020) Therefore, the author seeks for certain indications, how Social Media influences food and purchase behaviour to connect it to this important topic to date. Also, the motivation for veganism, vegetarianism or even just reducing the real meat consumption is considered in this research.

With this study, the author works out factors that are important for companies and brands in their marketing strategy with regard to their social media presence to understand the Millennial generation. Since there is a personal interest in this industry and the author himself works in the marketing department for a business catering company, the goal is to develop indications that support a social media strategy with regard to plant-based products in Germany and how to inspire the Millennial generation of this industry.

1.4 Research Objective

With this work the author reviews academic literature with a critical view on how Social Media influences behaviour related to the perception of vegan food, particular within the millennial generation. Followed by a created framework and the research paradigm as well as the research design and the potential outcome the author wants to achieve. At the end, the author will show the temporal sequence which is planned to complete the study.

The author aims to find out, how the usage of Social Media can have an impact to this generation's food choice in a plant-based context. Precisely because this generation is very committed to climate protection and the environment, the author would like to relate this topic. (Bollani *et al.*, 2019) Bringing this into a business and brand context, the author wants

to examine the most successful ways how brands should leverage their communication on Social Media platforms, so that the correct brand message is communicated. Furthermore, the research studies the role Social Media assumes when food behaviour is impacted.

The main objective is to identify factors as well as critical success factors which are related to the use of Social Media and present the reasons why an individual might change their food habits. Secondly, how vegan food brand communications on Social Media is perceived by an individual and thirdly, how this could lead to a more conscious behaviour as well as to brand engagement.

Many factors from different areas have a verifiable impact on food behaviour. Hence, the author wants to research on which level of influence Social Media can be positioned. Behaviour in general is shaped by many psychological factors and depends on personal circumstances. (Van der Pligt and Vliek, 2016) The Millennial generation is shaping the online environment the most, especially in regard of self-presentation and self-esteem. Being the largest generation living at the moment, makes this group very contemporary to study. Also because their values have a huge impact on their behaviour. (Gerhardt and Peluchette, 2020) Therefore, it is essential to research, how Millennials values occur. If this can be seen as a first indicator on the formation, that values emerge or are impacted by the use of Social Media, it can also lead to a positive or negative effect of food behaviour.

The addressed key questions conduct across different academic areas such as Social Media Marketing, Consumer behaviour, Millennial generation and the plant-based food industry.

The main objectives of this research are:

To define the importance of optical factors from a post on Instagram to create a positive impact regarding plant-based food.

This objective will focus on the identification of factors which influence the perception of plant-based food on Instagram. If there is a connection between the usage of Instagram and having a positive attitude towards plant-based brands and products.

What are important factors a brand needs to consider when communicating about food behaviour on Social Media to experience a brand?

There are different possibilities to communicate with a target audience from a brands perspective. The author aims to identify the most suitable ones which should be considered for a more reasonable communication. The objective therefore is to identify if a vegan brand should include product recommendations, pictures or videos of food, recipes or do it yourself tutorials in their Social Media communication.

The level of interest in food and healthy lifestyle should the individual present to be influenced?

To identify the level of interest in food pictures on Social Media Platforms, the author created this objective to show which platform is good fit for plant-based food and to analyze how plant-based content should be communicated to be perceived in a positive way.

The problem that the author tries to solve with this research is, that brands and individuals need to understand the importance of Social Media influence on behaviour. After being personally influenced by Social Media on food choices, the author aims to create a way of communication which brands can use for a successful communication to create a value. Especially sustainability and conscious nutrition plays a huge role in the Millennial generation. The interest in environmentally friendly and sustainable food grows especially in this younger generation. (Bollani et al., 2019)

The research can be beneficial for food brands and especially for plant-based brands and their marketing as well as for individuals who want to understand the scope of Social Media on their own behaviour.

With the accomplishment of this study, the author will exhibit factors and perceptions of the stated target audience in order to create a guideline, on how brands can use their position and voice to have a positive impact and to create brand engagement.

1.5 Structure of the Study

The dissertation is divided into five chapters. Each chapter starts with an introduction and explanation of the chapter regarding the way it contributes to the research question and its objectives.

The first chapter is about the introduction of the researched topic, an explanation of the research objectives of the exploratory study and to declare how significant the study is for plant-based brands.

The second chapter of the literature review starts with an explanation of the basic terms and an overview of the current state of research on the subject of Social Media, consumer behaviour, the millennial generation and the German plant-based market. Chapter two concludes with a conceptual framework to picture out the most significant findings of the research and a gap for the primary research of this study.

Chapter three provides the methodology as well as the research design. In this chapter, the strategy and methodology will be explained on how the primary data is collected. A mix of qualitative and quantitative primary data is chosen. For the purpose of this research, the exploratory approach was taken. A survey was sent out on Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn with focus on Millennials which use Social Media on a daily basis. Also, a qualitative survey with open questions took place with brand and product manager from one plant-based food brand.

The presentation and discussion of the findings of the quantitative and qualitative data will be elaborated in chapter four. The results of the primary data examined the validity, reliability and the assumptions made by the researcher based on the answers to the qualitative and quantitative survey.

In the final chapter the implications and limitations are highlighted and conclude with a result as well as recommendation for future research.

The following chapter starts with the literature review where existing literature is explored for further understanding of the researched topic and question to comprehend the research question.

2 Literature Review

The aim of this literature review is to define and evaluate previous research data in connection with the research question in order to design a conceptual framework for the explanatory study on German Millennials as well as brand and product managers from plant-based brands and the influence of Social Media on Millennials eating preferences in a plant-based environment in Germany.

2.1 Overview

This chapter provides based on the existing literature, a deep understanding of the Social Media landscape. In this context, an overview of Social Media marketing approaches and the self-presentation of users on platforms is discussed. In addition, a deeper insight into the functionality of Instagram and the different communication from brands and influencers is discussed. Seeing as these different types of communication, in regard to differentiate between brand or Influencer communication are the fundamental aspects of the research question.

Furthermore, the consumer behaviour in general and especially the purchase decision process and source credibility theory will be discussed in order to understand what factors influence an individual to build a specific attitude through Social Media. The section also provides an overview of how Social Media influences the purchase decision process in order to understand why an individual act in a particular way when he or she is influenced through Instagram. Furthermore, the optical influences like colour, design and arrangement on pictures posted on Instagram will be analysed in connection to the research question what the impact is, Social Media has on food preferences in the Millennial generation.

Finally, chapter two provides an insight to the German plant-based food market and its plant-based alternatives with a lookout to the role of plant-

based food in an healthy lifestyle and short-term effects of COVID-19 on the German food industry.

Furthermore, the author creates a conceptual framework based on the described topics and key findings of the literature. This shows the connection between the main influential topics like time of usage, purpose of usage and in general to view food related content.

The level of knowledge the individual provides is also an indication of what a brand or an influencer has to talk about to meet the interest for a positive image impact. This dependency on personal values and the willingness to deal with food content on Instagram is how the consumed content is intrinsically developed in relation to the attitude towards plant-based food.

2.2 Social Media

The presence of Social Media is increasing, in general communication and how people interact with each other, has changed with it. Kaplan and Haenlein(2010) define Social Media as “a group of Internet-based-applications [...] that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content”.

This definition gives a rough base for a better understanding of this medium. The question is, what makes it social, why is the Millennial generation the perfect target audience when talking about Social Media and how does it affect their behaviour? In fact, Social Media provides a platform, to create a visualization picture, video or text, which then for example presents the personality of a person. Self-presentation and the need to interact and communicate is nothing new. It is based in our identity, but it needs a stage or a medium with a specific setting and of course an anticipated audience (Goffman, 1959). By bringing this into today's age, Social Media platforms - such as a personal web page or a

blog – gives an individual the possibility of self-presentation - 24 hours, 7 days a week. Furthermore, the Internet then provides the appropriate audience. These Blogs and personalized Websites, make it possible to express the own identity in a digital context and provide endless possibilities in their creation. (Jensen Schau and Gilly, 2003)

2.2.1 Social Media as a Marketing-tool

Marketing is a central aspect of branding and corporate management. It is used to create messages and to communicate them to a specific target group in order to share the goals and values of a brand. In general, marketing means planning strategies as well as coordinating and simultaneously monitoring activities. (Kotler and Armstrong, 2017)

Through Marketing, brands identify needs and wants and create a brand or product the consumer identifies with to satisfy this need in order to create value in return. (Smith and Zook, 2019) Marketing should, on the one hand, identify and meet the expectations and needs of customers in a human and social way. On the other hand, companies want to recognize changes in the market in the form of shifts in needs at an early stage in order to adapt their strategy accordingly and to secure a competitive advantage over other market participants. (Kotler *et al.*, 2019) In order to achieve corporate goals, companies develop marketing strategies, which in turn are implemented using marketing tools.

Social Media marketing is to be seen as part of the marketing mix that can influence each of the four P's. The tools and functionality of Social Media marketing can thus be used within the production process (crowdsourcing), as a market research instrument (Social Media monitoring), directly for sales (social commerce) and in brand communication (relationship marketing). (Mero *et al.*, 2012)



Figure 1 The Marketing Process Creating and Capturing Customer Value (Kotler and Armstrong, 2017)

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2017), the secret is not the tool or platform itself, it is how to use Social Media and to implement its benefits in the marketing strategy. **Figure 1** shows, that the first step is to understand the marketplace and customer needs. A customer value driven strategy communicated in the right place and moment in addition to engagement creates a value for and from future customers. (Kotler and Armstrong, 2017)

No matter which Social Media platform is used, it will always result in interactive communication with the target group. That is why Social Media marketing should not be viewed as one part, but rather integrated in the holistic strategy. (Smith and Zook, 2019) In the marketing mix, communication from brands to their target audience through Social Media plays a major role, because now the customer is given a voice. Therefore, to build the relationship and to keep the customer engaged, is very important in today's fast moving world with so many possibilities. (Appel et al., 2020)

2.2.2 Self-presentation on Social Media

Combining, that the desire of self-presentation is based in our identity, and the possibilities of new technologies makes the usage of self-presentation on this medium as a matter of course. Bringing this together in a media related context, the author now analyses a theoretical concept. Even

though, Social Media as known what it is today wasn't present at the beginning. A theory known as the social presence theory which shows the relationship between a communication medium (for example speaking) and the degree to which the person perceives the presence of another person. (Lowenthal, 2009) If we put this theory in a media-related context like Social Media, it shows that "that media differ in the degree of 'social presence'" defined as the acoustic, visual, and physical contact that can be achieved they allow to emerge between two communication partners." (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). With this definition, and in mind, that people interact and present themselves always the way they want to be seen, they already influence the impressions other people have of them (Goffman, 1959). That also means, that the behaviour which is communicated through Social Media, can be created how the individual wants it to be.

		Social presence/ Media richness		
		Low	Medium	High
Self-presentation/ Self-disclosure	High	Blogs and Microblogs (e.g., Twitter)	Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook)	Virtual social worlds (e.g. Second Life)
	Low	Collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia)	Content communities (e.g. YouTube)	Virtual game worlds (e.g. World of Warcraft)

Figure 2: Classification of Social Media by Social Presence/Media Richness and Self-Presentation/Self-disclosure (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010)

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) assume that "the higher the social presence, the greater the social influence of the communication partners on the behaviour of others." That means, that the more content an individual creates on Social Media platforms, and the more he/she tries to interact, his/her influence will be higher in specific areas. Bloggers and Influencers

talk about their interests, their daily struggles and share various experiences with their community. We now know, that this need to share happenings and moments in live is the desire of self-presentation and to create an image how someone wants to be seen from others. This way, how they present themselves in addition what they eat, influences their community's behaviour. A study shows, that a promoted and branded snack, seems to be more preferred by the influencers target audience, than other snacks and therefore this kind of communication might have an impact on an individual's behaviour. (Qutteina *et al.*, 2019)

The development of Web 2.0 and its technical innovations regarding user-friendliness and to offer a quick and fast way to share content, have also more focused on the social aspect of online users in recent years. This change of perspective can also be seen as a transformation of the user, which means that the usage pattern switches from a passive recipient of information to an active co-designer of content. (Rohracher, 2005)

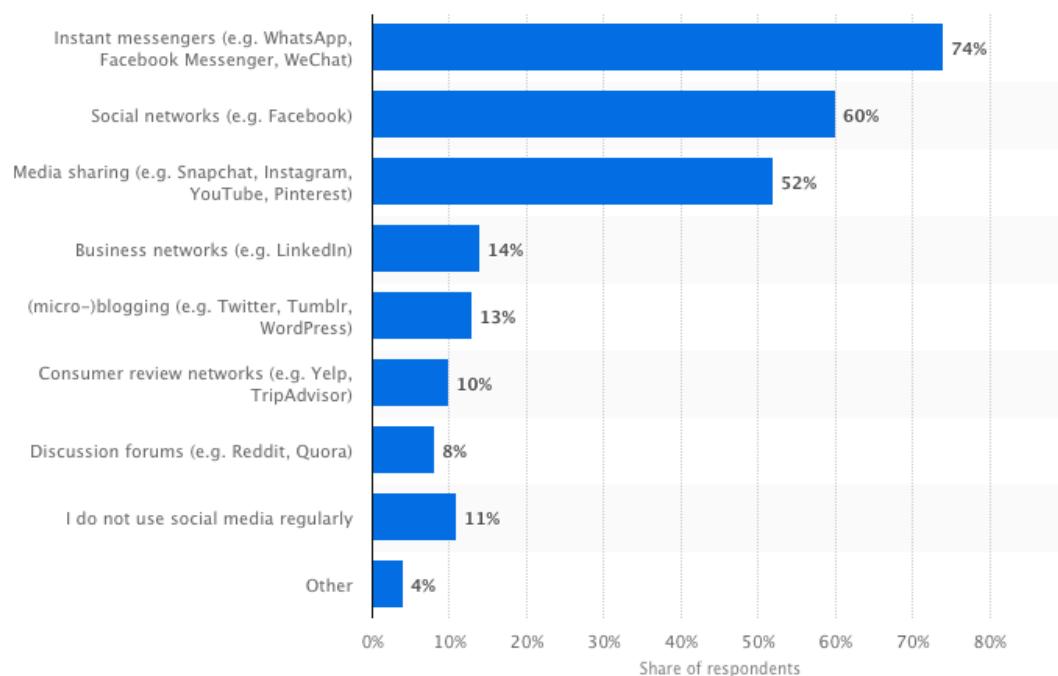
To be more interactive and engaged, users have numerous opportunities to participate in Social Media. Social Media platforms like Instagram and Facebook also developed therefore their own tools, so that this level of engagement is growing continuously. Commenting on posts, liking or also reacting with different expressions on information is nothing new anymore. This progress in communication technologies, digital networking through Social Media and the resulting interactive communication among market participants have brought about significant changes in the online purchase behaviour. Also, the integration of online shops in social networks is no longer an exception. These developments have socialized e-commerce and Social Media is experiencing commercialization. The interaction between customers via products, brands ensures transparency and replaces the lack of advice from a seller. (Appel *et al.*, 2020)

The Internet is characterized by rapid and continuous development, which creates new opportunities for companies to communicate and interact with customers. As already mentioned above, this development has been observed above all in the area of Social Media. The networking of Social Media has become increasingly important in online retail. For this reason, it is interesting on the one hand to examine the changes that could be reflected in the buying behaviour, and on the other hand to carry out a permanent update of the existing investigations in order to keep up with the fast pace and rapid development of both the technologies and the modern society in dealing with these technologies, to get an equivalent picture of the current trends in buying behaviour and to be able to observe possible changes. (Schwager and Meyer, 2007) Based on this, this work seeks to gain insights into the concrete influence this interaction option between food brands and consumers as well as consumers has on purchasing behaviour.

