



# **Thesis Title: Veganism: Motives, Practices & Potential Hardships Following a Novice Choice**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the factors that influence individuals' choice towards a plant – based diet (Ajzen,1991; McDermot et al.,2015) To that end individuals 'experiences and difficulties regarding the transition from a westernized dietary model towards a whole food plant – based one will be underlined. To gather data 16 vegans participated in semi-structured interviews and their qualitative data was analysed via thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2021). Research findings indicated that participants took various factors into consideration, when making decisions regarding their food choices (Ajzen & Madden,1986). When it comes to veganism, participants were found to be driven mainly by their intention of not harming sentient beings as well as their respect towards nature and the environment (Beck & Ladwig,2020; Gheihman, 2001). Participants perceived veganism as a lifestyle, associated with less meat consumption, and which promotes environmental and animal welfare (Janssen et al.,2016; Rosenfeld & Burrow, 2017). For participants, veganism is closely related to sustainability, being emphasized as one solution that can contribute to the reduction of unsustainable agricultural and animal-feeding practices, a lifestyle which preserves and promotes the environmental and social well-being of current and future generations (Vinnari & Vinnari, 2014; Mensah, 2019). Veganism as an ethical issue is a reaction to current cultural norms, meaning that it is influenced by societal norms, such as family, friends and overall social expectations (Ajzen, 2005; Povey et al.,2001). Vegans face societal stigmatization by non-vegans, because they are thought to be out of food options or being restricted to a deprived menu (Markowski & Roxburgh,2018; Gregson et al.,2022). Many times they find themselves into uncomfortable or awkward situations because they have to stand up for their ideals and through constant argumentation to explain the reasons why they followed this lifestyle (Brouwer et al., 2021; Oliver 2021). This can act as a barrier for people considering their food transition (D'Spouza et al., 2022; Bosnjak et al., 2020). It becomes evident that veganism as a way of life goes beyond the reduction of meat and dairy consumption as it can pave the way towards a healthier diet and a greener future (Bakaloudi et al.,2021; Bisen et al.,2021). Vegans point out the overall need for animal, environmental and natural respect (Beck & Ladwig, 2020; Dorgbetor et al., 2022). This means that veganism shall be actually treated as a social movement, which rejects the environmental commercialization and stands up against the exploitation of animals (Bertuzzi, 2017; Kelly, 2024). With this in mind every person should be aware that veganism is not about the creation and promotion of new markets but rather against turning living sentient beings into commodities (Gohil & Sharan, 2024; Gheihman,2021). So as to understand veganism's evolution and people's motives to engage into this lifestyle, it is important to understand the culture out of which veganism stems from (North et al., 2021; Rosenfeld & Burrow, 2017). From a market's perspective, it is essential that retailers can feel the consumer's needs and deliver to the market more sustainable products that appeal to the consumers and conform to sustainable regulations

(Aschemann – Witzel et al.,2021; Tziva et al., 2020) From a policy's perspective, the Greek state can build on the concept of veganism, contributing to sustainability promotion in the society (Allen et al., 2018; Vinnari & Vinnari, 2014). It would be interesting to conduct research with people that are vegan, in order to identify the difficulties that follow the transition towards a plant – based diet, as well as the reasons and motives that led them to follow this novice choice (Lea et al., 2005; Khaledi – Paveh et al.,2024).

**Keywords:** Veganism, Theory of Planned Behaviour, Sustainability, Ethics

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER 1: Introduction.....</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1. Context/ Background .....	5
1.2. Research rationale .....	7
1.3. Research aim and objectives.....	8
1.4. Research Questions .....	10
1.5. Structure of the Thesis.....	10
<b>CHAPTER 2: Theory .....</b>	<b>11</b>
2.1. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) .....	11
2.2. Motives and Experiences of Becoming Vegan .....	11
2.3. Theory of Planned Behavior and Veganism. ....	12
2.4. Sustainability and Veganism .....	14
3.1. Research Design .....	16
3.2. Method and Materials of Data Collection.....	16
3.3. Sampling .....	18
3.5. Research Process and Ethics.....	22
<b>CHAPTER 4 – Research Findings .....</b>	<b>25</b>
4.1. Factors Influencing Decision Making in General .....	29
4.2. Veganism.....	31
4.3. Psychological Factors.....	32
<b>CHAPTER 5 - Discussion .....</b>	<b>34</b>
5.1 Decision Making in General.....	34
5.2 Veganism .....	35
5.3 Mediterranean Diet and Cultural Context.....	35
5.4 Psychological Factors.....	36
<b>CHAPTER 6 Conclusion: .....</b>	<b>38</b>

<b>6.1 Thesis Summary.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>6.2 Sub – Questions &amp; Answers .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>6.3 Answer to Main Research Question.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>6.4 Limitations &amp; Recommendations for Future research.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>6.5 Concluding Remarks.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Appendix 1 – Interview Guide.....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Appendix 2 – Participant Information Sheet.....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Appendix 3 – Consent Form .....</b>	<b>55</b>

# CHAPTER 1: Introduction

## 1.1. Context/ Background

Veganism as a concept constitutes a set of nutritional, ethical and philosophical values and practices (Gheihman, 2021). Vegans do not only exclude meat and dairy from their diets but also they refuse to consume products or subproducts deriving from animals (North et al., 2021; Vestergren & Uysal 2022). Products such as wool silk and fare are not part of their clothing or styling preferences (Bertuzzi, 2017). Additionally, consumer goods like skin care products or cosmetics that are tested on animals do not belong to their consumption choices (Gregson, Piazza & Boyd, 2022). Nowadays that even more people are becoming aware of the devastation that current agricultural and farming practices are causing to the environment, transitioning to a plant – based diet is believed that can contribute to the battle against environmental destruction (De Boer, Schosler & Aiking, 2014). It cannot be denied that agricultural production and farming processes turn natural habitats into pasture lands, animal feed lots, and slaughterhouses, leading to wildlife extinction and environmental disintegration (Dorgbetor, Ondrasek, Kuntjak & Mikus, 2022). To make matters worse, these industries are significant environmental polluters (Macdiarmid, Douglas & Caampbell, 2016). As Beck and Ladwig (2020) report, meat, aquaculture, eggs and dairy utilise about 83% of farmlands and yet they yield only 37% of protein and 18% of calories, excluding high-water usage. Apart from land and water pollution and depletion, the agricultural sector is responsible for air pollution contributing by 14.5 to 18% to all greenhouse gas emissions produced by humans (Allen, Metternicht & Wiedmann, 2018). These principles of veganism are intertwined with the concept of sustainability, as veganism promotes a harmonious way of coexistence with animals and the environment, as well as the support to animal welfare (Vinnari & Vinnari, 2013). Apart from environmental preservation and protection, vegans call for ethical consumerism and responsibility when people make use of natural and environmental resources (Vestergren & Uysal, 2022).

Except to sustainability concerns, some people chose to abstain from meat consumption out of ethics and spirituality. To be more exact, since antiquity Greek philosophers like Pythagoras, Plato and Porphyry voluntarily avoided meat consumption out of ethical and spiritual concerns (Ruby, 2011). In her study a confusion about vegetarian and vegan diets is prominent. The difficulty in successfully identifying these two dietary models, has led to the constant dissemination of misinformation and misinterpretation about what each dietary model entails or should entail. This alibi makes it more difficult for scholars and academics to carry out their empirical research. To make matters worse many people are still unaware of the connection between their food choices and climate change (Macdiarmic et al., 2015). This problem rose from the deeply ingrained perception of meat as the ultimate product for health and longevity. As a consequence, people refuse the idea that their personal meat consumption should be reduced or that is associated with the climate impacts that we

have to overcome. In their research Macdiarmic et al., state that meat consumption is portrayed as a symbol of status and wealth. Except to that meat consumption is linked to culture with symbolic meaning. Meat eating is considered to be the ideal food choice for men whereas, a plant based diet is described more as feminine characteristic(Macdiarmic et al.,2015). Apart from the perception that eating meat is mostly for males whereas a plant – based diet is more suitable for females it could be argued that non meat eaters are often stigmatized by the rest of the population. In a research undertaken by Markowski & Roxburgh in 2019 social stigmatization of non-meat eaters is not an unusual phenomenon. One of their quotes, which summarizes exactly the participants' fear of being socially stigmatized and sometimes ostracized is the following: *"In other words, individuals anticipate that if they were to reduce and/ or eliminate meat and animal products from their diet – thus approximating the ways in which deviant, meat – free and plant -based individuals, such as vegans, eat - they would be subject to similar stigmatizing treatment for their food choices"*(Markowski & Roxburgh,2019). This is why many people feel the need to conform to societal norm in order to avoid their exclusion from the rest of the society and this is why transitioning to a plant – based diet seems such an impediment. Other potential factors that can influence an individual's choice to transition to a plant – based diet is the willingness to lead an ethical and healthy lifestyle, which is characterised by strong concerns about animal welfare and environmental and social justice (Simons et al., 2021). To the above, belong cultural influences, which view veganism as a challenge to a food system reliant on the exploitation of animals and workers. Out of ethical reasoning plant – based eaters stand up against animal reduction to production units, whose body limbs are employed as commodities for profit. If that was not enough, the animals are kept in cruel conditions. Practices such as beak trimming in the egg industry (Riber & Hinrichsen, 2017) or tail docking in the meat industry (Valros & Heinonen, 2015) and forced impregnation in the dairy industry (Crowe, Hostens, & Opsomer, 2018;) are very common. Regarding workers' exploitation, most of workers in such industries are undocumented migrants vulnerable to abuse (Kelly, 2024). Not to mention that they have often to face dangerous, repetitive or emotionally draining tasks at a high speed. To be more specific many of these workers have higher injury rates or they are more prompt to health hazards because of bloodborne pathogens or zoonotic diseases. For example, workers employed in slaughterhouses often find themselves under the risk of Hepatitis B and C, a disease transmitted through blood during cuts and injuries. Another type of disease is that of Q Fever (*Coxiella burnetii*), which is transmitted from cattle, goats and sheep when animal blood, urine or birth products are inhaled (Cook et al,2021). Another zoonotic disease that is contracted from animals to slaughterhouses 'employees is tuberculosis via the contact with infectious or infected materials such as carcasses, viscera, placenta urine and other excrements (Mia et al.,2022). It is interesting to mention that although these industries cause suffering to both humans and animals certain vegans share the point of view that if the meat and dairy industries could guarantee human and animal welfare then they would reconsider their food choices. According to Janssen et al (2016) Hartmann & Siegrist (2017) and Bakaloudi et al. (2021)

there is the eminent perception of an omnivore setback on condition that animal welfare can be guaranteed and safeguarded. All authors shared the opinion that external factors such as social pressures can facilitate or impede an individual's transition towards a plant - based diet.

