

# A Case Study About Australian Adolescents' Food Consumption and Psychology Changed to Health Food in The Post-pandemic Era

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**Abstract:** This essay explores the impact of the pandemic on the Australian adolescent obesity issue and the vegan food industry. Due to the pandemic, the delivery business has thrived, and people have become more aware of the importance of health, leading to an increase in the number of consumers interested in vegan food. The essay investigates how vegan companies can improve their business in the post-pandemic era by understanding consumer behaviour and attitudes. The study will focus on consumer psychology and explore how vegan companies can better meet their needs to improve their business.

**Keywords:** Consumer Behaviour, Consumer Psychology, Marketing.

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## 1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted our lives, including our health and well-being. As people worldwide try to adjust to a new way of life, there has been a growing interest in redefining wellness. In response, the health food industry has seen an increase in demand for healthier and more sustainable products and has started to focus on developing innovative products that cater to these needs, such as plant-based alternatives, organic snacks, and sustainable packaging. However, there are still challenges to overcome, including the need for better education and awareness among consumers and the importance of effective communication strategies to convey the value of these products. This case study explores how Australian adolescents have responded to this shift in consumer behaviour and how the health food industry has adapted to meet their changing needs. Through interviews with three target consumers, the author examines the critical issues faced by the industry and provides recommendations based on marketing mix strategies.

## 2. Organization of the Text

### 2.1. Problem background and statement

Nowadays, teenagers' obesity issue is a growing concern in society. Especially in Australia, the proportion of overweight children and adolescents has been rising since 1995, accounting for 41% in 2018 [1]. In addition, with all the media and marketplace emphasis on the growing obesity epidemic, consumers are becoming increasingly diet conscious [2]. Moreover, during the pandemic, more and more people have started to realize the importance of health. They have changed their eating preference to reduce the risk of infecting the virus. Besides, the development of the delivery APP allowed people to have more alternatives, which also motivated them to consume vegan products. Thus, to reduce childhood obesity and stay healthy, vegan food consumption has become a trend in the post-pandemic era.

### 2.2. Secondary findings

To better understand changing consumer behaviour, the author will use secondary resources, including academic articles, news, and industry reports, to analyse the opportunities and threats among consumers and the industry in the post-pandemic era.

The pandemic not only causes harm to people's physical health but also has a profound impact on the obesity problem of adolescents because of junk food [3]. Rising adolescent obesity rates draw worldwide attention. Thus, Australian corporations respond by helping consumer shift their value to green food [4]. Introducing relevant policies will become an advantage for the health food industry. To meet consumers' multiple demands and alter adolescents' attitudes toward junk food, many large companies are shifting to vegan products, including the fast-food industry, like Burger King, which has added up to 6 types of vegan burger options [5].

From the consumer's perspective, as the pandemic has thrived, the delivery business gives them more opportunities to order various foods online. Nevertheless, vegan food consumers will focus more on food quality than fast-food consumption. Risk perceptions influence health behaviours associated with dietary and nutritional issues [6]. Thus, if a consumer can identify a restaurant that provides excellent food quality, it is also a threat. The quality of products in the vegetarian industry is hard to guarantee, which will not only give consumers confidence in vegetarian food but also harm the entire industry. Another reason is that veganism is commonly perceived as laborious and more complicated to cook [7]. Based on this reason, restaurants may sell substandard food to save costs. Therefore, whether the company can be trusted by consumers and establish a good reputation will become a big challenge for the vegetarian industry.

Cooper's team [8] indicates that the three main drivers for vegan food choices are ethical, personal health, and environmental. During the pandemic, people are motivated to consume more healthy food to reduce the risk of infecting the

virus. Thus, vegan food consumption is becoming a trend in the post-pandemic world. Besides, adolescents' brief perception of food is aligned with social dietary recommendations [9], followed by a standard learning hierarchy. Thus, the healthy food industry can quickly cultivate teenagers' consumption of vegetarian food through online information such as advertisements.

Although changing adolescents' attitudes is relatively easy to implement, the cost will become an issue worth pondering. Except for the advertisements, the cost of raw materials for making vegan food is also huge. However, the research also shows that customers consider price one of two critical factors affecting customer satisfaction [10]. However, adolescents acknowledged that discretionary food should be consumed rarely and in moderation; their self-reported consumption

practices often contradicted this notion [9]. Thus, it will be a big challenge for the health food industry to keep costs down while delivering exemplary service and food quality.