2.2.3 Differentiation and relevance of platforms

Social Media Platforms provide brands and individuals with a high level to reach a specific target audience or to communicate with friends, family or companies. But there are significant differences when it comes to the usage, when to use it and how to communicate on each platform. Some are more used to fill spare moments and to find inspiration, others are used to communicate on a business level and to use it more like a newspaper. (Voorveld et al., 2018a)

The channels that are currently used on a regular bases in Germany are instant messengers with 74% as shown in **Figure 3**, followed by social networks with 60% and media sharing platforms with 52%. This survey was taken in May 2020 with 2087 respondents aged between 18-64. (Statista, 2020)



© Statista 2020

Figure 3 "What kinds of Social Media do you use regularly?" (Statista, 2020)

Although, this statistic does not picture Millennials in general, but the fact that a platform is used for different intentions also affects the content from which it can be viewed. Furthermore, it will also influence the brands and influencers on how they position themselves and communicate.. It must also be taken into account in which situation the user currently is and with what intentions and interests he is on the platforms and provides information. The information intake in leisure time is to be assessed differently than during working hours (Voorveld *et al.*, 2018b)

2.2.4 Functionality Instagram

In this work, the author focusses on one specific Social Media Platform, which is Instagram. The importance of Instagram as a marketing channel is shown by the following aspects. First of all, the high reach and growing popularity make the social network a very future-proof marketing channel from a company perspective. (Lipsman et al., 2012) Instagram is available for free download for all common smartphone operating systems (iOS from Apple, Android and Windows phones) in the respective "app stores". There is also the option of displaying Instagram galleries online in the form of web profiles on computers and other end devices. Furthermore, the option to share photos with his community was expanded by the option to also publish videos. (Appel et al., 2020) But in addition to all these "hard facts", Instagram has not only created a suitable, simple and popular option, parts of his life to share with others in the form of photos and videos. Instagram gives exactly what is expected from such social networks: a community and the exchange with each other. (Jenkins et al., 2013) However, Instagram's efficiency is primarily determined also by other factors that make the network so attractive for communication measures. The popularity of the network can be demonstrated by its user intensity. The target audience of this study, which is based in Germany, counts about 24,6 million users on Instagram in June 2020. Furthermore, in the statistic below, the age range from 25-34 presents the biggest generation group – the Millennials. (NapoleonCat Stats, 2020)

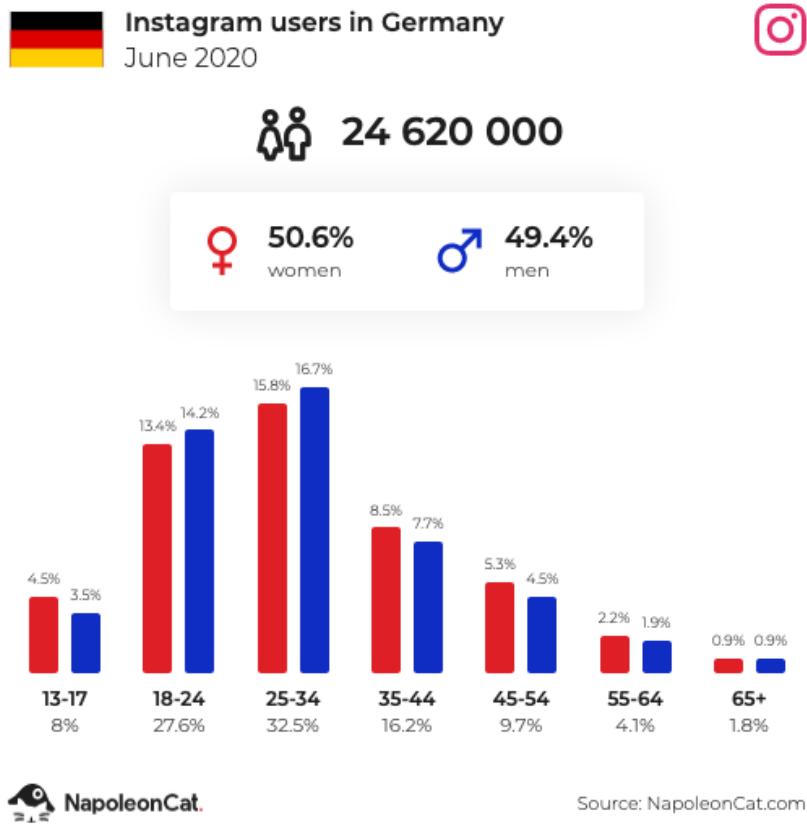


Figure 4: Instagram users in Germany, June 2020 (NapoleonCat Stats, 2020)

Furthermore, it's also important to look at the time Millennials spend on this medium. Therefore, the next graph from Statista (2017) shows, that users aged between 14-29 spend 17,1 minutes per average.

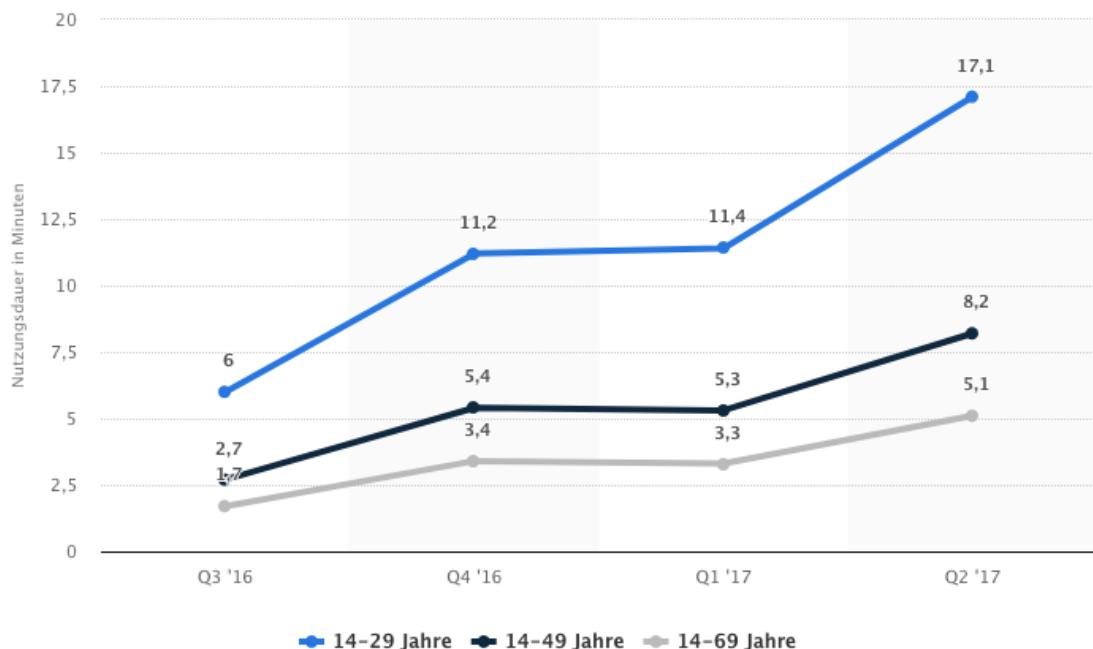


Figure 5: Instagram usage per age (Statista, 2018)

But, it is not only the use of time that is important, from a corporate perspective, it is the engagement between brands and users. This can be measured by impressions and reach. Instagram itself provides this information on each post and story. Those metrics have also different meanings and importance for brands. An impression for example does not take for account, if an ad is seen by the same person 10 times – if one person sees it 10 times, the impression is 10. In contrast, the reach counts the exact unique contacts. So, an impression can be 10 but the reach of an ad is one. (Cook, 2019) Bringing this functionality and information of how important this medium is for this study's target audience, the next chapter will now look at the engagement Social Media creates as engagement can be seen as a factor of behaviour influence.

2.2.5 Online brand engagement

Before bringing the research question into a branded context, brand engagement is also a relevant field in regards to the impact on an individual's behaviour and attitude against food content. Representative for brand engagement on Social Media is the emotional connection which can be shown through consumer actions (e.g., "likes" of pictures, reactions to stories, comments on posts, shares or re-posts) (Hunter, 2016).

When a cooperation between brand and Influencer takes place, a level of engagement of the target audience is expected. Brand engagement itself differs depending on the Social Media platform. A social interaction can be for example really important to build a relationship and brand loyalty (Voorveld *et al.*, 2018a). The platform Instagram is improving its features constantly. The platform Instagram is improving its features constantly. The Facebook-owned company regularly creates features for a better interaction, which makes it much easier for an Influencer to communicate on a personal and active level. Instagram provides also information and has an own algorithm. This algorithm makes it difficult for some Influencers to stay visible, as some new posts do not show up in the newsfeed of their followers (Carah and Shaul, 2016).

The statistic below (**Figure 6**), shows that especially because of new features and the development of the app, the number of user has grown rapidly.

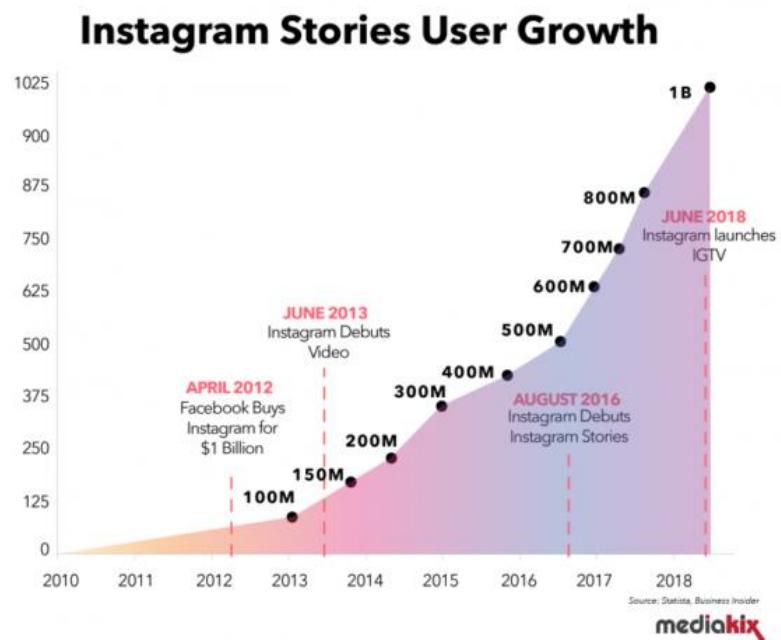


Figure 6: Instagram Stories User Growth (Mediakix, 2020)

However, although this new medium which is mostly used to showcase moments, brands, Influencer as well as the user himself, has various opportunities to interact with the community. It is also assignable, that content and advertising on this particular platform advertising was evaluated more positively as on others (Voorveld *et al.*, 2018a). Therefore, it can be assumed that the food presentation by a particular influencer can be perceived as positive and therefore influence the audience.

This brand equity consists of the brands awareness, associations and loyalty. The personal situation the target audience is situated in, has also an impact on the communication. The personal motivation on how to engage in Social Media, decides on the level of brand equity for this individual.

Therefore, when identifying Social Media as the influential tool which drives consumer perceptions and brand engagement, it can be considered, that those platforms have an impact on consumer behaviours. The effect which Social Media has on the brand image, are therefore also influences by the audience which is communicating on Social Media about the brand. (Goldsmith and Horowitz, 2006)

2.2.5.1 Brand versus influencer on Social Media

As a result of the changes due to digital communication explained above, strategies such as content marketing and a high degree of engagement by influencers are increasingly coming into focus. This is a method that translates advertising messages into content that is relevant to the target group and in this way represents added value for the user. (Schaffer, 2020) In addition, the communication of an influencer also leads to the fact that users publish more and more opinions and experiences about products and companies. The trust and credibility that derives from an Influencer is higher than messages published by a brand. (nielsen, 2013) This rise and scope of Influencer did not happen over night, Influencers build a community by simply sharing their opinions and perceptions on what they are personally passionate about.

In doing so, they assign more credibility than content that is generated by a company or brand. It is therefore not surprising that more and more attention is being paid to the investigation of word-of-mouth communication in the online context, and with it also the influencers, who are considered to be the decisive driving force behind word-of-mouth communication. (Meiners et al., 2010) Brands benefit from Influencers or even users in the fact that the content which they create has the credibility and does not cost them a whole marketing and production budget. This User-Generated-Content presents a high value for consumers

as they feel that this communication is very personal and they can identify with it even more. (Pangaribuan *et al.*, 2019) The fact that the consumer perceives this kind of content more personal and valuable a higher credibility to the Influencer is given. The base of this trust derives from personal moments the Influencer shares. Influencers present insights about their own opinion by talking about what they think about a specific topic or brand and position themselves with their personal view. (Schaffer, 2020)

This self-branding might be the key element when comparing the effectiveness of an influencer versus a product brand. A product or brand mostly does not have a face or personality that is representative and recommends in a natural way and without partiality. (Appel *et al.*, 2020) Influencers have no pressure to freely present their own genuine opinion, because they choose which brands or products to cooperate with. The personal opinion and recommendation process in regard to a purchase decision is nothing new, but Social Media and for example Instagram gives this type of influence a new dimension.

2.3 Consumer behaviour

In the past few years a lot has changed in terms of how consumers get their information. Social Media plays a very important role, as it provides a lot of information with easy and fast access to the simple and learned handling, sometimes even without asking for it. (PrakashYadav and Rai, 2017) In order to understand how marketing and Social Media influences consumer behaviour, it is necessary to explain this behaviour. The approaches to explaining consumer behaviour are based on a large number of theories and models. Furthermore, consumer behaviour is influenced on various levels by other people. The end consumer is not always the buyer of a product and in other places the actual user is

influenced by an influencer and his recommendation. (Solomon *et al.*, 2016)

Different aspects are identified to play a significant role when it comes to consumer behaviour. Cultural, social, personal and psychological factors are the main ones that marketers have to consider. Those factors influences a consumer on different levels when it might come to a purchase decision in the future. (Kotler and Armstrong, 2017)

The process of consumer behaviour to a purchase with its different issues and influences is demonstrated in **Figure 7** below. The author wants to set a focus on the first one from a consumer's perspective on how the consumer actually decides that a product is desired. From a marketer's perspective, it is highly important that this element is adhered to when using Social Media to satisfy an individual's need. If the consumer does not present a level of interest, is there even a chance to influence them. In the following two sections two theories are presented to stress the importance of consumer behaviour in relation to the purchase decision and Social Media.