The theory that is going to lay the foundations on which this research will be carried out, is Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). To the strengths of the TPB belong its successful application on lifestyle choices made by individuals such as diet. It can provide an explanation on the intentions, which can influence an individual's behaviour. It does not restrict itself to a certain context but it is applicable in a wide range of contexts, thus providing great flexibility. In the case of food transition it can be applied to indicate factors that influence an individual's decision. Such factors are ethical food consumption (Beck & Ladwig, 2020), environmental motives (De Boer, Schosler & Boersma, 2012) and dietary shifts out of health related issues (Bakaloudi et al., 2021). TPB includes subjective norms acknowledging the importance of societal pressure, stigma and the feeling of group identity and belonging (D'Souza, Singaraju & Arango – Soler, 2021). The Perceived Control element (PBC) facilitates TPB to be more concrete in comparison to other theories, which focus only on attitudes. In the case of this thesis TPB's (PBC) points out the impediments that individuals have to overcome when they attempt to transition to a solid plant – based diet. Such barriers according to Jenssen et al., (2016); Luciano et al.,(2023) include among others food access, affordability and cooking skills. As it mentioned TPB as a theory has many strengths, however it has certain drawbacks. To begin with, there is a gap between the intention and the behaviour. Ajzen (2020) in his work points out that not all intentions are translated into actions. Although, it is true to say that TPB is used as a behavioural predictor it focuses solely on rational decision making leaving out emotional or identity factors. A further weakness of TPB is its emphasis on personal beliefs, norms and control but it does not take into consideration any structural or cultural barriers making it biased. Researchers such as Fila & Smith (2006) stated that TPB can be very helpful when factors directly related to eating behavioural patterns are concerned but it is not that efficient, when indirect effects of intention are taken into account.

## 1.2. Research rationale

As it becomes evident from the previous section, there are multiple factors and motives influencing an individual's decision whether to adopt or not to endorse a plant – based diet, which do not restrict themselves only to health concerns (Bakaloudi et al., 2021). Ethical considerations taking into account the torturous conditions that animals are forced to endure in the meat, dairy and egg industries and the exploitation of

slaughterhouse employees exposed to hazardous and unhealthy working conditions should belong to central factors (Beck & Ladvig, 2020; Durusoy et al., 2019). Dietary choices are often shaped by environmental concerns, especially agriculture's and food production system's ecological footprint (De Boer et al., 2014). The perception and practice of veganism is an issue of societal and cultural impacts (Janssen et al., 2016). According to Khaledi – Paveh et al (2024) individual's experiences and psychological motives, even though not sufficiently discussed in previous studies are great of importance so as to understand how people form their vegan identity and navigate through impediments, barriers and challenges.

Ajzen's Theory of Planned behaviour (TPB) bestows the framework upon which vegan behaviour is analysed, indicating the link among attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen 2005). To its strengths belong the quantification of the impacts of cognitive and social factors on intention and allows the inclusion of moral norms and identity articulating ethical and social dimensions of veganism (D' Souza et al., 2022). Nonetheless TPB as a theory has its weaknesses namely it downplays the significance of habits and emotions, structural barriers such as the availability or access to plant – based food or the societal stigma following the change of dietary habits, hence becoming more predictive instead of explanatory, leading to limitations like engaging with vegans' lived experiences (McDermott et al., 2015; Markowski & Roxburgh, 2018).

This research sets out to identify the key factors motivating or hindering the endorsement of plant – based diets and to scrutinise how individual's experience veganism. Derived insights from this thesis will provide useful information to retailers, thus leading to the development of products aligning with consumers' perception and contribute to the broader debates on issues about sustainability, ethical food production, the protection and preservation of human and animal welfare and the promotion of social justice. Via the successful integration of ethical, social, psychological and environmental perspective this thesis intends to put forward a comprehensive understanding of veganism not only as a personal lifestyle choice but also as an aspect of wider socio – ecological transitions (Vinnari & Vinnari, 2013).

### 1.3. Research aim and objectives

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the factors that influence individuals' choice to adopt a plant – based diet, as well as to scrutinize their experience after their food transition. An interesting aspect that this thesis explores is that even though there is an increase of plant – based diet globally, scholars and practitioners tend to pay attention more on nutritional benefits without taking into consideration any societal, psychological, experiential dimensions into account (Janssen et al., 2016, Khaledi – Paveh et al., 2024). As a consequence, when inquiries on dietary models are carried out, findings and results produced in studies are often conflicting leading to public confusion (Bakaloudi et al., 2021). As research on diets deriving from non – western countries

is not taken seriously, is overlooked or undervalued, valuable insights are left out leading to the creation of blind spots in the literature (Ruby, 2012). As the broader academic debate on the issue of sustainability is concerned, a possible change in an individual's dietary patterns could help to mitigate the impacts that the current food production system is causing to the environment (Allen et al.,2018;Dorgbetor et al.,2022). In addition to that, plant – based diets are becoming an issue, which can influence individuals and society (Vinnari & Vinnari, 2013).

One of this thesis objectives is the identification of motives (ethical, health, social, psychological and environmental) that either facilitate or impede an individual's choice to reject the westernized dietary model, to exclude animal products and their derivatives from their diet (Beck & Ladwig,2020; D'Souza et al.,2022). The second objective of this thesis is the examination of an individual's perceptions and experiences regarding the impediments they face when adopting and maintaining a vegan lifestyle (Markowski & Roxburgh, 2018; Mayrhofer et al.,2024). The third and final objective of this thesis is to explore the wider implications of plant – based diets when consumer behaviour, food culture and debates about sustainability are addressed (Vinnari & Vinnari,2014). The significance of this thesis is that it is the first of its kind that attempts to provide new insights when psychological and social experiences are merged with sustainability concerns (Ajzen, 1991;Bosnak et al., 2020). Up until recently, there have been many studies on nutrition and the benefits of following a healthy lifestyle (Bisen et al.,2021). Nonetheless, there is a lot of confusion and misconception, when discussing about dietary models (Hoek et al.,2004). As a result, the one study counteracts the other meaning that although there is an interest from the public in living a healthier lifestyle, leading to longevity there is such a confusion of what shall be included on our plates and what is better to be avoided. Even among scholars and researchers there is not a united front when approaching diets (Macdiarmid et al.,2016). Not to mention that studies carried out by researchers outside of the developed countries are either overlooked or their results are downplayed, because their methods are considered to be subjective or insufficient (Ruby, 2012). To that end this thesis will attempt to shed light on perspectives, which might be overlooked by the academic society.

Moreover, this thesis contributes to the debate on food systems' sustainability by placing veganism in the broader context of sustainability and by highlighting the transition toward a more ethical and environmentally responsible consumption (Allen et al.,2018; Vinnari & Vinnari, 2013). The significance of this thesis is that it provides new insights to the academic debate by merging psychological and social experiences with sustainability concerns (Ajzen,2005). Through its clarification on motives and the experiences shaping consumer behaviour, it yields actionable insights to policymakers, sustainability advocates and retailers (Miguel et al.,2024).

## 1.4. Research Questions

Building upon these aims and objectives, this thesis moves on the formulation of the research question and its sub questions that guide the inquiry. This study sets out to understand how dwellers in the city of Athens and especially young adults endorse and experience veganism as well as how this aspect is connected to wider debates on sustainability. The research question is designed to address both motivational and experiential dimensions. In order to provide a concrete analytical framework three sub questions are formed, which are aligned with Ajzen's TPB, facilitating the study by the examination of how attitudes, social norms and perceived behavioural control can encourage or impede an individual's transition toward a plant – based diet in this urban Mediterranean context. The main research question that will guide this thesis is:

*“What motivates young adults in the city of Athens to adopt a vegan diet, what barriers do they encounter during this transition, and how do their experiences connect to the broader debate on sustainability?”*

To answer this question the study will explore the following sub questions:

**SQ1: What ethical, environmental and health – related beliefs shape young adults' attitudes toward the endorsement of a vegan diet in Athens? This question strives to indicate how positive or negative evaluations of veganism (animal welfare, climate concerns and personal health) influence peoples' intention.**

**SQ2: How do family expectations, peer influence and cultural traditions impact young adults' decision to transition to a vegan lifestyle? This question scrutinises the role of perceived social pressure and stigma, an important aspect in a collectivist and family oriented culture like the one of Greece.**

**SQ3: To what extent do cooking skills, nutritional literacy and knowledge of sustainability impacts enable or impede young adults' ability to adopt and maintain a vegan diet?. This question goes hand in hand with behavioural control, if individuals are capable on acting on the behaviour.**

## 1.5. Structure of the Thesis

In chapter 2 the literature review outlining the theoretical framework of the thesis will be presented, academic debates on veganism, motivational factors, TPB and the link between veganism and sustainability, will be reviewed. In chapter 3 the research methodology, detailing the employed methods and providing justifications for their selection will be described. In chapter 4 the research findings, which are going to be further analysed in chapter 5, will be presented. In chapter 6 the key findings will summarized, conclusions will be drawn, the thesis's limitations will be acknowledged and recommendations for future research will be offered.

## CHAPTER 2: Theory

### 2.1. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

Important key concepts used in TPB are the attitudes toward the behavior, the subjective norms, the perceived behavioral control (PBC), the behavioral intention and the actual behavior itself (Ajzen,1991;Bosnjak,Ajzen, & Schmidt,2020). To begin with, attitudes toward a behavior in this thesis are about veganism's outcomes (health, ethical and environmental benefits) and how these outcomes are evaluated by young people (D'Souza, Brouwer, & Singaraju,2022). Subjective norms are about societal pressure from family, peers or friends and the wider culture, which can determine whether they engage or abstain from veganism (Markowski & Roxburgh,2018). The perceived behavioral control (PBC) is about the ease or difficulty in veganism's endorsement and maintenance, as it is impacted by factors such as cooking skills, knowledge, availability of products and self-efficacy (Ajzen,2002,Wellens & Conner,2001). The behavioral intention indicates young adults' motivational readiness to perform the behavior for example the transition to a solely plant – based diet (Ajzen, 2020). Last but not least the behavior itself informs about a vegan lifestyle's adoption and practice, for example food purchases and cooking habits (McDermott et al.,2015).

At this point, TPB's applicability to young adults in the city of Athens will be illustrated. To be more specific, many young people dwelling in the city of Athens are informed about animal welfare and climate change, however it might be difficult for them to disengage from traditional values of Mediterranean food culture, a culture consisting of meat, dairy and fish (Raptou et al.,2024). In this case there is a clash between modern ethical/ environmental values and traditional dietary heritage (De Boer, Schosler & Aiking,2014). Here it should be mentioned that family and peer influences are very strong in Greek collectivist culture (Markowski & Roxburgh,2018). Living under parental roof, which is something common for young adults in Greece can pose impediments because food is prepared by family, making peer and parental attitudes decisive (Jenssen, Busch, Rodiger & Hamm, 2016). Although it is true to mention that in Athens plant – based products are accessible because of urban markets, it could be argued that young people often lack cooking skills (Mayrhofer, Roberts, Hackl, & Frischholz,2024). Lack of cooking skills and nutritional illiteracy can reduce self-efficacy (Lea, Crawford & Worseley,2005). Even though, young people may wish to follow a vegan diet out of ethical or environmental concerns, their intention is not translated into action (Ajzen,1991). The three predictors (attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control) can either facilitate or impede veganism's adoption (D'Souza et al.,2022).