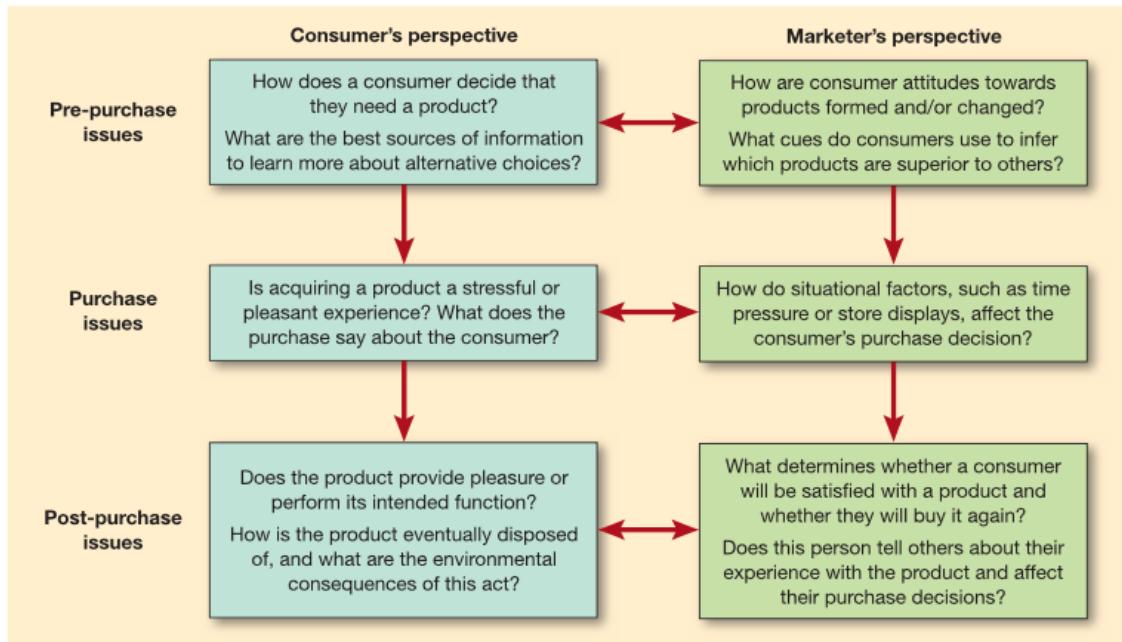


Figure 7 Consumer Behaviour (Solomon et al., 2016)

2.3.1 Source credibility theory

In order to find our way in an increasingly complex environment, each individual relies on obtaining information on a wide variety of issues, although he or she has no direct access to most of these issues. Therefore, it is necessary to be able to rely on the reliability of the provided information. Perception of the truth of information given by a person is the basis of credibility. This creates a multi-dimensional concept. The recipient to whom information is given is used, for example, to evaluate the source or sender of the communication. The relationship with the sender and the information is also assessed. In addition, the recipient has a certain willingness to accept the truth and credibility of the sender. (Hovland et al., 1953)

Credibility is a crucial factor in influencer marketing and affects user purchasing decisions. The report by Nirschl and Steinberg also examined the impact of influencer marketing on consumers. The results show that of the 172 respondents, 40% have already bought a product based on the

recommendation of an influencer. The investigation also showed that the opinion of influencers on half of the test subjects has already had an impact on the purchase decision. (Nirschl and Steinberg, 2018) The fact, that a product recommendation has such an impact on an individual's purchase, even though it comes from a person the receiver never heard before, leads to the assumption, that especially the personal contact on Social Media is decisive.

2.3.2 Buying decision process

In order to be able to illuminate the influence of the purchase decisions by the changes implied by Web 2.0, the various purchase decision processes and the phases of a purchase decision are first explicitly examined. The process of making a purchase decision is first preceded by a need. A need is generally considered to be undirected and is only realized with the intention of an object-oriented intention to act, i.e. as a need concretized to an economic good to acquire this as needed.

A need then becomes demand as soon as the intention to buy is also supported by purchasing power. The intention to buy a certain product, but also be able to finance it. (Court et al., 2009)

How a purchase decision process works is partly defined by the products to be purchased, how often such a product is bought and partly also based on existing knowledge of the consumer. The processes can be divided into four stages, shown in the picture below.

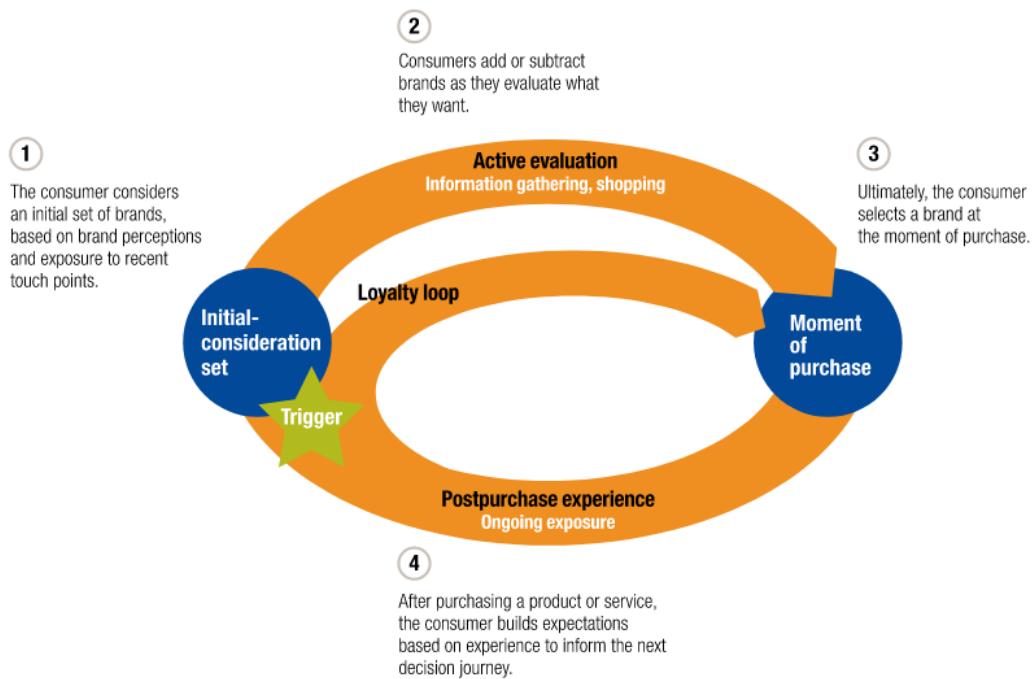


Figure 8 Decision-making process (Court et al., 2009)

The purchase decision therefore begins with the stimulation phase, or an initial trigger. The consumer becomes aware of the existing need. This can be triggered, for example, by advertising. The second phase, the so-called search phase, initiates the targeted research of the consumer. Here, the consumer gets a first overview of the existing offers, looking for ways to satisfy the need. In the subsequent evaluation and selection phase, the customer weighs which product delivers him the greatest benefit. If a decision has been made in this regard, for example that there is an object-oriented intention to act, the purchase will be carried out, provided there is sufficient purchasing power. This is followed by the post-purchase phase, also called after-sales phase, in which either a so-called post-purchase dissonance, i.e. the regret of the purchase, or a feeling of satisfaction arises. (Court et al., 2009) Bringing this in the context of this research, it can be assumed that especially in this case, the loyalty loop happens. When it comes to food decisions, the information search is not that decisive

anymore. Here, the target audience has already built trust and is no longer focused on his or her personal need.

2.4 The Millennial generation

Looking at the main target audience of the research, the millennial generation is the first generation to grow up with this kind of technology. The availability at this stage brings vast opportunities for this generation and a completely new understanding of how things work online. Seeing as they grew up surrounded by technology, it is somewhat natural for them to use and interact with it.

Especially interacting on Social Media, on websites or chats is significant for their socializing behaviours. They have a strong 'virtual bonding', they can identify themselves with the happenings online and other people. It sometimes helps young people, to break out and to have a platform to communicate their emotions. (PrakashYadav and Rai, 2017) Therefore, it can be assumed, that especially Millennials exhibit about the emergence of behaviours though Social Media.

Literature and studies also verify, that this generation learns really fast and is constantly looking for new innovations. Because Millennials did not only just grow up with technology – it is now also embedded in their daily lives. (Moore, 2012) They can be seen as experts and "digital natives" while they use Social Media for research and interactive purposes.

But also, the way they communicate changes. They no longer want a one to one communication. Millennials look for a proactive peer communication with conversations and discussions. They want to interact more and especially look for a dialogue with brands (Leen *et al.*, 2012). The social drivers of this generation have a good knowledge of how this technology works and how it has to be used to reach a defined objective.

2.4.1 Social Media Usage of Millennials

Google, Facebook or Instagram and other online tools are the first choice for Millennials to get information. The spread of Web 2.0 thus causes market transparency because the information costs for consumers have dropped significantly. Millennials however also make purchases, preferably online. Product Websites are also often used to find out about products before shopping or to share experiences with other users after the purchase. These options enable consumers to find out about the price-performance ratio even before buying. As a result, the market power of consumers increases and their brand loyalty decreases, because price and product features have become more important to Millennials than brands. (M. Lobaugh et al., 2019) In addition, Millennials expect brands to be present on social networks, share content and give them the opportunity to get involved and engage with the brand. This can be very useful for brands as they can increase brand awareness by sharing their posts. (Dass et al., 2019)

This nowadays has led to a fundamental change in how content works on Social Media platforms (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). This difference to other generations, that today's millennial generation is basically aware of how some brands work, makes advertising at this stage much more difficult. It also needs to be considered, that this generation as already mentioned, grew up with Social Media, but in addition advertising and online sources also impact the level of education. As this young generation uses smartphones, television and other sources, the advertising is always present and shapes the education latently. (Zia and Iftikhar, 2018) Beside other factors, the level of education and the norms an individual grew up, impacts the behaviour in relation to food. The norms and traditions are shaping the personal behaviour. (Shepherd and Raats, 2006) As the millennial generation, has now other sources than their family

and social environment, they have now other factors which influence their behaviour.

2.5 Plant-based food market

The word "vegan" was first mentioned by the Englishman Donald Watson. He founded the Vegan Society in 1944 as a spin-off of the English Vegetarian Society. (The Vegan Society, 2020) Watson did not derive the term vegetarian from the Latin vegetus (lively, fresh, powerful), but from the English vegetable (vegetable, vegetable). (The Vegan Society, 2020)

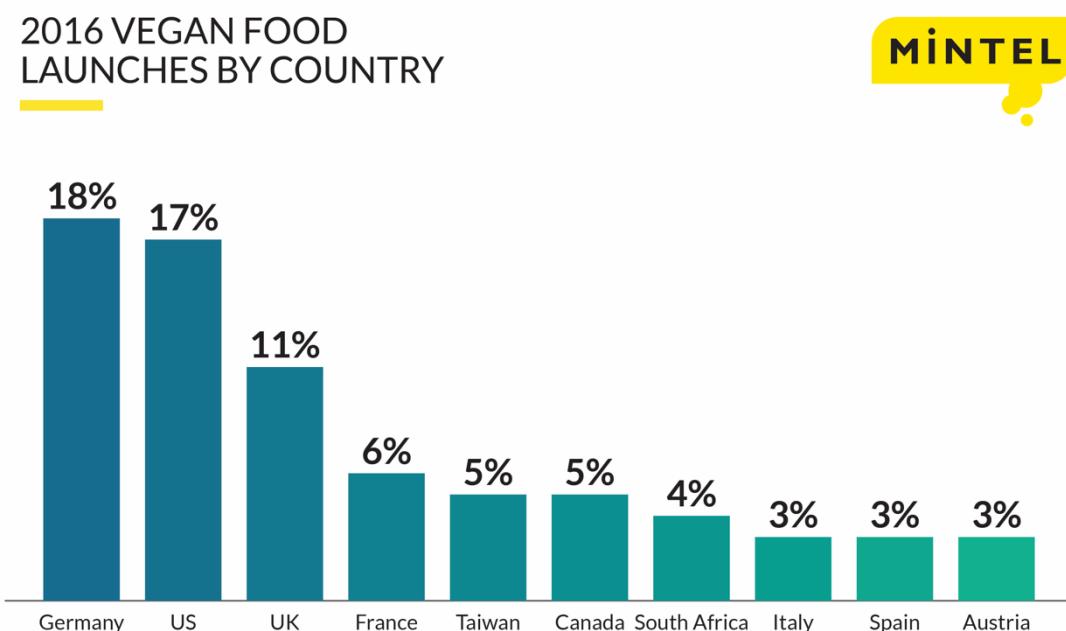
However, veganism is not only a form of nutrition, but also a way of life. It is not only about designing the diet without animal products, but also about doing without it in all other areas of life. It must be added that the term vegan is not defined in terms of food law and is therefore not protected. So that consumers can differentiate between the products, the term "vegan" in the European Union must be defined in a uniform, legally binding manner and a state seal associated with independent controls must be introduced. (PETA e.V., n.d.)

Even though, veganism on its own looks like a trend, there are positive affects to climate and nature. The high meat consumption can be seen as one of the reasons for the climate problems, climate and nutrition expert experts prove. Furthermore, consumer judge meat to cause health problems. Vegan meat substitutes are produced more sustainably and also offer health benefits to their consumer. (ProVeg, n.d.)

Almost 83 million people live in Germany, and these people are among the wealthiest consumers in the world. Furthermore, Germany is the second largest importer and third largest exporter of consumer-oriented agricultural products. Seen worldwide, it is the most important country in

the European market for foreign producers. Overall, Germany is a net importer of all important categories of food. (Export.gov, 2019) Looking at the numbers, how many vegans and vegetarians live in Germany, Proveg records around 8 million people, which means that 10% of the general public follow this lifestyle. (Proveg, 2020)

Also, the statistic below shows, that in 2016 about 18% and therefore the highest volume of vegan food launches took place. (Mintel Press, 2017) Which means, that there is a high potential market for vegan products and the need especially in Germany is present.