### 2.2. Motives and Experiences of Becoming Vegan

Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) contributes to the examination of motives and impediments, which impact young peoples' adopting a vegan lifestyle in Athens, which rejects some elements of the mediterranean diet. As the TPB states, intentions whether to engage or to abstain from a behavior are shaped by attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991; 2005). As far as attitudes or behavioral beliefs are concerned, young adults may believe that a vegan lifestyle is environmentally friendlier and ethically aligned with animal welfare (D'Souza, Brouwer & Singaraju, 2022). This is because the increased awareness of the cruelty that farmed and caged animals are facing (Beck & Ladwig, 2020). These include beak trimming, tail docking or forced impregnation (Riber & Hinnrichsen, 2017; Valros & Heinonen, 2015; Crowe, Hostens, & Opsomer, 2018). A vegan lifestyle supports societal justice for all of those, who cannot express their voices, such as that of farmed animals and that of the slaughterhouse's workforce, which consists of undocumented migrants, prisoners and trafficked people (Kelly, 2024). These three categories fall under constant exploitation and are subjected to hazardous working conditions and healthy risks (Kelly, 2024). The Greek tradition consists of strong family bonds and cultural expectations around mediterranean diet such as dairy, meat and fish (Raptou et al., 2024). Therefore, subjective norms, informed by normative beliefs are deeply embedded in the Greek context. As Markowski and Roxburgh (2018) mentioned certain Greek festivities such as Easter put a barrier to individuals transitioning to a plant – based diet by framing it as a rejection of cultural heritage leading to societal stigma for those, who attempt. In addition to subjective norms, control beliefs shape perceived behavioural control that is influenced by enabling and constraining factors (Ajzen, 2002). While it is true to say that vegan restaurants and supermarkets are available and easy accessible in the city of Athens (Raptou et al., 2024), barriers such as high cost of specialty foods, limited cooking skills and nutritional illiteracy hinder transition to a solely plant – based diet (Lea, Crawford, & Worseley, 2005). It is important to mention that TPB captures how attitudes, norms and control shape intentions (Ajzen, 2020). However, academics and practitioners reported that it downplays the effects of habits, emotions and identity in dietary behavioural patterns (Bosnjak, Ajzen & Schmidt, 2020). In other words the TPB points out the interplay between individual motives, societal restrictions, family and peer pressure and other practical constraints that either facilitate or hinder an individual's attempt to adopt and maintain a vegan lifestyle (McDermott et al., 2015).

### 2.3. Theory of Planned Behavior and Veganism.

The research question: "*What motivates young adults in the city of Athens to adopt a vegan diet, what barriers do they encounter during this transition, and how do their experiences connect to the broader debate on sustainability?*"", indicates its connection with TPB's core principles (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen, 2005). To be more specific, attitudes are about motivational factors, which can be crucial for either adopting or rejecting a plant – based diet, such ethics, environment or health (D'Souza, Brouwer, & Singaraju, 2022). Additionally,

subjective norms are about the influence of family expectations, peer impacts and cultural traditions (Markowski & Roxburgh, 2018). Perceived behavioural control reflects practical impediments, which deter individuals from even attempting to change their dietary habits. Those include cooking skills, nutritional illiteracy and accessibility to vegan options (Lea, Crawford, & Worseley, 2005). The TPB does not only provide a solid theoretical framework but it can be used as a roadmap for the empirical analysis of this thesis (Bosnjak, Ajzen, & Schmidt, 2020).

At this point, the three sub questions will indicate their relevance to TPB's theoretical framework. Sub question 1: **“What ethical, environmental and health – related beliefs shape young adults' attitudes toward the endorsement of a vegan diet in Athens?”**, is linked to TPB's construct of attitudes (Ajzen, 2002). Attitudes are usually developed when the behaviour's outcomes are evaluated (Ajzen, 2020). Individual's shared experiences of a plant – based diet and their feedback on veganism increased public awareness and provided a precedent and as a result, more and more people were willing to try a vegan diet for themselves (Janssen, Busch, Rodiger, & Hamm, 2016). Individuals wanted to experience the benefits of a plant – based diet such as health improvement and longevity (Bisen, Jha, & Bankar, 2021). Except to health improvements they wished to reduce their environmental impact (De Boer, Schosler, & Aiking, 2014). The first sub question allows the assessment on how young Athenians attempt to combine perceived benefits of a vegan diet with current perceptions of the Mediterranean diet (Raptou et al., 2024).

Moving on Sub question 2: **“How do family expectations, peer influence and cultural traditions impact young adults' decision to transition to a vegan lifestyle?”**, points to TPB's construct of subjective norms (Ajzen, 1991). Subjective norms are about societal pressures to perform or not to perform a behaviour (Ajzen, 2005). Mediterranean diet that is prominent in southern European countries like Greece connects cultural traditions with strong – family centered social constructs, which can act as a barrier to individuals wishing to detach themselves from an animal eating diet (Markowski & Roxburgh, 2018). A second area to consider is that peers may not be supportive towards newly imported ideals of veganism and act as another barrier towards a dietary change (Janssen et al., 2016). Thus, it can be stated that normative pressures play an important role in family – oriented and collectivist societies, where decisions about diet have a symbolic meaning (raptou et al., 2024).

Last but not least, sub question 3: **To what extent do cooking skills, nutritional literacy and knowledge of sustainability impacts enable or impede young adults' ability to adopt and maintain a vegan diet?**, is intertwined with TPB's third component, which is the perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 2002). Perceived behavioural control is about the ease or difficulty to perform an action (Bosnjak et al., 2020). For young people, in order to maintain a vegan diet, it is essential that they are confident in their capability to plan, prepare and afford plant – based meals (Lea et al., 2005). Whether or not individuals successfully adopt and maintain a new

diet, depends on control beliefs to food choices (McDermott et al.,2015). This sub question highlights the conditions enabling or constraining veganism's endorsement in the city of Athens (Raptou et al.,2024). So as to illustrate the interplay between TPB's constructs and to ensure theoretical and empirical alignment this study structures the research question and its sub questions around TPB's constructs. Attitudes are about individual motives (D'Souza et al.,2022), subjective norms emphasize social and cultural pressures (Markowski & Roxburgh, 2018) and perceived behavioural control highlights challenges and impediments (Ajzen, 2002). In this way a comprehensive model for the analysis of the complex interplay between personal beliefs, social dynamics and contextual barriers that influence young adults in Athens either to adopt or reject veganism can be established (Ajzen,2020).

## 2.4. Sustainability and Veganism

By employing TPB as the theoretical framework this thesis moves beyond general associations existing between veganism and sustainability to scrutinise how the concept of sustainability is perceived, internalized and enacted by people (Ajzen,1991; Ajzen, 2005). This theoretical lens allows the research to establish the connection of motives like ethical, environmental and social within current debates on sustainability, pointing out that transitions toward plant – based diets are simultaneously psychological social and structural procedures (Bosnjak, Ajzen, & Schmidt,2020). Attitudes (behavioural beliefs) show how participants evaluate the ethical and environmental impacts of their food choices (D'Souza, Brouwer, & Singaraju, 2022). Beliefs about one's ecological footprint reduction, animal welfare improvements or rejection of industrial practices (factory farming, resource overuse) will be embedded in this construct (Beck & Ladwig, 2020). Such beliefs reveal how environmental consciousness is a motive to adopt a vegan lifestyle (De Boer, Schosler, & Aiking, 2014). Furthermore, subjective norms (normative beliefs) as a dimension underlines how cultural expectations and societal norms can facilitate or hinder sustainable consumption. In Southern European countries like Greece the mediterranean diet is deeply ingrained in societal and family traditions, meaning that norms regarding food can either act as an enabler or as a constraint to plant – based diets (Markowski & Roxburgh, 2018). This can be the result of family resistance, social stigma and peer pressure, which can be interpreted as reflections of normative pressures toward or against veganism's endorsement (Raptou et al.,2024). The final element of the TPB namely perceived behavioural control (control beliefs) will be utilised for the analysis of structural and practical factors, which impact an individual's capacity to act in a sustainable manner (Ajzen,2020). Barriers such as affordability of plant – based options, restricted access to sustainable food sources and nutritional illiteracy will be coded under perceived control (Lea, Crawford, & Worseley,2005). Hence, TPB as a theoretical framework helps revealing how sustainability awareness interacts with educational and economic impediments (McDermott et al.,2015).

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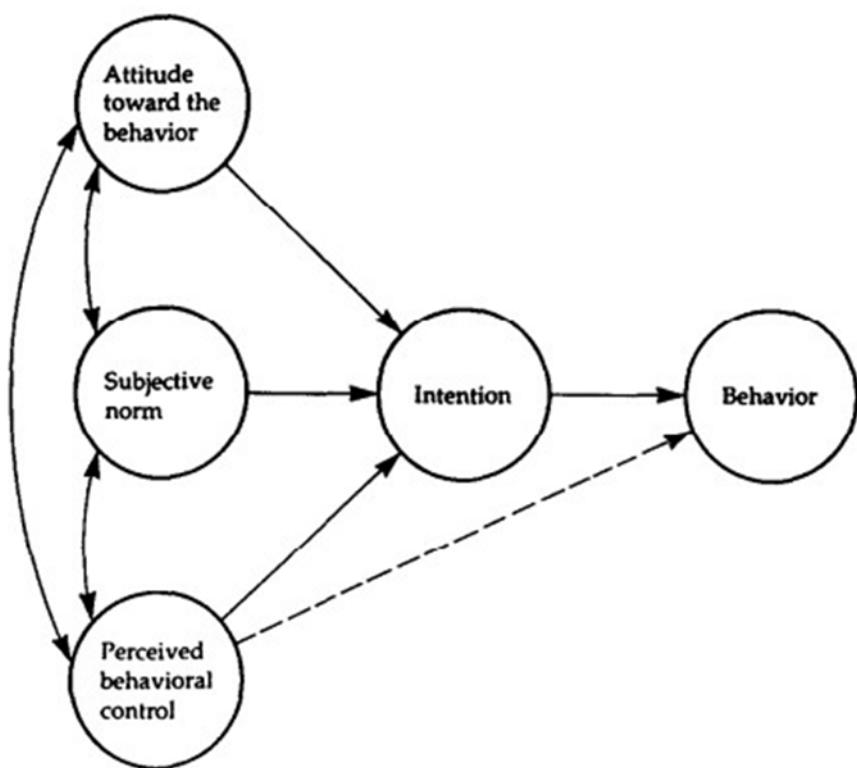


FIG. 1. Theory of planned behavior.

Ajzen, I. (1991). *The theory of planned behavior*. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179-211.

## CHAPTER 3 - Methodology

### 3.1. Research Design

For the purpose of this thesis a qualitative approach will be utilized as it can contribute to the investigation of the complex interplay between individuals' motives, societal pressures and cultural dynamics, aspects which influence the endorsement or rejection of veganism. Through qualitative inquiry reach contextual insights into peoples' experiences and meaning – making can be gained (Baškarada, 2014). According to Hammersley (2013) qualitative approach is particularly suited when scholars attempt to explore how individuals interpret concepts such as sustainability, ethics and identity in relation to food choices, which is something that cannot be efficiently captured through quantitative methodologies. In contrast to quantitative research, qualitative research does not seek numerical generalisation but by generating theoretically, meaningful insights, which can be useful for future research (Silverman, 2011), facilitates analytical generalization. Hence, instead of generalizing all young adults in the city of Athens, the focus is laid on understanding the experiences, motives and challenges of those following a vegan lifestyle in a specific social and cultural context. Such a point of view aligns with interpretivism that highlights subjective understanding and context – specific meaning (Pernecky, 2016).

### 3.2. Method and Materials of Data Collection

For this thesis two complementary methods will be employed. The first one is a critical literature review and the second are semi structured interviews. These combined approaches allow for an in – depth examination of the social, psychological and cultural dimensions affecting young peoples' adoption of veganism in Athens. The combination of these two research methods makes it easier for a coherent integration of Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), with empirical observation. The literature review provides the conceptual foundation of the study and is used as a roadmap for the formulation of the research questions and that of the interview guide. It critically, assesses the academic work on veganism, sustainability and behavioural decision making, emphasizing TPB's constructs like attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991, 2005). Key areas such as psychological, social and perception are explored. To begin with, the psychological aspect that dives into the psychological and motivational drivers influencing individuals intentions to adopt a plant – based diet, including ethical, environmental and health – related factors. Research undertaken by prominent scholars such as Janssen et al., (2016), Rosenfeld and Burrow (2017) and D'Souza et al. (2022) bestowed valuable information on how beliefs about the outcomes of veganism can shape attitudes and intentions. Moving on to the next area, which examined social and cultural influences, by laying the focus on how family, peers and collective traditions affect subjective norms. Also in this area scholars like Markowski and Roxburgh (2018) and Vestergren and Uysal (2022) shed light on how cultural identity and

social stigma can cause resistance to vegan diets in a collectivist context. Lastly, the following area addressed perceived behavioural control, illustrates barriers such as affordability, accessibility, cooking skills and nutritional illiteracy. Research carried out by McDermott et al. (2015) and Brouwer et al. (2021) pointed out how perceived ease or difficulty in maintaining a vegan lifestyle can influence behaviour.

The Literature review indicates the link between plant – based diets with environmental ethics and sustainable consumption (De Boer et al.,2014; Vinnari & Vinnari, 2013 establishing the connection between individual food choices and broader sustainability debates. Sources derived from Google Scholar, Research Gate and the Maastricht University Library, under the keywords of “veganism”, “plant – based diets”, “sustainability”, “and” “Greece”. Peer – reviewed academic articles from 2000 and after were prioritised and non-peer reviewed or opinion based sources were neglected. Thematic analysis was used in order to identify patterns, contradictions and research gaps informing the study’s empirical design as well as the TPB – oriented structure of the interview guide.

As mentioned previously semi structured interviews have been chosen as they provide flexibility to both researchers and participants. Moreover, they are suitable for the acquirement of rich reflective data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Silverman, 2011). At this stage of the thesis the interview guide as presented in (Appendix 1) is developed around TPB constructs including all aspects from Attitudes about ethics, environment and health to subjective norms in regard to social pressures from peers and family and to perceived behavioural control referring to practical impediments such access to products, financial costs and cooking skills. Throughout the interviews participants discussed their understanding of a vegan lifestyle, its ethical significance and its connection to the broader debate on sustainability. The combination of literature review and interviews facilitated the development of a theoretically grounded and methodologically coherent dataset, allowing the exploration of how individual motives and structural realities in Athens are intertwined. In addition to that it created a methodological bridge between theory and experiences. Finally, it ensured that empirical findings could be analysed under TPB’s theoretical lens, revealing that attitudes, norms and control belief can be applied in real world situations.

**Table 1: Research Design  
Overview & Data Analysis  
Framework**

Sub – Question (SQ)	Data Collection Method	Data Analysis Method	Relevant Sources
SQ1: What ethical, environmental and health – related beliefs shape young	Semi – structured interviews	Thematic Analysis guided by TPB (focus	Ajzen (1991;2005,2020); Rosenfeld & Burrow

adults' attitudes toward the endorsement of a vegan diet in Athens?		on Attitudes toward behaviour)	(2017); Gheihman (2021); Janssen et al. (2016); Beck & Ladwig (2020)
SQ2: How do family expectations, peer influence and cultural traditions impact young adults' decision to transition to a vegan lifestyle?	Semi – structured interviews	Thematic Analysis guided by TPB (focus on subjective norms)	Ajzen (1991;2005,2020); Povey et al. (2001); Bosnjak et al. (2020); D'Souza et al. (2022)
To what extent do cooking skills, nutritional literacy and knowledge of sustainability impacts enable or impede young adults' ability to adopt and maintain a vegan diet?	Semi – structured interviews	Thematic Analysis guided by TPB (focus on behavioural control)	Ajzen (1991;2005,2020); Fishbein & Cappella (2006); Janssen et al. (2016); Rashid et al. (2020); Rogerson (2017)

### 3.3. Sampling

The research sample is taken by following a qualitative purposive sampling. The rationale behind this approach was to capture variety in experiences and perspectives among young adults in Athens. The focus was laid on depth, variation and theoretical saturation instead of statistical representativeness (Fugard & Potts, 2015). Since, theoretical saturation is mentioned the sampling procedure is developed around Ajzen's TPB constructs, attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, which requires varied experiences for identification of patterns (Ajzen, 1991; 2005). The aim of the sampling was to achieve diversity in gender, age, educational level, occupation, socioeconomic class, income and the length that each individual follows a vegan lifestyle. For the sampling the total number of participants is 16 young adults between the ages 21 and 30. Out of these participants 7 are males and 9 are females all residing in an urban setting namely that of Athens. Their educational level varies from secondary, to postgraduates. Regarding their occupation varying from students, service workers, NGO volunteers, professionals to entrepreneurs. Additionally, their socioeconomic background is taken into account, ranging from lower class with a monthly income less than 900 euros per month, the middle class with a monthly income from 900 to 1500 euros to upper class with a net income from 1800 to 2,500 euros per month. To the above mentioned factors the participants experience about veganism is taken into consideration, with some of the participants adopting the specific lifestyle in a time frame from 8

months to 6 years. The rationale behind was to find out how economic constraints, family pressure and social capital influenced vegan practices and participants' sustainability beliefs. The interviews took place from the 5<sup>th</sup> of May to 28<sup>th</sup> of August 2025. During the interviews personal biases and participants socioeconomic differences were acknowledged (Olmos – Vega et al., 2023).

Table 2: Participants  
Demographics

Participant ID	Gender	Age	Education	Occupation/Field of Study	Length of Vegan Practice	Date of participation	Time participation
P1	Male	24	Undergraduate	University student (Sociology)	2 years	05/05/2025	10:15
P2	Female	26	Secondary	Barista/ part time	1,5 years	05/05/2025	17:00
P3	Male	28	Secondary	Delivery driver	3 years	06/05/2025	19:30
P4	Female	23	Undergraduate	Art Student	2 years	06/05/2025	08:30
P5	Male	27	Bachelor's	NGO volunteer	4 years	07/05/2025	16:30
P6	Female	25	Bachelor's	Teacher	3 years	07/05/2025	18:20
P7	Female	22	Undergraduate	Undergraduate (Nutritional Science)	1 year	28/08/2025	10:00
P8	Male	29	Master's	Software developer	5 years	28/08/2025	12:00
P9	Female	24	Bachelor's	Architect intern	2,5 years	26/08/2025	11:00
P10	Male	30	Diploma	Chef (Vegan Restaurant)	6 years	27/08/2025	12:00
P11	Female	27	University	Lawer trainee	4 years	28/08/2025	16:00
P12	Female	23	Secondary	Retail employee	1,5 years	24/08/2025	15:00
P13	Male	25	Master's	Graduate student (Environmental Studies)	3,5 years	05/08/2025	19:00

P14	Female	28	Master's	Entrepreneur (Vegan skincare)	5 years	22/08/2025	09:30
P15	Female	26	Bachelor's	Freelancer (Graphic Design)	3 years	29/08/2025	15:00
P16	Male	21	Secondary	Unemployed	8 months	28/08/2025	21:00

This table attempts to provide a clear overview of the participants engaging in the study so that transparency and credibility of the sample can be ensured. This demographics indicates diversity across gender, age, occupation and the time participants adopted and maintained a vegan lifestyle. The number of participants was guided by Fugard and Potts (2015), who suggested that 10 to 20 participants are typically, adequate to ensure thematic saturation in qualitative studies. The inclusion of individuals with a different occupational background enhances data by embedding the economic realities and time constraints impacting dietary adherence.

Table 3: Participants' Socioeconomic Profile

Class	Income Range in Euros / Month	Participants' Occupation	Participants' Representation	Key Challenges
Lower	< 900	Students, barista, delivery driver, unemployed	P1, P2, P3, P5, P16	Limited access to vegan products, economic strain, reliance on family meals
Middle	900 – 1,500	Marketing assistant, chef, freelancer, nutrition student	P4, P6, P7, P9, P10, P15	Balance between affordability & ethical preferences
Upper	1,800 – 2,500	Lawyer trainee, software developer, entrepreneur, graduate student	P8, P11, P13, P14	Greater access, Higher social acceptance, ethical and

				sustainability motives
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This table emphasizes how participants' socioeconomic background, occupation and key impediments impact their ability to adopt and maintain a vegan lifestyle in Athens. It points out that lower income participants face affordability issues and have limited access to plant – based foods, whereas middle – and upper class individuals demonstrate higher nutritional literacy and stronger environmental and ethical motivations (Ajzen, 2002; Bosnjak, Ajzen & Schmidt, 2020). It shows how cultural expectations and family norms, ingrained in the Mediterranean diet, act as barriers for many young adults , reflecting the influence of subjective norms in the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Markowski & Roxburgh, 2018).

Table 4: Sampling based on TPB Theory

TPB Construct	Sample Variant	Illustrative examples from participants	Analytical Relevance
Attitudes (Behavioural Beliefs)	Ethical, environmental, health concerns	Environmental values, animal welfare beliefs	Positive / negative evaluation of veganism
Subjective Norms (Normative Beliefs)	Family expectations, cultural traditions, peer influence	Parental resistance during family meals, social stigma	Social pressures shaping intention
Perceived Behavioural Control (Control Beliefs)	Economic status, access to vegan food, cooking skills	Limited access to affordable vegan options, culinary illiteracy	Constraints influencing behavioural intention
Behavioural Intention	Motivation	Desire to transition even if there are challenges	Intention and action gap
Actual Behaviour	Lifestyle integration	Consistency	Sustainability of food transition

In this table the suggested analytical framework that will guide the interpretation of empirical data from TPB's perspective is presented. It outlines how TPB's constructs: attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control will utilized during data collection and subsequent analysis, making sure that theoretical alignment with the research questions is achieved (Bosnjak, Ajzen & Schmidt,2020). Each construct goes hand in hand with anticipated sample variants, leading to the representation of expected diversity in participants'

motives, social contexts and practical constraints, founded on current literature on veganism and Sustainability (Markowski & Roxburgh, 2018; McDermott et al., 2015).