SOURCE: MINTEL GLOBAL NEW PRODUCTS DATABASE

Figure 9 Vegan food Launches by country (Mintel Press, 2017)

Especially in the past few years, the food market has seen growth in the area of vegan food and restaurants. 2019 was the year of vegetable burgers. First, the success of the American "Beyond Meat" burger made headlines, followed by the nationwide introduction of the "Big Vegan TS"

at McDonald's. In the meantime, supermarkets jumped on that trend and produced their own product lines, with the "Next Level Burger" (Lidl) and the "Wonder Burger" (Aldi). The vegetable patties have arrived in the discounter segment with a very positive resonance. The products not only convince veggies with their meat-like consistency and hearty roasted aromas. Campaign weeks and sales starts led to empty shelves in some places. (ProVeg, 2020)

2.5.1 Short-term effects of COVID-19 in the German food industry

The changed global situation due to the new coronavirus COVID-19 can be felt in every business area. Almost all areas have seen a lot of changes, whether for example in the hospital sector, schools, banks or food retail. There is a constant adjustment of the forms of society and new actions have to be found in this new situation. (Sneader and Singhal, 2020)

In almost every area, companies are struggling with the already existing consequences of restrictions that were put in place to protect against the spread of the coronavirus. In addition, there is general uncertainty in people's minds, because no one can predict with certainty how the restrictions and, above all, the stresses on the health system will affect the economy in the long term. (WHO, 2020)

However, it is already evident in some households that the demand for healthy food will also increase as a result of the pandemic. In Germany in particular, the meat-related scandals are continuing. (Ehl, 2020) The meat substitute products are therefore increasingly in demand and increasingly produced, as the German Federal Statistical Office announced. In the first quarter of 2020 and thus also the first phase during the pandemic, sales of meat substitute products increased by 37% compared to the same quarter of the previous year. (German Federal Statistical Office, 2020)

In times of global crises, people become more aware of their own health, but even before the crisis, the perception and communication was focused on a healthier way of life. More and more influencers and personalities on Social Media are informing their community about nutrition, substitute products, animal welfare and other environmentally relevant topics. (Gunn, 2018) In addition, the time at home has of course increased due to the pandemic. Home office and weekends at home tempt you to spend more time on Social Media and other online media and to deal with yourself and find out what is good for you. Probably the biggest change that corona has brought about takes place in the personal attitude of individuals. The home has become the focus and everyday life has slowed down for many. (Ehl, 2020)

2.6 Conceptual Framework

The created conceptual framework points up the theoretical approaches based on the literature review in order to the research question.

After the research objective has been examined through the literature, the author highlights the major influencing factors and key topics in the following figure and puts them in relation to one another. As discussed in the literature from Armstrong and Kotler (2019) and to identify the need of an individual, serves here as the basis of the conceptual framework in regard to the millennial generation, Social Media and attitudes occurred by the use of Social Media. In the revised literature, influencers embody a different image than brands and therefore have a different position in terms of the influence of their target group. But the intention, why Millennials use and interact on Social Media should not be overlooked either. Different Social Media platforms are used for different reasons. In the framework, the Millennial generation is distinguished between the late and early generation. The conceptual framework shows, that the usage

in this context is related to self-portrayal and engagement on the platform, for example the intention to interact with oneself, others or brands.

The content consumed on Instagram is partly determined by the user himself. The user decides at what time of the day to use Instagram and for what reasons. Furthermore, it determines the type of content through permanent use and search for terms like hashtags, brands or locations. This trend of searching for content food or fashion is supported by the algorithm and the user is shown more and more of the content.

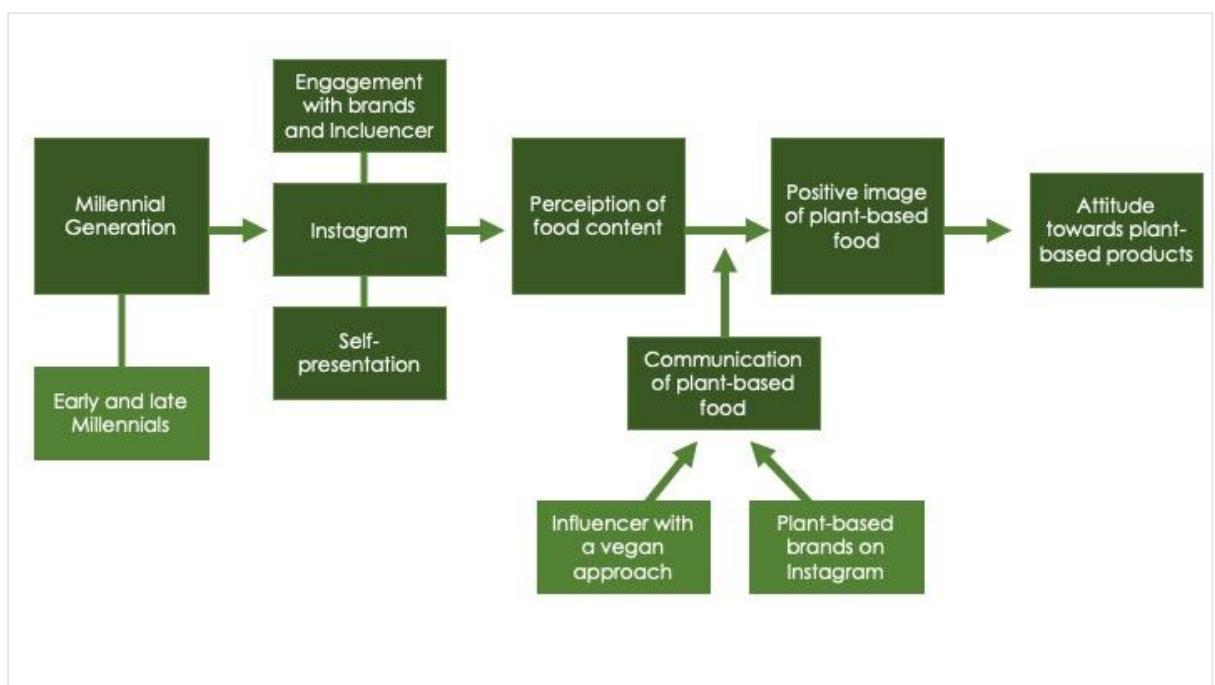


Figure 10 Conceptual Framework (diagram based on own research)

2.7 Conclusion

The gap that the author has discovered in the processed literature is the connection between the time of usage, the user's intention (self-presentation or does the user want to be entertained) to view food related content with a level of knowledge and interest and the subsequent response from a brand or an influencer with the respective content.

There is a dependency on personal interests and the willingness to deal with food content on Instagram. How the consumed content then develops in relation to the attitude towards plant-based in general will be analyzed.

3 Methodology and Research Design

Chapter three describes the methodology and research as well as the strategy of the study. It also includes data collection and analysis that contributes to research through testing on a targeted group.

The research goal is to investigate what influence Social Media has on the perception of vegan food and how Millennials perceive it on Social Media. The main focus of the research is to fill the gaps in the literature and to research what level of knowledge and interest in an healthy lifestyle the consumer should present to be influenced.

The research objectives and the question of whether this proposal can be interpreted as valid and reliable based on the data collection methods used.

The research objectives are:

What level of interest in food and healthy lifestyle should the individual present to be influenced?

What are important factors a brand needs to consider when communicating about food on Social Media to experience a brand?

How important are the optical factors when posting a picture on Instagram?

3.1 Overview

The research onion which Saunders (2019) presented in his work illustrates the stages which need to be developed in a research. The stages cover the philosophy, approach, methodology, strategy, time horizon and the indeed collection of data of a research.

In this section, the author focus on the first three stages which will point out the paradigm, purpose, process, outcome and logic in terms of this model.

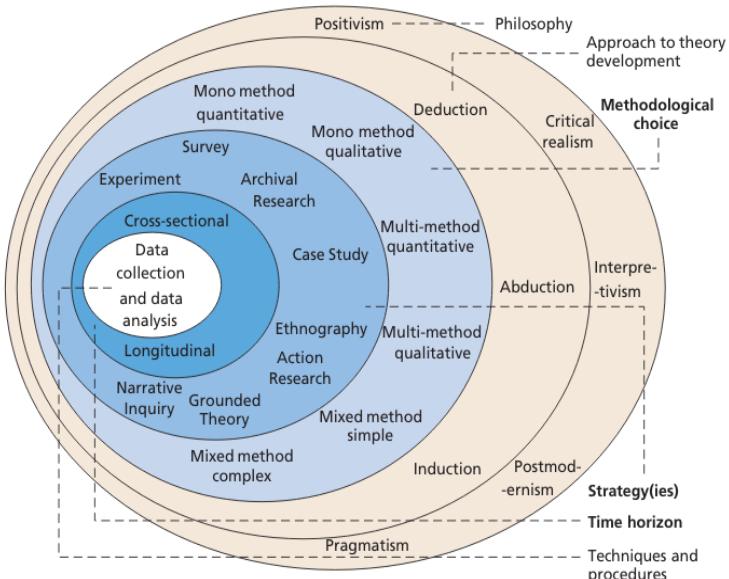


Figure 11 Research onion (Saunders et al., 2019)

The literature review shows, that especially the Millennial generation presents a high consumption of Social Media. The need to present themselves and to interact with others online creates a new way of communication. This new way to interact online and to share opinions and different views is especially used in self-branding. As discussed, Instagram is one of the most used Social Media platforms. Furthermore the user decides at first what he or she wants to see, before the algorithm shows

more and more of what is clicked and liked. The following research is designed to identify what the influence causes and how Social Media can be classified in the impact of food behaviour in a plant-based environment.

3.2 Research Philosophy and Approach

In this research, the author examines the perceptions and personal actions of the Millennial generation. With the research question, the behaviour and sensations of Millennials will be evaluated as well as an interview with a product manager from a vegan food brand. As personal opinions and individual perceptions through a survey of the main target audience will be conducted, the paradigm of Interpretivism is chosen.

The created research question examines many different perspectives, opinions and motivations. Since a single phenomenon can have multiple perspectives, opinions and interpretations, the paradigm of interpretivism is appropriate. The aim of this technique is to understand, how an individual, and in particular the millennial generation, behave on Social Media in regard to their personal lifestyle, for example being vegetarian or not and to be more likely to have an healthy lifestyle. As of the nature of the data which is collected, this paradigm creates the most value as it is necessary to understand experiences and motivations of this generation.

The interpretivist philosophy is chosen to consider the different perceptions which are based on different point of views and personal circumstances. (Saunders et al., 2019) In this work, personal circumstances like gender, the importance of an healthy lifestyle and if an individual is vegan, vegetarian, flexitarian or eats meat will be considered.

The purpose of this research is exploratory. The reason being that the plant-based area records a high rise of interest and the aim of this work is to establish a framework which will show how the perception on Instagram is impacted.

With this research, the author seeks to identify insights regarding the assumption that Social Media has in today's age and the scope of influence on an individual's behaviour. The exploratory research gives the possibility to find the insights by also being flexible in the reaction to different perspectives. (Saunders *et al.*, 2019)

The exploratory research provides the conditions for a mix of quantitative and qualitative research. The main reason to use a mix between those types, is in order to be able to analyse different point of views and to support the quantitative data with qualitative information from a professional point of view.

The main reason why the exploratory approach is chosen for the process of data collection, is that the purpose of this method gives the opportunity to explore the theory and the phenomenon of the proposed research problem. (Cassell *et al.*, 2017)

The author sees the applied outcome as most appropriate as the research is focused on an investigation of behaviour and opinions. Also, the applied research gathers a higher quality with the collected data. (Ang, 2014) As the research question is presenting a practical issue in today's age, the applied research will be selected.

The approach this research is presenting, the author chooses an inductive approach. The reason being that the aim of this work is to identify a generalized approach which occur from the specific observation through a target audiences perceptions. (Saunders *et al.*, 2019)

3.3 Research Strategy

The main strategy of this research is the grounded theory, based on a mix of quantitative and qualitative data collection. As the author is following the inductive approach, the grounded theory presents the most appropriate strategy. The grounded theory deals with relationships between ideas and concepts. It provides an appropriate theory by relating the own perception and understanding of how the world works, in its social context. (Potter, 1998) As the overall logic of this study, is to observe people's opinions and create a theory, this strategy brings all points together. With this general method, the author will systematically research the discussed areas by generating a theory. The strategy will start with collecting data by a survey of the consumer perspective, and also with an interview which will focus on vegan brands point of view.

3.3.1 Research design

The research design which is chosen to best address the created research question, will concentrate on the mix of quantitative and qualitative data collection approach. The qualitative research and therefore the exploratory process consists of observing the participant opinions and perceptions, bringing this to a theory which will then explain an individual's behaviour in the researched context. (Ang, 2014) The main priority of this work, is to highlight and evaluate insights about how Social Media consumption can change behaviour. In this section, the author will describe the overall research strategy followed by the method on how to collect the data, the nature of data, the access and ethics issues and finally the technique which will be about how to code the conceptual framework.

3.4 Collection Primary Data

The data collection will be focused on two populations. One is focussed on the Millennial generation and is quantitative nature whereas the second one is a vegan product manager with qualitative approach and is collected through a survey and an interview. This primary data provides in-depth information regarding the audiences behaviour. With this kind of data collection, two advantages gained are time and dual exploration. (Brenner et al., 1985)

The main objective of this work is to identify factors in relation to Social Media, which might cause a change of food behaviour and the perception of plant-based food on Instagram.

In order to reach the target amount of respondents which comprises of 271 people in order to have a valid probe of the German Millennial population a link was created that led the participants directly to the survey. This link was shared publicly via Social Media on Instagram and Facebook and sent to people via personal messages. Furthermore, the link was posted in different Facebook and LinkedIn groups. Care was taken to ensure that people of different educational backgrounds, different ages and genders, from different federal states and with different interests are reached in order to create a broad picture. Therefore the survey was especially published in vegan and vegetarian friendly group to ensure, that there is a mix of vegans and non-vegans.

Shortly after the start of the study, it became apparent that the male participation rate was lower than women. In response to this, additional posts were made in Facebook groups and men in particular were asked to take part in the survey.

The confidence level was calculated with 90% in regard to a population of 22.000.000 Millennials living in Germany. The Margin of error was

calculated with 5% which brings an ideal sample size of 271. The survey was completed with 282 participants, but only 214 of them actually belong to the target group of the study. This fact can be considered for further research. The currently calculated margin of error now refers to 6%.

The results of the interviews were examined from a social constructivist point of view. Furthermore, they are to be assigned to the interpretative nature. The following overview is presented for the results which are analysed with SPSS.

3.5 Access and Ethical Issues

For this study, a personal contact regarding an interview might be possible but not needed as all answers can be given in written form. Furthermore the quantitative data is collected by an online survey. The author is aware of the ethical issues regarding questions for example, upon a personal behaviour. Therefore, the author created an information handout which presents an overview about the research purpose. (Appendix A) This handout will be part of the survey and interview and the participants need to read it first before starting the survey. Furthermore, all participants will remain anonymous and their answers will be treated confidential in this research. The involvement in this research study is voluntary, no names will be recorded and the participation can be withdrawn at any time.