### 3.4. Data Analysis

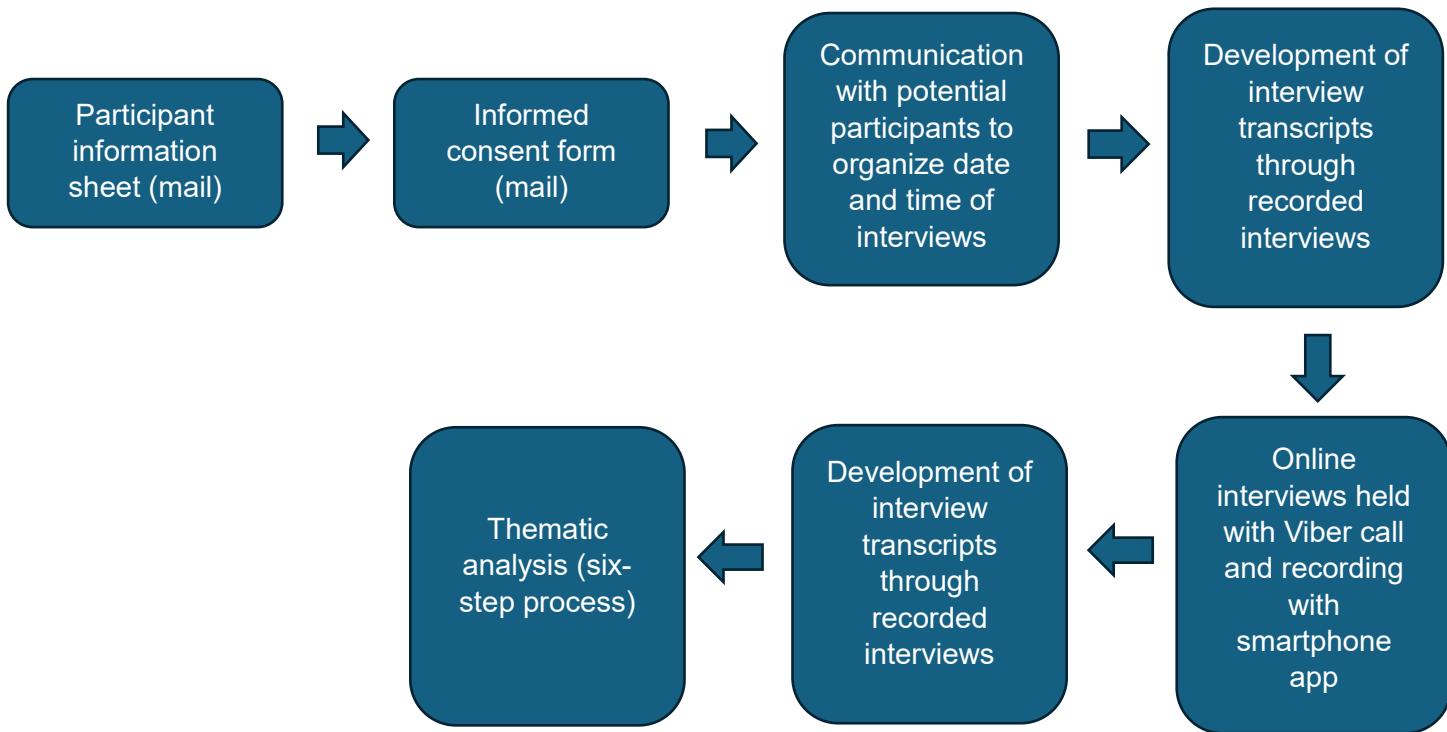
Regarding data analysis, thematic analysis was employed, where a line – by-line coding process was utilized to the collected data from literature review and interviews and themes were recognized (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012). This method was selected, because it gives the ability to researchers to analyse a vast amount of qualitative data in a short time period, through grouping data into sub-themes and themes, based on their common content (Gale & Heath, 2013). Braun and Clarke's six-step process of thematic analysis was followed. In the first step, the researcher got familiarized with the data as much as possible. In the second step, data-coding took place, as a means of identifying content that is relevant to the research aim and objectives. In the third step, initial themes were generated. In the fourth step, themes were reviewed and refined. In this step, theoretical saturation was applied, whereby were reviewed and refined up to the point that the researcher felt that the subject under investigation had been fully examined and there was no more theory to review or develop from research findings (Christou, 2023). In the fifth step, themes were defined and named. Finally, in the sixth theme, themes were written-up, i.e. they were described in the dissertation text, also providing indicative quotes to support their definition (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Reflexivity was applied in analysing and interpreting research findings, in the sense that critical examination of the personal values, experiences and biases of the researcher took place, in order to identify the extent to which they have influenced the interpretation of research findings and eliminate this influence to the maximum possible extent (Byrne, 2021).

### 3.5. Research Process and Ethics

The first six participants were recruited from researcher's personal contacts, thereby somehow also attributing to a convenience sample (Dillman et.al., 2009). The remaining ten participants were members of Vegan Life NGO, a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting veganism in Greece. A representative of the organization was contacted by phone, who in turn communicated with members of the organization, in order to get their approval to provide the researcher with their contact details, so that recruitment takes place. Potential participants were all contacted by phone. For methodological transparency's enhancement, a purposive sampling approach was employed to ensure participants diverse gender, socioeconomic and educational backgrounds representation, following guidelines so as to achieve sufficient depth and variation in qualitative samples (Fugard & Potts, 2015). The final sample consisted of 16 participants a number aligning

with Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2024) suggestions for thematic analysis, whose sample adequacy is determined by data saturation rather than statistical representation. Prior to their participation, research participants were informed about the nature and scope of the research, as well as what their participation would involve. In principle, research participants were sent a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 2), which informed them about the fact that their participation was voluntary, holding the right to withdraw from it at any time and for any reason, even two weeks after their participation. Participants were encouraged to respond only to those questions they felt comfortable with, thereby promoting reflexivity throughout the data gathering process (Olmos – Vega et al., 2023). Their anonymity was kept, since the research was anonymous. Participants were also reassured that their data would be handled with confidentiality and that they were used for academical purposes only. After deciding to participate, participants were also given a consent form to read and sign, through which they verified their participation (Appendix 3). Last but not least, while the qualitative sample size does not aim for representativeness, its purpose was the achievement of theoretical and thematic saturation, as no new insights derived from additional data (Guest et al., 2012; Fugard & Potts, 2015). This procedure ensures the findings credibility and mentions that resulting themes capture the experiences and perceptions of vegan individuals within Athens context. The endorsement of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2024), supplemented by a coding process (Roberts et al., 2019), further strengthens analytical rigour and interpretive validity.

**Figure 1: Research process and parameters**



## CHAPTER 4 – Research Findings

The findings of the thematic analysis that was carried out are provided in Table 2. Based on the thematic analysis, the following main themes were developed: “Decision Making in General”, “Veganism”, “Mediterranean Diet” and “Psychological Factors”. Each of these themes and their sub-themes are analysed in the following sub-sections.

Table 1: Results of thematic analysis

Main Theme	Sub question (SQ)	Main TPB Construct	Thematic Code / Subtheme	Excerpts from the Participant interviews	Interpretation
Veganism	SQ1.What ethical, environmental and health – related beliefs shape young adults’ attitudes toward endorsing a vegan diet in Athens?	Attitude Toward Behaviour	Definition of Veganism	“It’s about eating vegan food” (P1). “It’s a life stance of not hurting animal life.” “Being Vegan means respecting animals and living with what nature gives.” (P3).	Participants view veganism as both a diet and a moral ethical stance blending behavioural and identity – driven beliefs.
			Connection with Sustainability	“Veganism is connected with sustainability”(P4). “It’s the way to sustainability” (P7). “Not everyone sees the link” (P6).	Reflection of a moral reasoning and lifestyle alignment. Evident strong environmental reasoning linking veganism to sustainability

					via literacy levels. Intersects with ecological motives and ethical consumerism.
		Advantages & Disadvantages (Health Dimension)	"It's healthier – low cholesterol, low blood pressure" (P8). "Athletes can perform well as vegans" (P9). "I am concerned about protein and B12 intake" (P5).	Health motives are central; Participants discussed about reduced risks and physical well being however, remaining concerned about nutrition inadequacy challenges.	
Mediterranean Diet	SQ.2 How do family expectations peer influence and cultural traditions impact young adults' decision to transition to a vegan lifestyle?	Subjective Norms / Cultural Impacts.	Cultural Traditions and Diet Identity.	"Greek culture is meat based" (P1). "Mediterranean diet is close to veganism" (P10). "Family culture of eating healthy influenced me" (P12).	Cultural traditions, particularly Greek Food customs, inspire and constrain veganism. Some interpretations present

					Mediterranean habits as stepping stones toward the adoption of plant – based diets.
		Social Interaction Difficulties	“It’s hard to go out; limited vegan options” (P6). “People question why I’m vegan” (P9). “Friends make me explain myself” (P10).	Eating out and social gatherings reveal stigma and limited inclusivity, illustrating how collectivist cultural contexts like that of Greece shape social impediments.	
		Cultural Evolution & Adaptation	“If I followed our culture, I’d eat lamb at Easter” (P7). “Greek culture is changing gradually” (P15)	Participants talked about a slow cultural shift toward sustainability and ethics, proposing cultural negotiation in redefining dietary norms.	
Psychological Factors	SQ.3 To what extent do	Perceived Behavioural	Inner Factors and Motives	“I want to live a healthy life” (P1).	Internal drivers such as

	cooking skills, nutritional literacy and sustainability knowledge enable or impede adopting and maintaining a vegan diet?	Control / Internal Motivation		<p>“I feel good respecting nature” (P5).</p> <p>“Being different motivates me” (P3).</p>	health, self – satisfaction and ethical identity underpin sustained behavioural commitment and perceived self – efficacy.
		Life Values & Ethics		<p>“Being vegan is about respecting life and nature” (P11).</p> <p>“It’s ethical to care for animals and future generations” (P14).</p> <p>“Veganism is a responsible stance” (P15).</p>	Veganism promotes a set of core life values such as responsibility, empathy and balance, supporting the moral dimension of personal identity development.
		Personality & Self Perception		<p>“I’m conscious about the environment” (P1).</p> <p>“I am empathetic; I care about animals” (P8).</p> <p>“I am open to new experiences” (P4).</p>	Personality traits like openness, empathy, and resilience are perceived as enablers of vegan behaviour maintenance.

		Ethics & Responsibility	“Of course it’s a matter of ethics for animals” (P2). “It’s ethical to care about animals and the environment” (P14). “Non – vegans can still be ethical” (P15)	Ethical reasoning backs up self – concept as morally responsible citizens; participants make clear the distinction between ethical action and moral superiority.	

#### 4.1. Factors Influencing Decision Making in General

In this section participants’ general decision – making procedures through the lens of the TPB will be examined. TPB’s determinants: attitudes toward behaviour, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen 1991; 2005) will shed light on participants’ reflection illustrating how psychological evaluation, social context and perceived capability can shape choices before a vegan lifestyle’s adoption. The following analysis is based on a reflexive approach (Braun & Clarke 2006) supplemented by identification patterns across narratives (Guest et al. 2012). In table 2 the findings of the thematic analysis undertaken, are provided. Based on the thematic analysis table the following main themes were emerged: “Decision Making in General”, “Veganism”, “Mediterranean Diet” and “Psychological Factors”. The first subtheme emerging is about general decision factors that are impacting the attitude towards a behaviour. To be more concrete, participants talked about weighing prices, quality, needs and situational urgency before making important decisions. Indicative quotations include statements such as “*Well, it depends, price, quality, stuff like that*” (P1) and “*I look for*

*what I need, I evaluate my alternatives and then I decide”*( P7). Participants shared that they take moral or ethical reasoning when they make choices. One of them said “*I will normally take the most appropriate and ethical decisions, depending on the circumstances*” (P16). Through these occasional references to ethical awareness a moral reasoning behind participants choices is pointed out. As mentioned many times in Ajzen’s (1991;2005) works and Ajzen & Madden (1986), behavioural beliefs and the anticipated outcomes of an act form the attitudinal foundation of intention. In a similar manner, McDermott et al. (2015) proposed that belief strength fluctuates with context and participants ‘remarks confirm that ethical and practical motives coexist in tension. The next subtheme is about social pressures, which are impacted by subjective norms. Participants revealed a mixed influence from both family and peers and social environment. For example, “*Family culture of eating healthy influenced me*”( P12). In addition to that Povey et al. (2001) and D’Souza highlight that social approval or stigma can affect dietary intentions, as indicated in participants’ statements about resistance and conformity. The interplay between resistance and conformity, represented in participants’ narratives, notes that social influence intertwines with personal identity (Bosnjak et al., 2020). In the cultural context participants talked about Greek traditions connecting to subjective norms, such as “*Greek culture is meat based*”(P1) and “*The Mediterranean diet is closer to veganism*” (P10), illustrating that cultural identity and dietary expectations interact with social pressures. Under the third subtheme, which provides information about perceived ease or difficulty, the so called perceived behavioural control, participants evaluated how their perception of a task being easy, manageable or realistic formed their intention before acting. Some of them mentioned that ease or difficulty can affect behaviour differently. Such perceptions about the ease or difficulty when performing a behaviour are conceptualised by Ajzen (2002;2020) as control beliefs. Participants preference for ease reflects perceived behavioural control as a cognitive filter for intention formation. As Fishbein & Cappella (2006) point out in their work, these kind of perceptions affect both confidence in one’s shelf and increased likelihood of performing an action. The final subtheme emerged is about Ethics and Responsibility. Participants made reference to their ethical reasoning as an integral component of their general decision – making process. To many their every day life choices are associated with personal responsibility, social awareness and moral concerns, making clear that even in everyday decisions they make, they bare in mind any potential impacts that their decision may have on others, animals or the environment. Participants’ ethical decision making was the product of their reflection of internalized values and moral awareness rather than seeking social approval. This means that ethical responsibility serves as a motivational and evaluative filter when participants were about to make choices, reflecting Ajzen’s (1991) illustration on attitudinal beliefs rooted in moral and normative considerations. It could be said that participants’ line of thought validates TPB’s theoretical lens of decisions emerging from the interaction of personal evaluation, societal norms and control perceptions. In other words, everyday choices that seem to be spontaneous are in fact the result of structured cognitive assessments according to Ajzen’s (1991, 2005, 2020) suggestions. The findings mentioned above

provide the psychological foundation for further analysis of the mechanisms operating within the decision to transition and maintain a vegan lifestyle.