The participants in the survey are credible to the extent that the author shares the survey personally in his own network and thus trusts the honesty of his environment. The qualitative interview is shared via direct message after personal contact with the product manager. When the author selected the topic, it was already known that a personal interest and trend could be recognized in the personal environment. In addition, some useful

contacts were made beforehand, which also resulted in the willingness to go further in order to create new ones.

However, the potential reluctance of the respondents also had to be taken into account. It was important to convey the importance to the participants and to inform them about the importance and the result of the study in order to be able to obtain their written consent.

By collecting quantitative and qualitative data, the study can be given multiple perspectives, depth and value.

3.6 Approach to Data Analysis

The research is mainly quantitative and is supported by a qualitative part, therefore the inductive research was the appropriate method for the research objective in order to answer the research question. The course of the survey differentiates whether the participant is eating a meatless in general or if he eats vegetarian, vegan or pesceterian and then leads to a modified questioning method. It is also examined whether the participants would only eat the dish based on viewing a picture. It was deliberately decided not to explain beforehand that this is a plant-based dish in order to capture the opinion as neutral as possible.

The approach to the data analysis was to get direct observational studies of the participants and neutral views on that photo. The second data collection deals with the communication of the brand and its followers via Social Media. The approach of this mixed method of quantitative and qualitative aspects enables the representation of a spectrum of interpretive results.

3.7 Nature of data

3.7.1 Quantitative data

Three questions at the beginning are crucial to narrow down the exact target group. This can be used to specifically filter Millennials who live in Germany. The gender then also serves to identify any gender-specific trends in the next step. These three questions are crucial to narrow down the exact target group. This information will be used to specifically filter Millennials who live in Germany to achieve a representative result. The gender then also serves to identify any gender-specific trends in the next step.

The second part of the survey is then aimed at asking about Social Media behavior.

- Which Social Media platforms do you use mostly on a daily basis?
- Why do you use Social Media?
- What kind of content do you see on your Social Media mostly?
- At what time do you use Social Media Platforms mostly?
- Have you ever tried a dish based on what you saw on Social Media / which was cooked by an Influencer?
- On which Platform would you like to see more food related content?

With these questions, the habits and possible wishes are queried step by step. The first question in this block was deliberately aimed only at the three most frequently used Social Media platforms on a daily basis, in order to see when they are being used and finally whether the participant has already used or implemented the viewed content himself. The last question in this part covering Social Media is then to check whether the most frequently used platform is also the one on which the user might want to see more food content.

In the third part, the questions relate to the participants' eating and living habits.

- How important is it for you to eat healthy?
- When did you start caring about what you eat?
- Do you think your Social Media in general has an impact on your food preferences
- Do you feel Covid-19 changed your eating habits?
- What would you describe yourself as?

After these questions, the participants are divided into different paths. Here, the author would like to differentiate between participants who do not eat meat in any way and those who do.

The vegans, vegetarians, flexitarians and pescetarians are asked in the following step:

- Why don't you eat meat?
- Do you feel there are enough plant-based meat alternatives?
- Do you think plant-based food is only a trend?

The author would like to analyze more closely the impressions and experiences of those who already eat meatless.

The participants who do not pay attention to a plant-based or meat-free diet were only asked here:

- Have you ever tried a meat substitute product?
- Did you like it?

With this questions, as with the other group of participants, the author aims at personal experiences with plant-based foods in order to obtain a possible tendency whether Millennials who do not follow a purely plant-based diet are interested in these products at all and whether they like them or not.

For the next section, the participants are brought together again, so they see the same question. They were shown the following picture and asked if they would eat this burger. The author has deliberately omitted image references or text in order to obtain a neutral opinion purely on the optics of this photo.



Figure 12 Garden Gourmet Burger (Nestlé, 2015)

Depending on the answer, whether yes or no, the participants were sent to follow-up questions on different paths.

If they selected Yes:

- Did you know it's a plant-based burger?
- If your answer is no - would you still eat it?
- If your answer is yes - What make you want to eat the burger?
- Do you know any of the following plant-based brands?
- On a scale from 1 to 5 - How important is the optic on the picture to influence your decision in a positive way?

If they selected No:

- Would you eat the burger if it's plant-based meat?
- If your answer is yes - What make you want to eat the burger?
- If your answer is no - what could change your mind?

- On a scale from 1 to 5 - How important is the optic on the picture to influence your decision in a positive way?
- Do you know any of the following plant-based brands?

It was important for the author to get a reason for the impulsive decision for or against the burger. It was specifically asked whether the opinion would change when it comes to plant-based meat in order to investigate to what extent this fact would change the attitude towards the photo.

Furthermore, it was asked how important the optics of the photo are to the participants in order to be able to make a statement about how this factor influences personal perception. Well-known German plant-based brands were also queried in order to find out about familiarity or a possible trend.

In the final part, all participants are brought together again and the same questions are presented:

- What type of content would you like to see more on Social Media about food?
- Do you prefer brand content or user generated content about food?
- Which color do you associate with plant-based food?
- Anything else you want to add?

The aim of these three questions is to re-establish the connection to Social Media and the personal wishes and needs of the target group. Furthermore, it is investigated with which type of content, with regard to brand-specific or by an influencer, is preferred.

Finally, it is asked which colour the participants associate with plant-based food in order to come back to the optical factors. The last question gives the participants the opportunity to give a personal comment or opinion, which is not mandatory in this survey.

3.7.2 Qualitative data

In contrast to the quantitative survey, the questions in the qualitative interview were asked with a focus on the brands perspective and how they see and interact with their target audience.

At the beginning, the job title is asked and a description of the target group in generations in order to guarantee the quality and credibility of the interview partner and the brand.

The following questions are also asked about general Social Media communication:

- What is your main communication channel on Social Media and why?
- What is most important for you, when you post a picture / video on Social Media in the name of your brand?
- What is your content on Social Media focused on?
- With which content do you create the most engagement with?
- Do you feel Social Media has an impact on your brands image?
- Is influencer marketing a part of your Social Media strategy?

The author is very much referring to the how and what of the brand communication through Social Media on these questions. Attention is paid to which actions are already being carried out by the brand in order to draw conclusions about the wishes of the target group.

The following question is also asked to analyze the size of the brand on Instagram.

- How many follower does your brands Instagram account have on Instagram?

In the following, the plant-based diet will be specifically discussed and how and whether the brand itself has noticed a change.

- Do you feel the perception of plant-based food changed over the past years? How?
- Did Covid-19 changed anything in your Social Marketing?

Finally, personal but still anonymous questions are asked about the person in order to create the link to credibility and to classify how the product manager herself is classified by her generation and attitude.

- Are you personally interested in plant-based food?
- Do you work in the plant-based food industry?
- Which gender do you identify with?
- What is your age?

In relation to this interview, 16 vegan brands from Germany were contacted via LinkedIn and Instagram by personal contact from the author. Only one brand reported back at all and was willing to answer the questions.

3.7.3 Sampling Strategy

Most studies are conducted within a subset of a population. This is mainly due to the fact that the entire population is unknown, unreachable or not feasible in terms of time and cost. In addition, using random samples has the advantage that the results are very accurate. (Saunders et al., 2019) Thus two main types of sample selection can be distinguished because firstly, probability sampling means that anyone interested can participate in the study. This has the advantage of generalizing the result and minimizing distortion. Whereas a non-likelihood sample is described as a sample with specific characteristics and personal judgment. (Taherdoost, 2016)

As mentioned earlier, this research focusses on Millennials who live in Germany. Therefore, a non-snowball sample was used because the likelihood of the respondents selected have the following characteristics:

- Home located in Germany
- between 24-42 years old
- Daily use of social media channels

3.8 Conclusion

The outcomes of this research will potentially give food brands a benefit when creating their Social Media strategy. The research will provide insights about the perception of food advertising in general and also the personal perception and the impact Social Media has on an individual's behaviour. Brands and furthermore Social Media influencer can use those insights for a more mindful way of communication.

The study also identifies potential trends and challenges, brands and influencers may have to deal with in their future communication. Despite the millennial generation presenting a large target audience in online communication, there is much research done in this field, but not specific enough for this particular field of plant-based food in regard to Social Media. Most of the conducted studies examine the behavioural aspect on Social Media, but not in context with food choices and the effects of branding.

4 Presentation and Discussion of the Findings

4.1 Overview

As part of the survey of quantitative as well as qualitative, empirical social research offers a choice of written, telephone, computer-aided and personal procedures. In relation to the specialization of the topic of this study, the primary data acquisition is necessary in order to shed light on the developed framework.

Since the survey is carried out throughout Germany, the variants of the personal and telephone survey are ruled out in this case due to the logistical challenges. The written survey using an online questionnaire is therefore chosen for this survey.

4.2 Findings

In this chapter, the results of the online survey with mainly Millennial participants in the survey and a product manager in the interview are presented and discussed in regard to the research objective. As explained in the previous chapter, data was collected and recorded as part of this research design. The results of these qualitative and quantitative data are subdivided in this chapter according to the findings and analyzed in sections before they are related and a general conclusion is drawn.

The analysed literature has shown that many factors influence behaviour and the perception of products and brands on Social Media. With the collected data, the author will primarily improve the perception of content on the platforms used in relation to "how important is it for you to eat healthy" and the question "do you think Social Media has an impact on your food behaviour ". Furthermore the fact of which Social Media platforms are actually used in regard to the different eating types.

4.2.1 Quantitative survey target audience

A total of 282 questionnaires were completed between August 3rd, 2020 and August 17th, 2020. In order to narrow down the exact target group in terms of age and to ensure that only the answers from German Millennials are counted, the first step of the survey was to ask about age and place of residence. The number of participants is reduced to 214. (Appendix B)

Millennial Generation and Social Media usage

In order to evaluate how Social Media usage behavior relates to attitudes and perceptions towards food, it is primarily important to analyze actual usage behavior. A total of 214 participants who belong to the actual target group of this study took part in the survey (**Figure 12**). These participants are divided into 152 women and 62 men and therefore a distribution of 71% women and 29% men, which results in a slight inequality between the sexes.

Gender					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	152	71,0	71,0	71,0
	Male	62	29,0	29,0	100,0
	Total	214	100,0	100,0	

Figure 13 Survey results – Gender (results and diagram based on own research)

The first evaluation of the survey focusses on which Social Media channels are used most on a daily basis. A choice was given between Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Pinterest, Twitter, LinkedIn and others. Since it was already known from the previous research that mostly not only one platform is used (Voorveld et al., 2018a), a multiple selection was possible. This option of selecting several platforms was also used, whereby the trend towards Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and Pinterest is very clear here.

The statement that Instagram was selected as the strongest platform (**Figure 13**) already confirms the author's findings in regard to the importance of Instagram in the everyday lives of Millennials. In addition to the platform usage, it was asked at what time of the day the usage takes place. 160 say they use Social Media during their free time and 43 say they use it in every free minute, the rest is on Social Media during work or meal times.

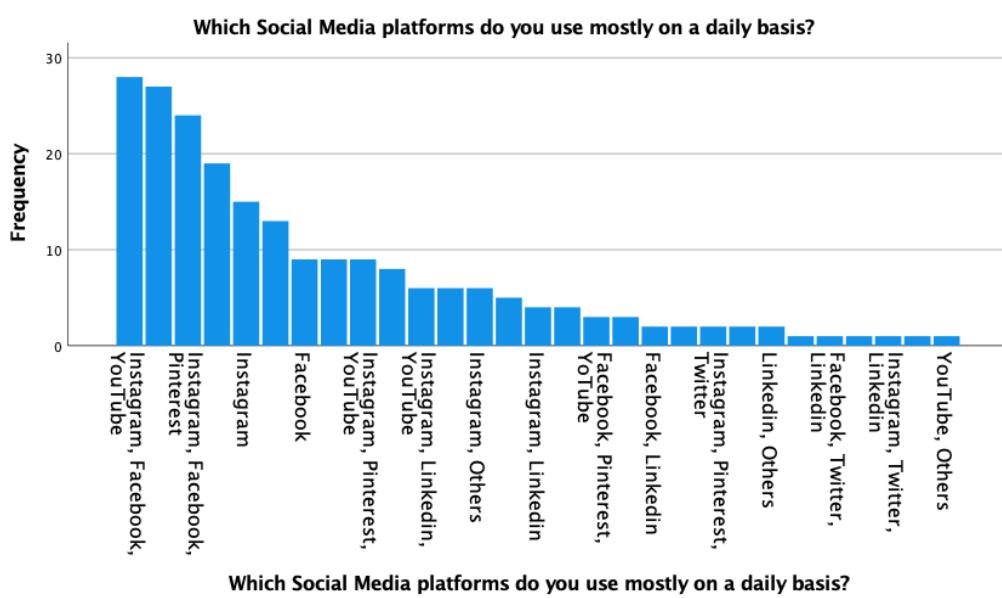


Figure 14 Which Social Media platform do you use mostly on a daily basis? (results and diagram based on own research)

These statements fit together, since Instagram is more driven by images and videos and no information or messages are shared in a feed like in LinkedIn or Twitter, rather it is more about atmosphere and find inspiration. This answer was also given the most, followed by filling up spare time, socialize and sharing videos and photos.

This connection between the use of Social Media in free or spare time and the constant lookout for inspiration, shows how open minded and always optimizing the target group is. As already researched in the literature, self-presentation is the top priority, especially on platforms like Instagram. This

constant self-optimization and the search for new ideas in leisure time confirm this fact.

Social Media usage and healthy lifestyle

With regard to the research question, the following **Figure 14** will highlight the connection between the question "Do you think Social Media has an impact on your food preferences" and the statement on how important an healthy lifestyle is for the participants. In total, 97 answered with 'Yes' they feel Social Media has an impact on their food preferences, whereas 70 people clicked 'No' and 47 selected 'Maybe'.

The author has combined these questions and their answers with one another in their frequency in order to analyze whether the participants, for whom a healthy lifestyle is very important or very important, also feel influenced by Social Media.

As shown in **Figure 15**, there is a tendency in relation to the fact that an interest in an healthy lifestyle is consciously influenced by Social Media. A slight trend can be seen that Social Media takes influence once the importance has reached a certain level. Whereas the participants that selected "not important" or "so-so" are more likely to not feel influenced by Social Media.

Do you think your Social Media in general has an impact on your food preferences?

How important is it for you to eat healthy?			Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very important	Valid	Yes	48	62,3	62,3	62,3
		Maybe	20	26,0	26,0	88,3
		No	9	11,7	11,7	100,0
		Total	77	100,0	100,0	
Important	Valid	Yes	40	40,8	40,8	40,8
		No	39	39,8	39,8	80,6
		Maybe	19	19,4	19,4	100,0
		Total	98	100,0	100,0	
so - so	Valid	No	19	55,9	55,9	55,9
		Yes	8	23,5	23,5	79,4
		Maybe	7	20,6	20,6	100,0
		Total	34	100,0	100,0	
Less important	Valid	No	2	66,7	66,7	66,7
		Maybe	1	33,3	33,3	100,0
		Total	3	100,0	100,0	
I try to eat healthy	Valid	No	1	100,0	100,0	100,0
I strictly only eat what's good for me	Valid	Yes	1	100,0	100,0	100,0

Figure 15 How important is it for you to eat healthy? / Social Media impact on food preferences (results and diagram based on own research)

Different eaters

In the further course of the study, it is also investigated how participants in a meat-free diet and a diet with meat perceive and deal with food content on Social Media. The results were differentiated into 'meat eater' and 'no meat eater' and the results for the variables were drawn from there. In total, 127 participants follow a nutrition with meat, whereas 87 don't eat meat at all.

There is a tendency that participants who follow a meatless diet are more likely to cook dishes from Social Media. However, this cannot be supported by the following graphic (**Figure 17**), as the percentage distribution between meat eater and non meat eater and how they feel to be influenced of Social Media is not given.

Statistics

Have you ever tried a dish based on what you saw on Social Media / which was cooked by an Influencer?

Meat	N	Valid	127
		Missing	0
		Variance	,233
No Meat	N	Valid	87
		Missing	0
		Variance	,173

Have you ever tried a dish based on what you saw on Social Media / which was cooked by an Influencer?

Meat vs. No Meat		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Meat	Valid	Yes	81	63,8	63,8
		No	46	36,2	36,2
		Total	127	100,0	100,0
No Meat	Valid	Yes	68	78,2	78,2
		No	19	21,8	21,8
		Total	87	100,0	100,0

Figure 16 Have you ever tried a dish based on what you saw on Social Media (results and diagram based on own research)

Do you think your Social Media in general has an impact on your food preferences?

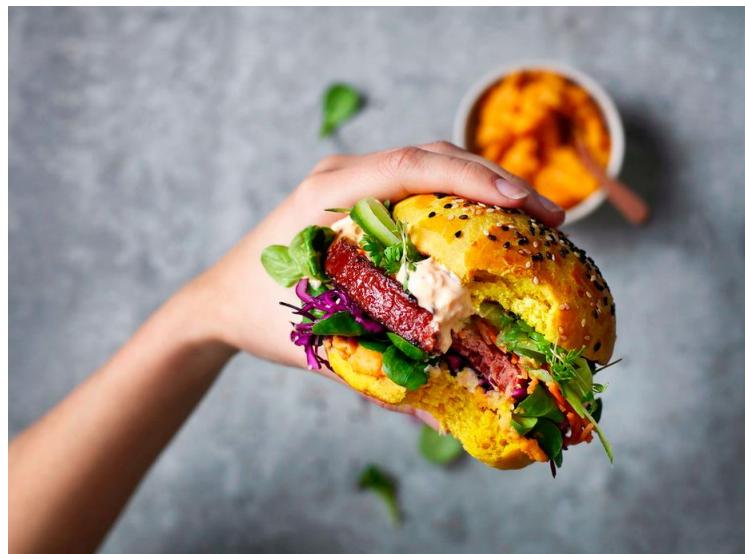
Meat vs. No Meat		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Meat	Valid	Yes	58	45,7	45,7
		No	40	31,5	31,5
		Maybe	29	22,8	22,8
		Total	127	100,0	100,0
No Meat	Valid	Yes	39	44,8	44,8
		No	30	34,5	34,5
		Maybe	18	20,7	20,7
		Total	87	100,0	100,0

Figure 17 Social Media impact on food preferences / meat versus non meat nutrition (results and diagram based on own research)

The importance of look and feel on pictures

In order to investigate what exactly defines the influence of Social Media on the preferences in the food environment, the personal attitudes with regard to a healthy lifestyle and nutrition habits in general have already been put in relation to Social Media. In the further course of the quantitative analysis, the author will now analyse further optical factors in order to achieve a possible tendency for the research question.

All 214 participants were shown a photo of a burger and asked if they would eat it. The evaluation in **Figure 18** shows, that the Millennials generally responded positively, with yes, to the photo. A slightly better reaction is shown by those who generally include meat in their diet.



Statistics

Would you eat this burger?

Meat	N	Valid	127
		Missing	0
		Variance	,134
No Meat	N	Valid	87
		Missing	0
		Variance	,191

Would you eat this burger?

Meat vs. No Meat		Frequency		Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Meat	Valid	Yes	107	84,3	84,3	84,3
		No	20	15,7	15,7	100,0
		Total	127	100,0	100,0	
No Meat	Valid	Yes	65	74,7	74,7	74,7
		No	22	25,3	25,3	100,0
		Total	87	100,0	100,0	

Figure 18 Would you eat this burger? (results and diagram based on own research)

Since there was no communication on the ingredients before the photo was shown, the author now selects the answers from those who knew either by intuition or knowledge that this was plant-based meat.

In fact, only 44 Millennials said they didn't want to eat the burger. It is exciting to note that of these 20 are meat eaters and 22 not. From those plant-based eaters a total of 17 stated that they were aware that this was plant-based meat on the picture. It can also be seen that of the 214 in total, the majority of 170 people clicked Yes, which speaks for the picture itself, as even though the picture was not explained at all, people are more likely to have a positive reaction even though it is against their eating habits in regard to meat or meatless nutrition.

Statistics

Would eat the burger – Answer Yes – Did you know it's plant based?

Meat	N	Valid	127
		Missing	0
		Variance	,526
No Meat	N	Valid	87
		Missing	0
		Variance	,744

Would eat the burger – Answer Yes – Did you know it's plant based?

Meat vs. No Meat			Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Meat	Valid	Yes	57	44,9	44,9	44,9
		No	50	39,4	39,4	84,3
		Selected not to eat the Burger	20	15,7	15,7	100,0
		Total	127	100,0	100,0	
No Meat	Valid	Yes	53	60,9	60,9	60,9
		Selected not to eat the Burger	22	25,3	25,3	86,2
		No	12	13,8	13,8	100,0
		Total	87	100,0	100,0	

Statistics

Would eat the burger – Answer No – Did you know it's plant based?

Meat	N	Valid	127
		Missing	0
		Variance	,320
No Meat	N	Valid	87
		Missing	0
		Variance	,646

Would eat the burger – Answer No – Did you know it's plant based?

Meat vs. No Meat			Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Meat	Valid	Selected to eat the Burger	107	84,3	84,3	84,3
		No	11	8,7	8,7	92,9
		Yes	9	7,1	7,1	100,0
		Total	127	100,0	100,0	
No Meat	Valid	Selected to eat the Burger	65	74,7	74,7	74,7
		Yes	17	19,5	19,5	94,3
		No	5	5,7	5,7	100,0
		Total	87	100,0	100,0	

Figure 19 Answers "Would you eat the burger" detail (results and diagram based on own research)

Considering other factors that influence the perception towards Social Media with regard to the content, the question arises which type of content is better accepted and preferred by the target group. The next table shows that millennials prefer content from individuals more than from brands. In total, 70,8% of the survey population prefer individual's content to brand content with 13,1 %, see **Figure 20**. This can be traced back to the factors of authenticity identified in the literature. Regarding the value that individuals present it can be said, that users have lesser feeling of being influenced and the content appears more natural. This perception of natural content is connected to the Influencers own authenticity. Furthermore, Influencers usually take their followers with them in their everyday life and the result is a very natural communication that is also designed to be interactive.

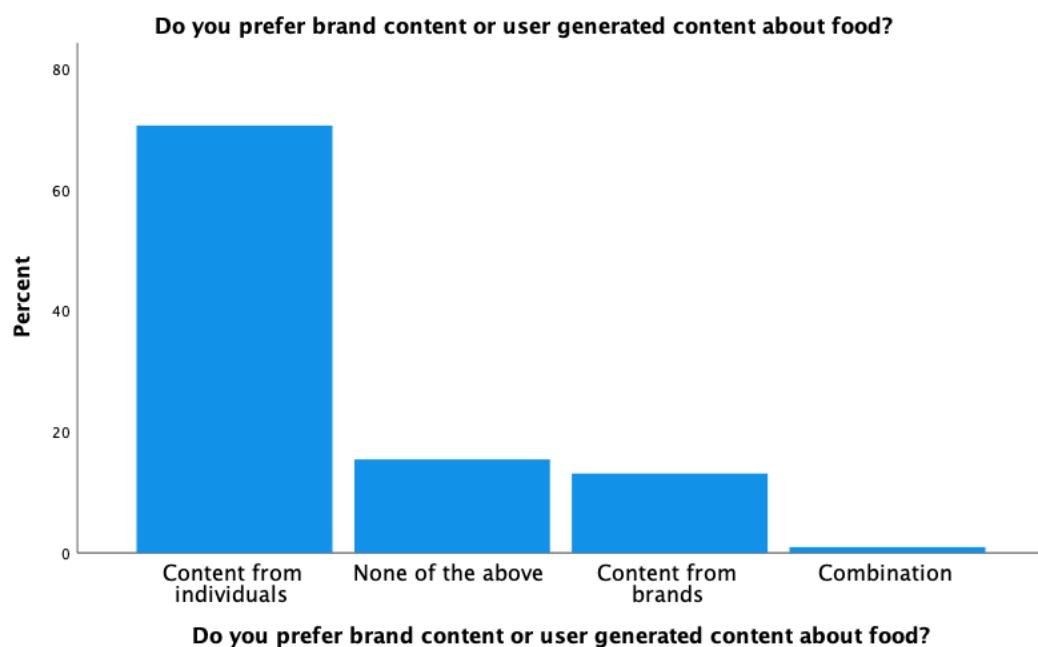


Figure 20 Do you prefer branded or content from individuals? (results and diagram based on own research)

With regard to the research question about what the influence of social media is, optic, among other things, was examined more closely and included in the survey of the target group. Individual voluntary reactions of the participants why they chose 'no' when asked if they would like to eat the burger and what would need to change that they would eat the burger are:

Colour codes:

Green: General taste did not match with the photo.

Red: Look & Feel.

Light Grey: Personal circumstances / allergies.

Dark Grey: It should be real meat.

- Less bread - that's why I don't like burgers
- If it looked more like meat
- If a food is meat-free I prefer not to immitate the look or taste of meat but just go with real vegetables or cheese or something like that. Food has to be honest.
- The thing not being a burger?
- I dont like burger
- I don't eat gluten and try to have mostly wholefoods
- I don't eat burgers in general, no matter what kind of meat. I've never tried one in my life and I don't want to.
- Other Bread and no mixed salat only green salad
- Nothing I don't like plant based meat at all
- Wenn es ohne Fleisch ist, ich esse Fleisch aber ich mag keine Burger-Pattys =(translation) If it would be without meat, I eat meat but I don't like burgers
- If it would be less. I prefer more simple food. & I really don't like plant based meat-alternatives. I prefer eating more naturally.
- smaller meat
- Meat
- Meat or veggie doesn't matter but the one on the photo isn't tasty

- a good veggie Burger is heaps better than plant based
- Don't know to be honest. I am not into substitutes. If I have burger, it's meat. If I don't want meat, I would choose something else than burger.
- The meat looks unreal
- If the patty didn't look like meat.
- Better meat and bun
- I don't like the texture and taste of meat like alternatives as I don't like the taste of meat although I see why ppl do it. It's a good thing if you like the taste I suppose
- Real meal

It turns out that those who gave an answer on a voluntary basis to the question, generally tend to disagree with either burgers, meat or plant-based meat (green and grey answers). Since these answers are only related to the product on the picture, the author focus on the answers related to the look and feel answers in red as those factors could be changed when talking about marketing on Social Media. The actual product, like the burger, either patty or the fact that it is plant-based, can not be changed. How the burger is perceived, can change.

- If it looked more like meat
- smaller meat
- Meat or veggie doesn't matter but the one on the photo isn't tasty
- The meat looks unreal
- If the patty didn't look like meat.

The fact that Millennials attach great importance to the appearance and the presentation of products in pictures can also be explained by the strong urge to present themselves and the pursuit of perfection. The way something looks is how it is.

How important is the look and feel on a photo to you (related to food)

Valid	Important	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Important	83	38,8	38,8	38,8
	Very important	74	34,6	34,6	73,4
	Neutral	24	11,2	11,2	84,6
	less important	24	11,2	11,2	95,8
	not important	9	4,2	4,2	100,0
	Total	214	100,0	100,0	

Figure 21 How important is the look and feel on a photo (related to food) (results and diagram based on own research)

However, in response to the direct question in the survey, after scaling how important the look and feel of a photo with regard to food is for the participants, the results are shown in **Figure 21**. Accounts of 1 = very important 2 = important 3 = neutral 4 = less important 5 = not important are selected. In the area from important to very important, 83 people voted for important and 74 for very important. This means that look and feel with regard to the design and the influence it has on the perception of food play an important role as 73,4% of the targeted audience consider this important.

In conclusion of this part, it can be said that many different factors, which are dependent on personalities, speak for or against the likelihood of an image, as the various answers show. However, there must be real consumer interest in food and plant-based products in order to be able to address and satisfy the actual interest. Secondly, an image in relation to food and plant-based themes must arouse interest, educate and catch the viewer in order to create an engagement.

4.2.2 Supportive qualitative interview

An expert interview was held to support and validate the quantitative data. The product manager of a vegan food brand answered questions related to its social media presence and target audience. On Instagram the brand has 14.000 follower and Social Media is based in their Marketing strategy.

The target group of the vegan food brand is mainly Generation Y, also known as the millennial generation. The most important channel for the brand is Instagram, as this is where the greatest reach can be achieved and engagement is generated through stories and posts. It is interesting to note that the focus in relation to communication is on "Special attention to enjoyment of the food, adequate information on the product, varied posts" (Appendix C) This can also be traced back to the findings of Voorveld et al. (2018) as enjoyment in relation to Instagram plays a central role here. Consumers are mostly on Instagram in their free time, wanting inspiration and escaping everyday life. Therefore, the joy combined with an appealing and varied communication is very important here in order catch the attention of the target audience.

However, the answer to the question of whether social media has an impact on the brand's image shows that this is not the case. Communication via social media is seen more as a functional instrument. It serves as a platform to present itself as a brand, but the brand not only identifies itself through social media but also benefits from the tool it offers to interact faster and more directly with the target group.

Thus, Instagram is very effective as a marketing tool, as it only communicates through its image and video language and is less text-heavy, which charges the communication very emotionally, as images convey more than a clear text message. (Apkon, 2013)

However, most of the brand's engagement, according to its own statements, comes from prize draws. This can be traced back to the fact that consumers who already follow the brand, are attracted to interact by those special actions. These actions generate a high level of interaction and traffic on the brand's Instagram page and the Instagram algorithm then in return shows new users the contribution and a organic reach is generated.