#### 4.2. Veganism

In this section the first subtheme is an attempt to bestow a definition of veganism, where participants provided two main types of definitions. The first one is veganism as a diet, one where meat, dairy and animal products are excluded (“*It’s about eating vegan food,*” P1). The second one is veganism as a philosophical ethical stand, emphasizing a lifestyle which does not harm animals in any way, respects nature and acts according to moral values (“*Being vegan means respecting animals and living with what nature gives,*” P3). According to Rosenfeld & Burrow (2017) and Gheihman (2021) veganism is reflected upon as both a lifestyle and as a moral identity. Ethical and value driven meanings are marked as behavioural attitudes as mentioned in Ajzen’s (1991, 2005, 2020) Theory of Planned Behaviour. Other participants linked veganism to “thinking vegan”, showing an internalization of moral values, something which aligns with Bosnjak’s et al. (2020) on TPB’s moral expansion. Additionally, this subtheme suggests an identity – based motivation, in where individuals expressed who they are instead of what they consume. These statements indicate that participants view veganism as both a diet and a moral ethical stance, blending behavioural and identity – driven beliefs. The second subtheme is the connection with sustainability meaning that most of the participants interconnected veganism with sustainability because it promotes the reduction of harming animals and environmental impact, the preservation of resources for future generations and the maintenance of natural ecosystems. Several participants established a connection between veganism and environmental protection (“*Veganism is connected with sustainability,*” P4; “*It’s the way to sustainability,*” P7). A small minority though did not see any direct connection (“*Not everyone sees the link,*” P6), suggesting variation in environmental literacy and the different interpretations of sustainability. This point of view about veganism’s perception as producing positive environmental outcomes (Ajzen, 1991;2002) constitutes reflection of attitudinal beliefs within TPB. Such ethical and environmental reasoning aligns with Janssen’s et al. (2016) moral and ecological motives and Beck & Ladwig’s (2020) ethical consumerism. This line of reasoning shows what D’Souza et al. (2022) call as an integration of personal ethics within a collective responsibility. From Participants’ point of view veganism is a sustainable practice itself, correlating with TPB’s concept of favourable outcome expectations. The thematic implication which arose is about sustainability strengthening moral and attitudinal bases for veganism. The third and final subtheme of this section is about veganism’s strengths and weaknesses, whenever health aspects are taken into consideration. Participants unanimously perceived a vegan lifestyle as health positive because of low cholesterol, lower cardiovascular risks and overall wellness (*It’s healthier, low cholesterol, low blood pressure,*” P8). Some participants nevertheless voiced their concerns about adequate nutrient intake, stating about protein, iron and vitamin B12 (“*I am concerned about protein and B12 intake,*” P5). Similar nutritional challenges were identified in Rashid et al. (2020) and Rogerson (2017), who talked

about informed dietary management between vegans. Others expressed their assertiveness that athletes can also perform well on a plant – based diet (“*Athletes can perform well as vegans,*” P9), illustrating that health motives are of great importance, however awareness of nutritional planning is important. Some participants thought that nutritional adequacy can be achieved through knowledge and discipline, showing awareness instead of rejection of these issues (Janssen et al., 2016; Coxon et al., 2023). Fewer participants prioritized ethical or ecological motives over physical health benefits, incorporating wellbeing as part of broader moral responsibility towards animals and the environment (Beck & Ladwig, 2020). Similar to section 4.1 the final subtheme, which emerged is about Ethics and Responsibility. Participants made explicit references to veganism as an issue of moral responsibility and ethical duty (“*Of course it’s a matter of ethics for animals,*” P2; “*It’s ethical to care about animals and the environment,*” P14). Additionally, participants made clarifications that moral awareness does not necessarily show superiority (“*Non – vegans can still be ethical,*” P15), but that veganism is about the representation of a personally chosen responsible stance based on empathy, balance and respect for life. In that case, ethical reasoning serves as a unifying framework connecting personal values, environmental concern and prosocial motivation. From TPB’s lens, this corresponds to attitudinal beliefs and moral norms, which work as an intentional guide and reinforcement of self – concept of responsibility.

### 4.3. Psychological Factors

In this section the psychological aspects impacting vegan behaviour are explored through TPB’s perceived behavioural control and internal motivation. The focus is laid on how internal motives, life values, personality traits and ethical reasoning facilitate or impede veganism’s practice and maintenance. Founded on participants’ interview (P1 – P16) self – efficacy, moral reasoning and self – perception are reflected. As internal drivers participants mentioned health, well – being, and self – satisfaction : “*I want to live a healthy life.*” (P1), “*I feel good respecting nature.*” (P5), “*Being different motivates me.*” (P3). Through these statements it becomes apparent that motivation linked to feeling good, personal discipline, and a sense of autonomy. These ideas are a reflection of what Ajzen (1991; 2005;2020) named as concept of perceived behavioural control confidence and the ability to act on intentions, which determines self – efficacy and intentional strength (Ajzen & Madden, 1986; Fishbein & Cappella 2006). In the second subtheme, which is about life values and ethics, participants associated veganism with moral principles and ethical coherence. The following interview excerpts “*Being vegan is about respecting life and nature.*” (P11), “*It’s ethical to care for animals and future generations.*” (P14) or “*Veganism is a responsible stance.*” (P15) supplement the idea that veganism is viewed as an extension of core values like respect, empathy and responsibility. According to participants’ majority ethical behaviour is seen not as a social trend but rather as a moral obligation. Their interpretation is connected to Ajzen’s attitudinal beliefs and Bosnjak et al. (2020) moral expansion of TPB, which underlines the integration

of moral identity within behavioural intentions. These values tend to be the moral backbone of vegan identity, reinforcing intention stability aligning with D’Souza et al.(2022), who state that ethical awareness links individual choices to a collective moral responsibility. In the third subtheme participants described specific personality traits in association with following a vegan lifestyle. P1 stated that: *“I am conscious about the environment.”* Participant 8 talked about their empathy: *“I am empathetic; I care about animals.”* Whereas P4 shared their openness to new experiences: *“I am open to new experiences”*. As mentioned by the participants behavioural traits like empathy, openness, resilience and conscientiousness were described as facilitators of veganism’s endorsement. Some of the participants linked introversion to reflection and self-discipline, whereas others viewed extroversion as a necessity to defend vegan choices. This diversity of personal characteristics corresponds to the findings of Rosenfeld & Burrow (2017), who identified moral and identity-based self-concept as a crucial element in maintaining vegan practices. In a similar way, Gheihman (2021) put an emphasis on the role of personality and reflective self-perception in sustaining ethical lifestyles. Under the last subtheme that is about ethics and responsibility, participants framed veganism as an ethical responsibility rather than a matter of superiority. The responses, which aligned to this statement are the ones of P2: *“Of course it’s a matter of ethics for animals”*, P14: *“It’s ethical to care about animals and the environment.”* and P15: *“Non vegans can still be ethical.”* From these responses it becomes clear that participants value a respectful coexistence and reject any form of distinction, speciesism or moral elitism. Ethical awareness underpins moral identity and aligns with TPB’s normative component. Ethical awareness underpins moral identity, which aligns with TPB’s normative component (Ajzen,1991; 2002). Ethical behaviour is an affirmation of moral plurality acceptance, in support of Beck and Ladwig’s (2020) argument that ethics, empathy and sustainability are interrelated components of responsible consumer identity.

## CHAPTER 5 - Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings deriving from thematic analysis, resulting from the four themes as presented in table 2. Those include Decision Making in General, Veganism, Mediterranean Diet and Psychological factors. The connection between participants' ideas with Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), which is about attitudes, subjective norms and behavioural control, was established. The results are situated within the scholarly and societal debates regarding veganism, sustainability, ethical consumerism and moral agency, reflecting how moral identity, societal influence and self – efficacy interact in forming vegan lifestyle intentions. Lastly, this chapter explores how individual beliefs, cultural influences and psychological traits can shape a vegan lifestyle's endorsement.

### 5.1 Decision Making in General

Normative beliefs including among others social expectations and pressures emerged as major factors in shaping participants' dietary choices, decisions and habits. They mentioned that decision making is not spontaneous but rather a structured cognitive process. Participants said that general decision factors included price, quality, personal need and situational urgency: "*Well it depends on price, quality, stuff like that*" (P1). Many from the interviewees applied ethical reasoning even to everyday choices: "*I will normally take the most appropriate and ethical decisions, depending on the circumstances*" (P16). Views like that of P 16 confirms Ajzen's (1991; 2005) claim that behavioural beliefs and outcome expectations build the attitudinal foundation of intention. A further issue emerging during the interviews was that of social pressures operated via subjective norms. For instance, strong cultural association between meat consumption and Greek traditions like the one of easter, confirms that behaviour is guided by social approval or disapproval. This revealed in P1 quote: "*Greek culture is meat – based.*" This aligns with TPB's subjective norm construct found in the literature suggesting that social identity and cultural norms are powerful determinants when dietary patterns (Povey et al., 2001; Bosnjak et al., 2020) were discussed. A second area to consider is the dual tension between independence and conformity, where individuals struggle for personal authenticity, while they are expected to conform to communal expectations. Perceived behavioural control emerged through evaluations of ease or difficulty: "*If there is the easy way to do something, I will go like this*" (P7). Statements like the one of P7 showed that participants attempted to balance practical convenience with moral consistency, indicating an internal negotiation between effort and ethics. An additional subtheme emerging from the interviews was that of ethics and responsibility. Everyday decisions are seen as carrying moral weight and social impact. Ethical reasoning provided a motivational and evaluative filter guiding behaviour. These patterns affirmed that decision making results from the interplay among attitudes, social norms and control perceptions, validating TPB. Through the broader societal debate it became evident that there is a need to balance cultural preservation

and ethical modernisation in food practices. From the interviews it became clear that veganism's promotion requires social acceptance and cultural reframing.