In this way, the brand generates a completely natural way of attracting attention and interacting with its target group. The focus for the vegan brand is on the product, the varied posts and the gathering of information or clarification.

4.3 Discussion of findings

The aim of this work is to find out what factors are those factors that influence millennials in the context of social media. With reference to the conceptual framework created and in connection with the collected data, it can be seen that the self-presentation that comes first plays a role here, but not without neglecting further features.

With reference to Kotler et. al. (2019) , it can be seen that a uniform and coherent marketing strategy is no longer sufficient without social media in today's age. Considering the core topic of this study, plant-based food, there are also decisive factors that affect user behavior when it comes to the influence of social media.

With regard to the research topic, the most important element when developing a marketing strategy is the usage behavior of the target audience. It has been shown that Millennials are active on social media, but for a variety of reasons. Depending on the aim of the brand to be advertised, this factor must be taken into account. Vegan food brands in Germany, that want to inspire people and want to take their target group

with them on a journey, do not primarily need to provide in-depth information and have no academic mandate. But they need to create a world that Millennials want to join, a trend they want to follow and a philosophy they agree with.

Furthermore, brands do not have to neglect the reactions, wishes and needs of their target group. With content on a platform like Instagram, brands and Influencers need to inspire people and create engagement. Brands have to help shape these factors with constantly new creative ways. However, it is also evident that Millennials in particular rely more on individual content because of authenticity. Millennials in Germany want to identify with the content they consume, whilst it is the only way a philosophy can be brought to life and communicated. Therefore, this is about the reactions of the target group and the correct reaction to them.

When creating a brand image and getting involved on Instagram, the right picture and design needs to be used. The collected data shows, how important the look and feel in a photo are in order to get a desired reaction.

4.4 Conclusion

Ultimately, the Millennial generation cannot be summed up in all its many facets. Every attitude and personal opinion is influenced by a large number of internal and external factors. Some trends were recognized in the data collection presented and discussed against one another based on frequencies. The researcher had expected that optical factors would play a significant central role, but also that social media would become more important when it comes to influencing in regard to plant-based food.

In fact, this quantitative survey consisted of questions that primarily focused on user behavior on social media to find out how much this affects consumer behavior.

The answers show that a personal opinion and own presentation on social media is more concise than assumed. The specially formed opinion is only influenced by social media in the second step, when there is already an initial interest in a certain topic. This can be positively influenced by optical elements in the event that they correspond to the taste of the user.

5 Concluding Thoughts on the Contribution of this Research, its Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

In Chapter four, the results of the survey and the supporting expert interview are presented and analyzed. The factors that influence the impact of social media on the perception of millennials in Germany and thus influence attitudes towards plant-based food are discussed. These presented results have been analyzed with a final consideration of their importance in the research objective and the general role in relation to marketing.

Chapter 5 of the study now discusses the effects of the results on the research goal and the research question as well as limits and recommendations. The aim is to highlight elements and issues that are relevant in research and make suggestions for future studies.

5.1 Implications of Findings for the Research Questions

The prominence of vegan nutrition and plant-based products is growing more and more on the German food market. In addition, these products receive enormous media attention due to scandals in the meat industry and due to global warming. However, the attitude towards plant-based food has not been a trend for some time. More and more people are incorporating vegan days or meals into their diet and are benefiting from health benefits, furthermore they have a positive impact on their environment. Although the interests and reasons for a plant-based diet differ, the market offers a variety of opportunities for new brands as well as for existing brands to reach a new target group. Consumers become more and more aware of the need to live sustainably and, especially in the food area, to consciously enjoy and select and to try something new.

5.2 Contributions and Limitations of the Research

The research is of an exploratory nature and relates specifically to the generation of millennials living in Germany, the study also focusses on plant-based food and vegan lifestyle.

The number of participants is limited, which means that smaller but more precise statistics and results in relation to the research objective could be created. There are limits to research as the target group reached was very complex in their own opinion of the questions asked. Many of the questions asked may have been answered unconsciously for the participants because, as the author has already explained, a neutral opinion about the photo wanted to be obtained.

Further limits are the personal inclination for plant-based food and experiences from the professional environment of the author.

5.3 Recommendations for Practice

The fast-moving Millennial generation identifies with the content they consume on Instagram. Brands and influencers need to better understand the consumer expectations when it comes to plant-based food.

Since optics play a significant role in this area, visual elements at the core of the marketing strategy must be considered. However, tastes are always different and also constantly changing. In a broader sense, brands and influencers can work together even more closely in educating people about plant-based food in order to arouse any hidden interest.

If there is a basic interest and the right message is addressed to the target group correctly, this can lead to a positive perception.

However, in order to generally create a more positive image for the topic of plant-based food and its perception on Instagram in Germany, the product itselfs should be continuously developed. Due to current developments in society such as scandals and pandemics, the topic of healthy eating is becoming increasingly important. Because no generation before has dealt so much with the topic of sustainability, it is necessary to use this as a fundament and to educate this generation about the advantages.

To spread these messages, there is actually no better medium than Instagram. Emotions can be conveyed through visual language, feelings can be aroused and small information packages can be communicated with text and language.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

The study deals exclusively with millennials living in Germany and their attitudes and perception of plant-based food on Instagram. In addition, an expert from the product side was brought in, who was able to give new insights into communication on social media.

Further studies should include more brands, including non-plant-based brands and address a broader target group in order to gain a multi-level perspective so that added value can be created.

The questionnaire design should be more in-depth and include multiple examples related to Instagram and brands. However, this would have

been too complex and time-consuming for this part of the study. In-depth interviews with a focus group can then be supplemented to close the gap between understanding the questionnaire. By providing examples and explanations of brands, the objectives of the questions could be presented more clearly for the participants and thus obtain a more precise answer.

5.5 Final Conclusion and Reflections

In this last chapter, number five, the researcher examined how the results of the research contributed to the achievement of the research objective and how the research question is answered.

Thus, valuable insights into the millennial generation and how complex this target group is are given. In order to enable a better result and an outcome that is valuable for brands, better cooperation between influencers and brands need to take place. The author has found that millennials only consume what they identify with themselves in order to depict their own self-image. Concluding, if the content of the brand does not correspond to how the user would like to see himself, there will be no match.

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Appendices

5.6 Appendix A – Consent Form



Informed Consent Form

1. Research Study Title

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON MILLENIALS FOOD PREFERENCES IN A PLANT-BASED ENVIRONMENT IN GERMANY

University: Griffith College Dublin (GCD), Graduate Business School

Student Name: Mareike Uhde, Email: mareikeuhde@gmail.com

Principal Investigator: Michael Nicell, Email: michael.nicell@griffith.ie

2. Clarification of the purpose of the research

The objective of this Research Study is to examine and understand the importance and the scope of influence social media has on a generation's food behaviour. Furthermore, to critically evaluate marketing strategies used by food brands to influence the millennial generation in their food choices by creating an impactful brand image.

3. Confirmation of particular requirements as highlighted in the Plain Language Statement

This study involves participating in an interview and a focus group discussion. It aims to collect data from the target audience which is determined by the research. Questions will be directed towards your thoughts and opinions about a particular food brand image or your personal experience regarding food choices made after social media consumption.

Due to the actual Covid-19 situation, the interview as well as the discussion will take place remotely (via zoom and telephone).

Participant – please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)

I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me)	Yes/No
I understand the information provided	Yes/No
I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study	Yes/No
I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions	Yes/No
I will participate in a focus group discussion	Yes/No
I am aware that my interview will be audiotaped	Yes/No

4. Confirmation that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary

Involvement in this Research Study is voluntary. Participants who decide to take part may withdraw from the Research Study at any point. There will be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the Research Study have been completed.

5. Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of participants. Participant names will not be recorded, as all participants will be assigned a code in the final report to protect participant's identity. Confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.

6. Signature:

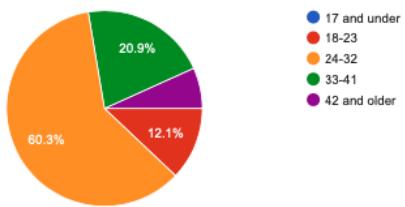
I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project.

The participants gave consent in the online survey
with after starting the survey by selectio "Yes, I
want to participate this survey"

5.7 Appendix B – Survey Analytics

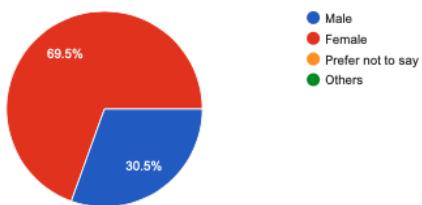
What is your age range?

282 responses



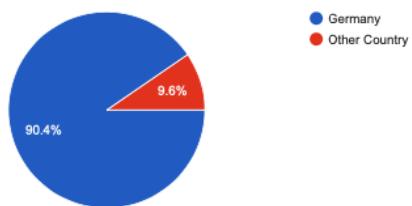
What gender do you identify with?

282 responses



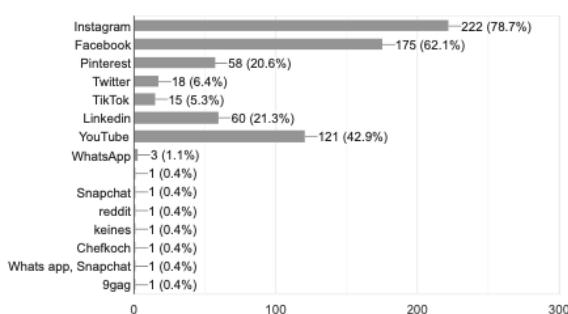
Where is your home located?

282 responses



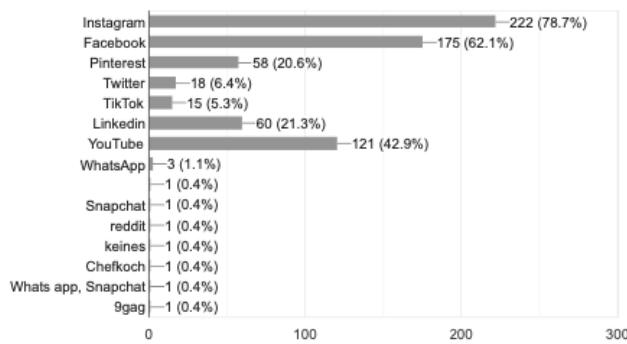
Which Social Media platforms do you use mostly on a daily basis?

282 responses



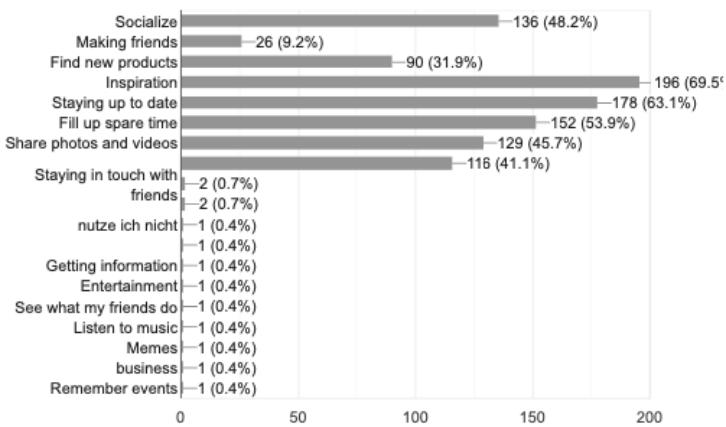
Which Social Media platforms do you use mostly on a daily basis?

282 responses



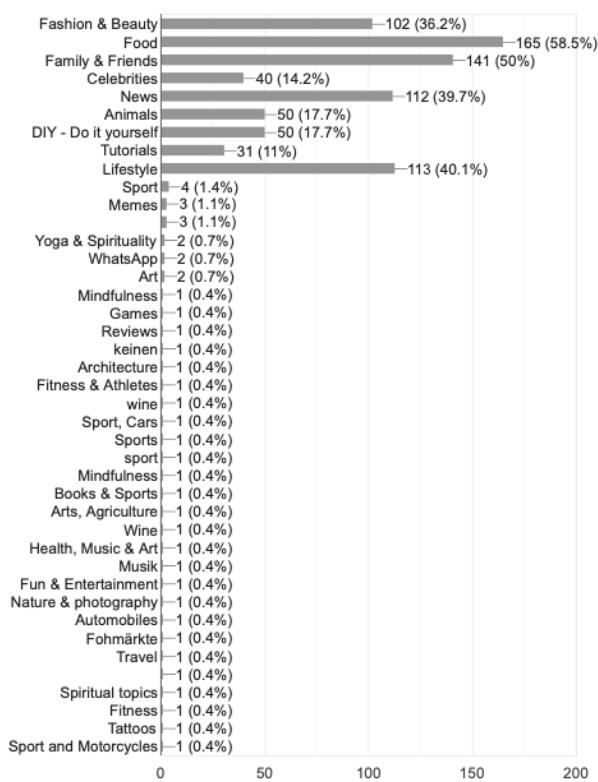
Why do you use Social Media?

282 responses



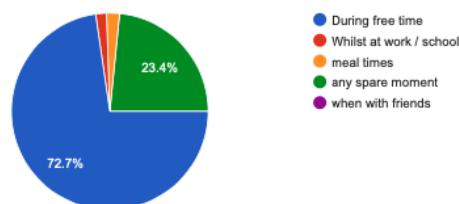
What kind of content do you see on your Social Media mostly?

282 responses



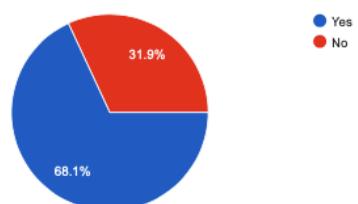
At what time do you use Social Media Platforms mostly?

282 responses



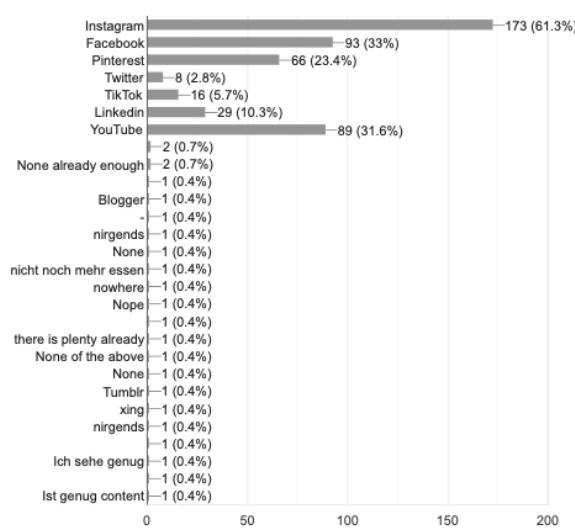
Have you ever tried a dish based on what you saw on Social Media / which was cooked by an Influencer?