## 5.2 Veganism

During the interviews participants defined veganism in two complementary ways. The first one is as a dietary practice excluding animal products. The second one as a philosophical stance against causing harm to animals. According to P3: "*Being vegan means respecting animals and living with what nature gives*". Following this line of thought some of the participants firmly believed that veganism is a lifestyle or moral identity and it is not merely a diet, perspectives lining up with Rosenfeld & Burrow (2017) and Gheihman (2021). Further participants like P4 illustrated veganism's connection with sustainability: "*Veganism is connected with sustainability*". The interviews illustrated divided opinions on veganism's health dimensions. One the one hand, some participants point out veganism's health advantages: "*It's healthier – low cholesterol, low blood pressure*" (P8). Others voiced their concerns about nutritional adequacy in regard to protein, iron, B12, demonstrating nuanced understanding instead of plain rejection (P5). These points of view confirmed Rashid et al (2020) and Rogerson (2017) on nutritional management among vegans. Again Ethics and responsibility appeared as an integrative subtheme in the interviews: "*It's ethical to care about animals and the environment*"(P14). Another interesting point found out in the interviews is participants' rejection of moral elitism: "*Non – vegans can still be ethical*"(P15). This aspect indicated that ethical awareness can act as a unifying framework linking values, environmental concern and moral agency. Such thoughts confirmed TPB's idea about attitudinal beliefs being formed by outcomes 'evaluation (Ajzen, 1991;2005). In a broader academic context the gap between values and action still impedes individuals, meaning that people may hold positive beliefs however, they face difficulty in acting consistently because of external or cognitive barriers. Regarding the societal debate the constant tension between ethical consumption and practical dietary challenges is apparent in contemporary lifestyles.

## 5.3 Mediterranean Diet and Cultural Context

This section investigates how family expectations, peer influence and cultural traditions affect young adults willingness or reluctance to transition from the Mediterranean diet to veganism. It is framed through TPB's subjective norms and cultural determinants (Ajzen 1991; 2005;2020).

In the interviews participants described Greek cultural diet as meat – based, strongly tied to celebrations and religious feasts: "*If I followed our culture, I'd eat lamb for Easter*" (P7). This indicate that dietary traditions function as normative expectations, consistent with Ajzen's (1991) notion of subjective norms having effect on behavioural intentions. De Boer et al. (2014) and Macdiarmid et al. (2016) similarly reveal that strong culinary traditions often act as cultural anchors impeding transitions toward sustainable or plant – based diets.

Some participants argued that Mediterranean diet coincides with veganism, because of its plant – based ingredients like olive oil, fruits and legumes: “*Mediterranean diet is close to veganism*” (P10). This dual perception mirrors cognitive flexibility in evaluating traditional food norms through the lens of sustainability. Studies undertaken by Vinnari & Vinnari (2014) and Mensah (2019) support the noting that Mediterranean diet’s plant – based profile is able to facilitate sustainability transitions when interpreted within ethical framework. Participants viewed food choices not merely as consumption patterns but as extension of identity reverberating Ajzen’s (2005) argument about attitudes being expressions of personal and social meaning. As P12 mentioned: “*Family culture of eating healthy influenced me*”, demonstrating how collective norms can shape personal attitudes through socialization. Hoek et al. (2004) and Janssen et al. (2016) similarly found that individuals in Mediterranean contexts perceive food choices as moral and communal acts of belonging and tradition. Throughout interviews participants expressed their difficulties in social integration when adhering to vegan practices: “*It’s hard to go out; limited vegan options*” (P6); “*People question why I’m vegan*” (P9). The experiences of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> participants reaffirm the pressure of conformity and the fear of social judgement, which Ajzen (1991) identified as key components of subjective norms shaping intentions. Markowski & Roxburgh (2018) highlighted similar stigmatization mechanisms in Mediterranean and family – oriented cultures, where deviation from communal eating is viewed as social distancing. Participants shared that their food choices in collectivist contexts where shared meals are of symbolic importance find themselves in constant internal negotiation between personal ethics and cultural belonging, something that Bosnjak et al name moral identity co existing with normative constraints. Participants reported scarcity of vegan options in restaurants and social gatherings strengthening perceptions of exclusion. This reflects low perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 2002), where situational barriers limit actual adoption despite positive attitudes. Last but not least Aschermann – Witzel et al. (2021) verify that accessibility barriers and lack of market integration hinder consumers in Mediterranean regions from sustaining plant – based diets.

## 5.4 Psychological Factors

This section dives into the psychological aspects impacting vegan behaviour through the constructs of behavioural control and internal motivation (Ajzen, 1991; 2005; 2020). Findings underline how self – efficacy, moral reasoning life values and personality traits influence both the transition and maintenance of vegan practices. During the interviews participants put an emphasis on autonomy and personal discipline in their decision – making: “*I want to live a healthy life.*” (P1); “*I feel good respecting nature.*” (P5); “*Being different motivates me.*” (P3). Their statements revealed confidence in their ability to act upon intentions, an aspect consistent with Ajzen’s (1991; 2005) perceived behavioural control and control beliefs predicting behavioural strength. Factors like motivation linked to well – being and self – satisfaction indicate self – determined behaviour instead of external influence, aligning with Fishbein & Cappella (2006). Moreover, participants

consistently associated veganism with moral integrity and ethical responsibility: “*Being vegan is about respecting life and nature.*” (P11); “*It’s ethical to care for animals and future generations.*” (P14); “*Veganism is a responsible stance.*” (P15). Ethical behaviour was not seen as a social trend but rather than a moral obligation or internal duty. This reflects TPB’s attitudinal beliefs informed by moral reasoning (Ajzen, 1991; 2002) and corresponds to Bosnjak et al. (2020) and D’Souza et al.(2022), who discuss about the integration of moral norms into behavioural intentions. Such internalized ethics forms the moral backbone of vegan identity, strengthening intention stability and behavioural consistency. Several participants linked personality traits to their ability to sustain veganism: “*I am conscious about the environment.*” (P1); “*I am empathetic; I care about animals.*” (P8); “*I am open to new experiences.*” (P4). Personality traits such as empathy, openness and resilience are factors facilitating a transition to a vegan lifestyle. Introversion was linked to reflection and discipline, whereas extroversion to advocacy and confidence in social contexts. These findings supplement Rosenfeld & Burrow (2017) and Gheihman (2021), who argue that self – concept and personality sustain long – term moral lifestyles.

Ethical reasoning was expressed as respectful coexistence and moral plurality, not moral elitism voicing Beck & Ladwig’s (2020) argument that ethics, empathy and sustainability are interconnected aspects of responsible identities. This agrees to TPB’s normative component, where moral awareness serves as an internalised guide for responsible action. Psychological factors interact dynamically to sustain veganism. To be more concrete, perceived control strengthens intention formation, whereas ethical awareness brings forth value coherence and personality traits maintain behavioural resilience. Together these elements form a moral – psychological framework, which is compatible with Ajzen’s Theory of Planned Behaviour, where self – efficacy, moral identity and ethical reasoning strengthens behavioural commitment. Finally, participants’ reflections stipulate that veganism goes beyond dietary preference as it represents a psychological self – concept integrating cognition, emotion and ethics.

## CHAPTER 6 Conclusion:

### 6.1 Thesis Summary

The aim of this thesis was this analysis of the factors that influence individuals' choice to become vegan, as well as how individuals experienced veganism in their daily and social lives. To the objectives belong the identification of internal and external motives driving veganism's adoption, the examination of challenges and social experiences related to being vegan and the derived implications for marketing, social understanding and the promotion of sustainability. The methods employed were literature review and 16 semi – structured interviews conducted with young adults in Athens. The gathered data were analysed through what Braun and Clarke (2006) name Reflexive Thematic analysis. The research carried out was guided by Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour. Four main themes emerged from the analysis, which were Decision Making in General, Veganism, Mediterranean Diet and psychological Factors. Participants shared their ideas on ethical reasoning, environmental sustainability and social pressures showing how attitudinal, social and control factors have the ability to shape vegan behaviour.

### 6.2 Sub – Questions & Answers

The main question that initiated the whole research was: *"What motivates young adults in the city of Athens to adopt a vegan diet, what barriers do they encounter during this transition, and how do their experiences connect to the broader debate on sustainability?".* So as to answer this question three sub questions were formed: **"SQ1: What ethical, environmental and health – related beliefs shape young adults' attitudes toward the endorsement of a vegan diet in Athens?"**. When this question was employed participants expressed that veganism is the consequence of a moral opposition to animal suffering and respect for life (Ajzen 1991; Beck & Ladwig, 2020). They supported the idea that veganism is not only defined as diet but also as a philosophical lifestyle choice rooted in moral identity and empathy. According to the 3<sup>rd</sup> participant: *"Being vegan means respecting animals and living with what nature gives"* (P3). Furthermore, veganism was perceived by the participants as a sustainable lifestyle, which reduces ecological harm and resource exploitation (Janssen et al., 2016). P4 mentioned that: *"Veganism is connected with sustainability"*. Other participants viewed plant – based eating as ethical consumerism agreeing to the notion of collective environmental responsibility (D'Souza et al., 2022). A further aspect is that participants associated veganism with positive health outcomes like lower cholesterol, lower blood pressure. Nonetheless, some expressed their concerns about protein, iron and vitamin B12, indicating awareness of nutritional balance (Rogerson, 2017; Rashid et al., 2020). Health motives intertwined with ethical awareness leading to a holistic motivation for veganism. Their point of view according to Ajzen's (2005) TPB falls under attitudes towards veganism embedding moral reasoning ecological responsibility and moral well-being, reaffirming the attitudinal component. Moving on to **"SQ2: How do family expectations, peer influence and cultural traditions**

**impact young adults' decision to transition to a vegan lifestyle?",** participants acknowledged Greek culinary traditions as both barriers and stepping stones toward veganism. Some participants like P1 and P10 shared their insights: "*Greek culture is meat – based*" (P1), an aspect in contrast to the P10: "*Mediterranean diet is close to veganism*". This duality in shared ideas reflects subjective norms under TPB's theoretical lens balancing conformity and moral independence (Ajzen & Madden, 19886). According to P 9 vegans often experience societal stigma, limited food options and peer judgement: "*People question why I'm vegan*" (P9). Such pressure can undermine behavioural intention and lead to social fatigue, when maintaining vegan practices (Povey et al., 2001; Markowski & Roxburgh, 2018). Even though, there are many difficulties participants observed gradual change in Greece toward ethical and sustainable eating: "*Greek culture is changing gradually*" (P15). This reflects a change in subjective norms and some level of cultural flexibility, as societies renegotiate food identity within sustainability debates (Bosnjak et al., 2020). In other words, social and cultural pressures strongly shape TPB's subjective norm dimension, whereas traditional expectations impede veganism, rising ethical awareness encourages cultural adaptation toward sustainability. Last but not least, **"SQ3: To what extent do cooking skills, nutritional literacy and knowledge of sustainability impacts enable or impede young adults' ability to adopt and maintain a vegan diet?"**. Vegans reported barriers in ease of access, cooking confidence and product variety. However, strong self-efficacy and ethical motivation enabled behavioural consistency (Ajzen, 2002; Fishbein & Cappella, 2006). Participants described inner motives such as self – satisfaction, discipline and feeling good about respecting nature (P5). Motivation linked to autonomy and control, validating TPB's concept of perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 2020). Participants connected veganism to empathy, balance and responsibility: "*It's ethical to care for animals and future generations,*" P14). Ethical coherence reinforces intention stability and long term commitment (Bosnjak et al., 2020). Traits such as openness, resilience and conscientiousness supported sustain vegan behaviour (Rosenfeld & Burrow, 2017; Coxon et al., 2023). Participants saw veganism as a responsible moral choice, not moral superiority. As P 15 mentioned: "*Non – vegans can still be ethical*". Ethical reasoning serves as self – regulatory mechanism translating moral norms in to everyday actions (Beck & Ladwig, 2020). Internal motivation, moral identity and perceived control together empower vegan behaviour, fulfilling TPB's third, which is about control beliefs.

### 6.3 Answer to Main Research Question

At this point, this thesis will attempt to provide a concrete answer to the main research question, the backbone on which the whole research is founded: "*What motivates young adults in the city of Athens to adopt a vegan diet, what barriers do they encounter during this transition, and how do their experiences connect to the broader debate on sustainability?*". A potential answer to this question could be that the choice to transition to veganism depends on multiple factors that are shaped by attitudinal beliefs such as ethical reasoning, health,

sustainability, subjective norms like cultural identity, family expectations, peer influence and perceived behavioural control including self – efficacy, nutritional literacy and internal motivation. Ethics and sustainability form the moral foundation driving veganism, supplemented by psychological self – concept and social meaning. Additionally, cultural traditions can either hinder or facilitate transition, because they anchor dietary identity but can evolve toward plant – based norms. Moreover, psychological factors like empathy, openness and reflective identity sustain behavioural consistency. Lastly, veganism works as both an individual moral framework and a collective social movement advocating for environmental and animal welfare. These dynamics corroborate Ajzen's Theory of Planned behaviour signalling that veganism arises from the interplay of personal evaluation, societal influence and perceived capacity of acting ethically.

#### 6.4 Limitations & Recommendations for Future research

This Thesis acknowledges the fact there were certain limitations while research was been conducted. Firstly, there was a small qualitative sample ( $n = 16$ ) limiting generalizations. Secondly, the findings are context – bound to the city of Athens, reflecting specific socio – cultural dynamics. The interpretation inherent in thematic analysis introduces potential subjectivity (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which can lead to biases. This problem could be tackled by the application of quantitative or cross – cultural methods to broaden validity. It would be advisable to conduct comparative studies between vegans and non – vegans in order to explore different ethical reasonings and behavioural predictors. A further recommendation would be to examine cross – cultural contrasts in vegan adoption within Mediterranean and non-Mediterranean contexts (De Boer et al.,2014). Another suggestion would be to test psychological traits and moral identity as predictors of vegan sustainability commitment (Bosnjak et al., 2020). An interesting aspect would be to examine how media representation and social stigma can act as moderating factors in the development of a vegan identity (Markowski & Roxburgh,2018). Finally, to conduct long term studies applying TPB informed interventions to assess how individuals 'intentions and behaviours toward veganism evolve and remain stable over time (Ajzen & Madden, 1986).

#### 6.5 Concluding Remarks

Veganism displays a moral and psychological transformation and not just a dietary change. It's roots are to be found in ethical values, sustainability consciousness and personal identity coherence. In spite of cultural and societal impediments, inner motivation and moral reasoning provide the psychological strength to withstand challenges while simultaneously sustaining a vegan behaviour. The understanding of veganism through the Theory of Planned Behaviour offers insights into how attitudes, norms and control perceptions merge into intentional action. For it's promotion it is important to acknowledge it's ethical, cultural and emotional dimensions, putting an emphasis on respect inclusion and authenticity. Ultimately veganism contributes to sustainability, empathy and ethical awareness because of values crucial for shaping a more responsible and compassionate society.

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## Appendices

My thesis, with the title “Veganism, Motives, Practices & Potential Hardships Following a Novice Choice”, is about the examination of the factors, which motivate individuals, especially young people in Athens to adopt veganism as a lifestyle, as well as the barriers they have to face during their transition. Through the exploration of their motives and challenges , the study attempts to provide a deeper insight into how personal, social and structural factors can impact sustainable dietary practices. This research will contribute to broader academic discussions and policy debates on Sustainability and particularly in regard to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2 and 12. The second (SDG) is about Zero Hunger and the twelfth is about Responsible Consumption and Production. It brings into attention how plant – based diets can create a more ethical, environmentally responsible, and socially conscious food system.



## Appendix 1 – Interview Guide

### Section A: General Decision – Making & the Theory of Planned Behaviour

- When making everyday decisions, which factors do you usually take into account?
- How do social pressures or others' decisions impact your decision – making process?
- How does perceived ease or difficulty of performing a certain action affect your choices?
- Can you mention a time when you made a decision based on whether you felt ready or able to carry it out?

### Section B: Attitude Towards Veganism

- How would you define veganism as a concept?
- What were your main reasons or motivations for thinking to adopt a vegan diet?
- In your opinion, what are the health – related benefits or risks when choosing to follow a vegan diet?
- How do ethical concerns, such as animal welfare or environmental protection, influence your perception about veganism?
- Do you think veganism as only a food choice or as broader lifestyle or philosophy reflection?
- What do you think is the connection between veganism and sustainability?

### Section C: Subjective Norms and Social Influences

- How do your Family's traditions or expectations influence your diet?
- What is your friends' and peers' reaction to your vegan lifestyle?
- Have you ever experienced social stigma, pressure, criticism or support in regard to your dietary choices?
- How do cultural values and tradition in Greece, such as celebrations or holidays, affect you when following a vegan diet?
- Do you think that veganism challenges or can be incorporated within Greek cultural identity?

### Section D: Perceived Behavioral Control and Practical Barriers

- How easy or difficult is maintaining a vegan diet in Athens?
- What are the challenges or barriers you encounter when attempting to follow a vegan diet (availability, convenience, costs)?
- How confident you feel in your capability to prepare and cook vegan meals?
- How knowledgeable do you feel about nutrition and how to meet your dietary needs as a vegan?
- How does your awareness of sustainability issues influence your daily food choices?

### Section E: Closing Remarks & Reflections

- How does your decision or consideration to adopt a vegan diet affect your lifestyle, relationships, and sense of identity?
- What piece of advice would you share with other young people in Athens who are thinking about a vegan lifestyle?

## Appendix 2 – Participant Information Sheet

**Research Study Title:** Veganism: Motives, Practices & Potential Hardships Following a Novice Choice.

**Name of Researcher:** Spyridon Kapralos (Student ID i6196104)

**Research Supervisor:** Dr. Francesca Forno

### **Purpose of the Study:**

My name is Spyridon Kapralos and I am inviting you to participate in a study that forms part of my degree for the Msc in Sustainability Science, Policy & Society at Maastricht University.

The aim of this study is to explore the motives, practices and potential challenges that young adults dwelling in the city of Athens, Greece, experience when they adopt and maintain a vegan lifestyle. My thesis attempts to contribute to academic discussions on sustainable food systems, ethical consumption and the social psychology of dietary transitions. Before agreeing to participate, it is essential that you understand the purpose, nature of the research, and what your involvement entails. Please read this information carefully and feel free to contact me if anything is unclear or if you need more information. My contact details are provided at the end of this sheet.

### **What Do I Need to Do?**

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete participate in a personal interview, which is expected to take approximately 45 minutes. The interview will be conducted online either via Whats App, Viber or Zoom. The interview will be audio recorded with your permission to ensure the accuracy of collected data. Afterwards the recordings will be transcribed and anonymized. In other words, your personal details like name will be substituted with a participant code (P1 – P16). Your participation is completely voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without any consequences.

### **Potential Risks and Benefits:**

There are no direct risks associated with participating in this research. Nonetheless, some of the questions may reflect on personal experiences or beliefs. Should you feel discomfort at any point, you can either skip the question or withdraw from the study at any point.. By participating, you will contribute valuable data to understanding how individuals experience veganism in the society, as well as how these insights can support sustainability and ethical food policy development.

**Anonymity and Confidentiality:**

All data collected will be handled with confidentiality according to the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDR) and standards set by Maastricht University personal data policy. The responses will be used solely for the purpose of this research and will be permanently deleted after five years after the study's completion.

**Use of Research Results:**

The findings from this study will form the basis of a Master's dissertation. Anonymized data and quotes may be used in the dissertation, academic presentations, conferences, or publications, but no identifying information will be included.

**Withdrawing from the Study:**

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time during the survey without providing a reason. After completing the survey, you will have two weeks to decide if you want to withdraw your data. If you choose to withdraw, please email me with your participant number, and your data will be removed.

**Contact for Further Information:**

If you have any questions about the study or would like further clarification, please email [s.kapralos@student.unimaas.nl](mailto:s.kapralos@student.unimaas.nl), +31610010407.

For concerns about the study or the conduct of the researcher, please contact:

Research Supervisor: Dr. Francesca Forno [francesca.forno@unitn.it](mailto:francesca.forno@unitn.it)

**What Happens Next?**

If you are willing to participate you will be asked to review and sign a Consent Form confirming that you have read and understood this information. Once your consent is provided, the interview will be scheduled at a mutually agreed time.

## Appendix 3 – Consent Form

Interview Consent form  
Maastricht Sustainability Institute – Maastricht University



I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by **Spyridon Kapralos** (student number: **i6196104**, contact information: **s.kapralos@student.maastrichtuniversity.nl, +31 610010407**) for the thesis project **“Veganism: Motives, Practices & Potential Hardships Following a Novice Choice.”** This thesis is the final work of the Master’s Programme **“Sustainability Science, Policy and Society”** at the **Maastricht Sustainability Institute (MSI), Maastricht University, The Netherlands.**

The thesis aims to **explore the motives, practices, and potential challenges experienced by young adults living in Athens, Greece, when adopting and maintaining a vegan lifestyle.**

**Research Supervisor:**

**Dr. Francesca Forno**, Maastricht University

I understand that:

Ye	No
s	

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I will not be paid for my participation   and I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

2. I have the right to decline to answer any question. Until the moment of publication   I can always withdraw my participation in this research without providing any reasons.

3. The interview will be recorded (audio-taped). The recordings will only be used by the researcher(s) to re-listen and transcribe the interview. The recording can be stopped at any moment upon my request.

4. The project is designed to gather information for academic purposes and the above-mentioned project only.

5. The researcher will not identify me by name in any publication using information obtained from this study, and my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure.

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6. Data collected for this study become property of the Maastricht Sustainability   Institute, and will not be shared with external parties. Personal information

collected about me that can identify me, such as [e.g. my name or where I live], will not be shared beyond the study team.

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7. Data (transcripts and recordings) will be stored with care and no longer than is necessary for the research. For study programs, raw data needs to be retrievable for 5 years (as a quality assurance measurement).

8. Maastricht University stores data in secured digital folders. In the unlikely event of a data breach involving your data, the researcher is obliged to inform you. In the case of data loss, the researcher commits her/himself to inform you about the loss and all details about the loss (i.e. what data has been lost, where and under what conditions/ circumstances).

9. I can request to see data collected on me at any time.

10. There are no known risks associated with participation in this study.

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11. I agree that my information can be quoted in research outputs

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*Name, signature, date & location*

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**Participant**

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Name of participant

Signature

Date and location

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**Researcher**

I did my best to ensure that the participant understands to what he/ she is freely consenting, I gave the participant the opportunity to ask questions and I confirm that the participant has given consent freely.

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Researcher name Spyridon Kapralos

Signature

Date and location