282 responses



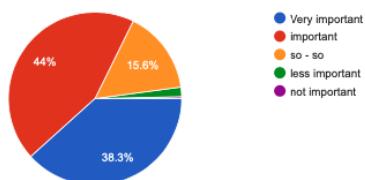
On which Platform would you like to see more food related content?

282 responses



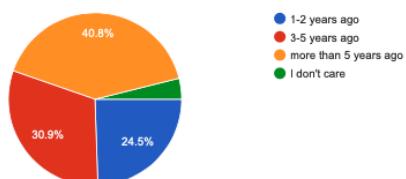
How important is it for you to eat healthy?

282 responses



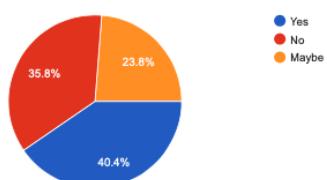
When did you start caring about what you eat?

282 responses



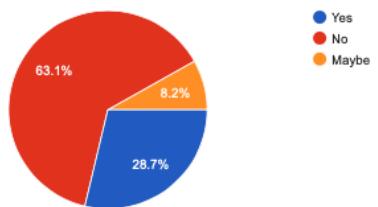
Do you think your Social Media in general has an impact on your food preferences?

282 responses



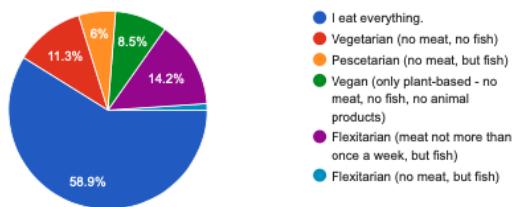
Do you feel Covid-19 changed your eating habits?

282 responses



What would you describe yourself as?

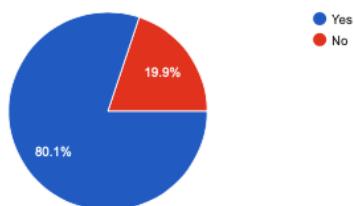
282 responses



I eat everything

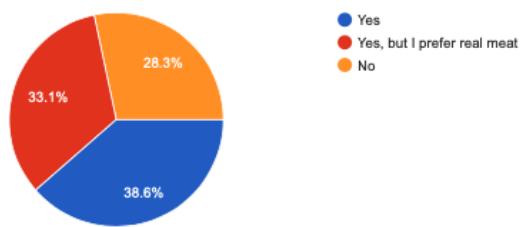
Have you ever tried a meat substitute product?

166 responses



Did you like it?

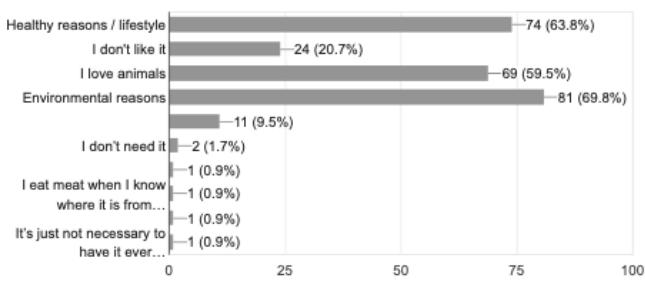
166 responses



Vegi-, Flexitarian & Vegans

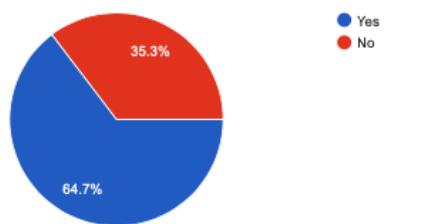
Why don't you eat meat?

116 responses



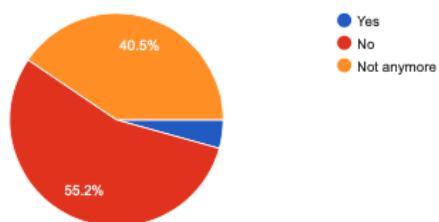
Do you feel there are enough plant-based meat alternatives?

116 responses



Do you think plant-based food is only a trend?

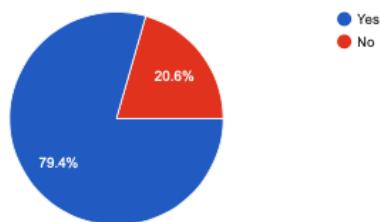
116 responses



THE QUESTION

Would you eat this burger?

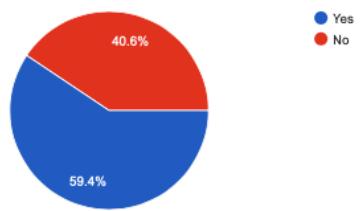
282 responses



Yes, I'd eat this burger

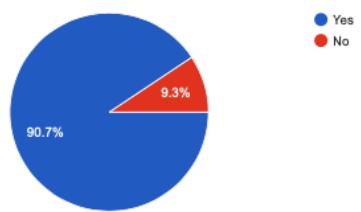
Did you know it's a plant-based burger?

224 responses



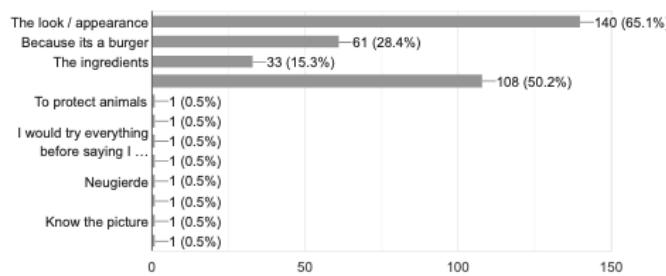
If your answer is no - would you still eat it?

107 responses



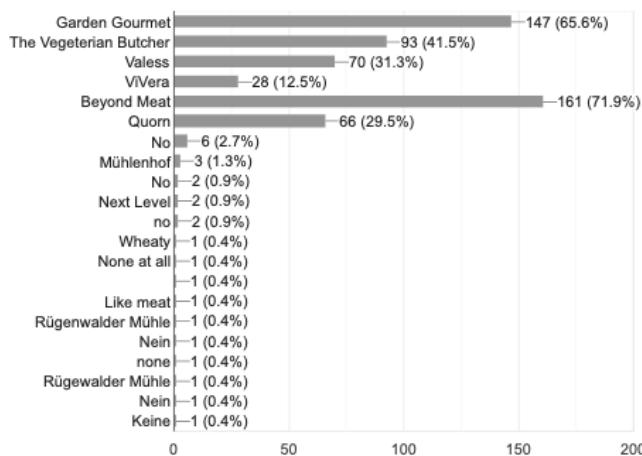
If your answer is yes - What make you want to eat the burger?

215 responses



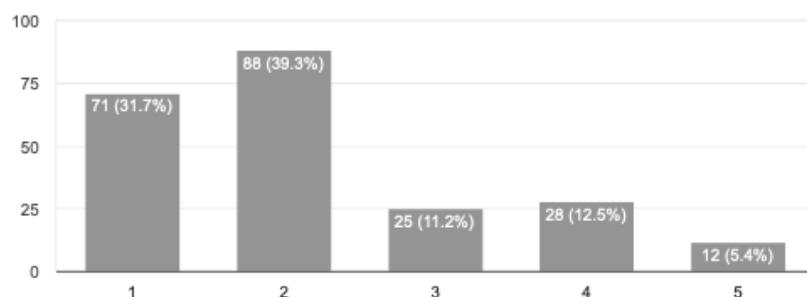
Do you know any of the following plant-based brands?

224 responses



On a scale from 1 to 5 - How important is the optic on the picture to influence your decision in a positive way?

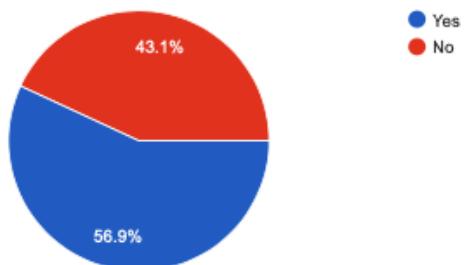
224 responses



No.

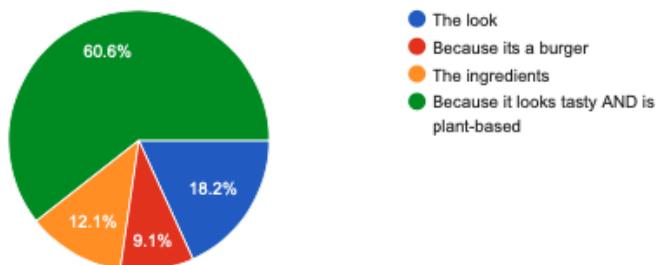
Would you eat the burger if it's plant-based meat?

58 responses



If your answer is yes - What make you want to eat the burger?

33 responses



If your answer is no - what could change your mind?

23 responses

a good veggie Burger is heaps better than plant based

Meat

The thing not being a burger?

Don't know to be honest. I am not into substitutes. If I have burger, it's meat. If I don't want meat, I would choose something else than burger.

If the patty didn't look like meat.

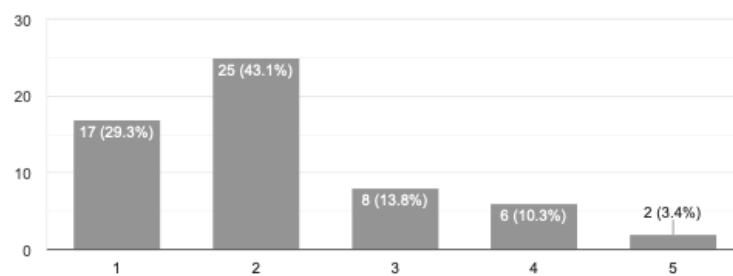
If it would be less. I prefer more simple food. & I really don't like plant based meat-alternatives. I prefer eating more naturally.

smaller meat

I don't eat gluten and try to have mostly wholefoods

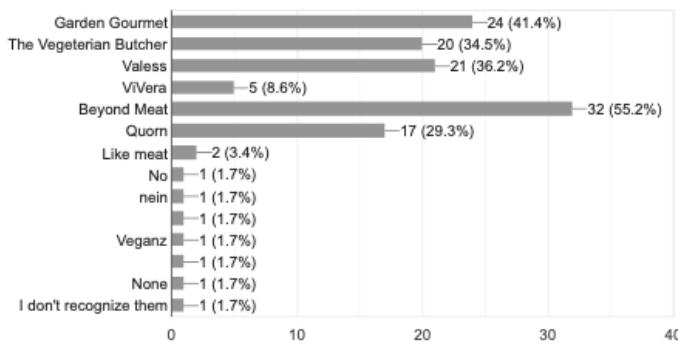
On a scale from 1 to 5 - How important is the optic on the picture to influence your decision in a positive way?

58 responses



Do you know any of the following plant-based brands?

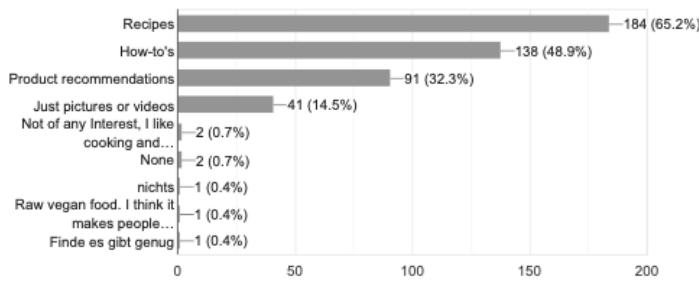
58 responses



Nearly there...

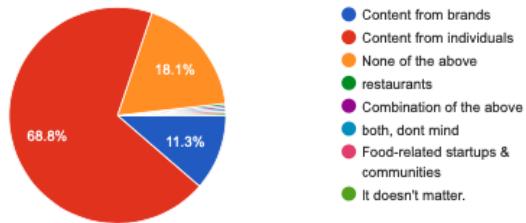
What type of content would you like to see more on Social Media about food?

282 responses



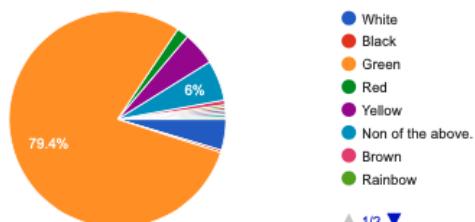
Do you prefer brand content or user generated content about food?

282 responses



Which colour do you associate with plant-based food?

282 responses



Anything else you want to add?

13 responses

no

I wish there are more persons, who think about their eating behavior and environmental reasons of being vegetarian or vegan.

no :)

plant-based food is still kind of expensive in Germany. If I pay 3€ for 180g of soya schnitzel and 4€ for 400g of turkey, it doesn't really shift your choice towards the plant based food. But I still buy it regularly, simply because I feel better knowing that less animals had to be killed for me.

Good luck liebe MU und ganz viele Grüße nach Dublin!! :)

I am not really keen on seeing food on Social Media. More important is to see fresh food/ingredients on markets, supermarkets etc.

Viel Erfolg bei der Masterarbeit!

5.8 Appendix C – Qualitative Interview / Survey Product Manager

Please describe your current job title and the brand you're working for (if possible)

1 response

Product Manager

Who is your main target audience? (speaking in Generations)

1 response

Generation y

What is your main communication channel on Social Media and why?

1 response

Instagram story/post, reach

Do you feel the perception of plant-based food changed over the past years? How?

1 response

Yes, higher demand of customers, increasing number of plant based products, more sales

What is most important for you, when you post a picture / video on Social Media in the name of your brand?

1 response

Special attention to enjoyment of the food, adequate information of the product, varied posts

What is your content on Social Media focussed on?

1 response

Enjoyment, information

With which content do you create the most engagement with?

1 response

Prize draws

Do you feel Social Media has an impact on your brands image?

1 response

No

How many follower does your brands Instagram account has on Instagram?

1 response

14000

Is Influencer Marketing a part of your Social Media strategy?

1 response

Yes

Did Covid-19 changed anything in your Social Marketing?

1 response

Yes, we gained more follower

Are you personally interested in plant-based food?

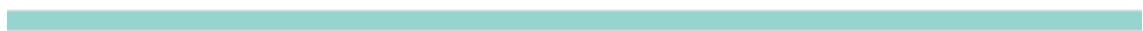
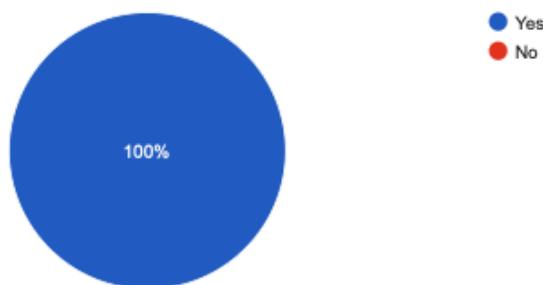
1 response

Yes



I work in the plant-based food industry

1 response



Which gender do you identify with?

1 response



What is your age?

1 response

28