### 2.3. Primary findings from one interview

In this section, the author Wang and Hou conducted a questionnaire-based study to investigate the attitudes of four Australian adolescents (aged 15 to 19) toward healthy food. The interviewees included high school and college students from diverse educational backgrounds to study their perceptions of vegan products. The questions and responses are listed in the appendix. Based on consumer psychology, attitude, and motivation theory, the author designed ten survey questions to understand how consumer attitudes are formed and changed.

**Table 1.** Interview Questions

Question 1: What factors do you think can affect adolescents' obesity?
Question 2: How often do you eat vegan products?
Question 3: What are the factors that motivate you to choose vegan food?
Question 4: What do you think of vegan food under the pandemic?
Question 5: How did you learn about vegan products?
Question 6: Why (not) do you choose vegan food?
Question 7: How do you choose vegan products?
Question 8: Why (not) you think vegan food is a trend in the post-pandemic world?
Question 9: How do you find information about vegan products?
Question 10: How likely you would recommend vegan food to your family or friend?

**Table 2.** Interview Responses

Interviewee	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Question 6	Question 7	Question 8	Question 9	Question 10
Justina	(1)More fast foods (2)low self-esteem (3) less exercise	Once per month	Health related.	Through some article, it writes about the vegan food can decrease the risk of pandemic. If people want their health and decrease the risk, they will choose to eat vegan food. I think more people will eat vegan food during the pandemic to keep their health.	Read the news and website, through family	First, consider about the animal. Sometimes just don't want to eat meat. Second, health related. Nowadays, we prefer to eat fast and convenience food. Vegan is good for diet.	Brands: By Nature, Wildly Good Quality: the taste of the food	Yes, vegan food can be a trend in the post-pandemic world. People want to keep their health also more young people are care about their body shape. young people are willing to go to gym and control their diet. Vegan is good to doing diet for them.	(1)News (2)online	7/10, everyone should try vegan food. In people's stereotype, they will think vegan food is lack of quality and taste. However, in this decade, there is diversity product of vegan food. Also, you will not expect this food is for vegan because of the taste.
Jack	I think that a major factor is the parents. A lot of the time children only eat what is given to them by their parents and if they aren't provided healthy food often they continue with the unhealthy diet their parents provided them in childhood into their adulthood	I'll sometimes have vegan products with dinners and as sides for meals	I'll sometimes have vegan products with dinners and as sides for meals	I think that vegan food was probably easier to access during the pandemic and cheaper than meat products	My mum sometimes cooked with vegan products so I learnt about it through her	Most of the meals we have contain some sort of veggie or fruit so we often include vegan food in our meals	Usually we will have something green like green beans or broccoli with dinner and maybe a potato. And for lunches we always have fruits so any kind of fruit as long as it's in date and tastes good we will eat it	I feel that more people are including vegan food in normal meals but I don't think that many are fully vegan as it is very hard to make that transition	(1) internet (2)coles or Woolworths website	I would recommend my friends to include vegan veggies and fruits in most of their meals as it is good for them
Daisy	fast-food restaurants lead to a unhealthy diet	never, but will eat fruits	Meat are expensive	Pandemic never change my attitude towards vegan food, balance diet is more important	online articles	I think a meal without meat is unhealthy as well	nutrition, texture, and the price shouldn't too high	No, I think most people still eat meat, but may consume more on vegetables	(1)websites (2) Books	never, I will recommend balance diet
Wen	(1) Eating habits (2) Mood and stress (3) Exercise frequency	six per month	The religion of culture	Because of the epidemic, more people pay attention to health and life safety. So many people choose to increase their vegetarian intake.	online videos	I am very fond of meat and the business pyramid shows that meat intake is necessary.	Choose vegetables that I like to eat.	During the post-pandemic era, when there was a pandemic scare about raw meat carrying the virus, ingredients were chosen more carefully in some regions.	(1)social media (2)instagram (3) coles and woolworth brochures	6/10 to encourage my family to have a better eating habit

According to the results, university students believe that social factors, including the high density of fast-food restaurants in significant cities, cause adolescent obesity. On the other hand, high school student Jack stated that "parents are the most important factor that affects adolescents' obesity." Moreover, they also believe that a lack of exercise is an essential personal factor. Although most interviewees still cannot fully embrace vegan meals, they have increased their vegetarian intake because of the pandemic. They believe that people have started to care more about healthy lifestyles, and the price of vegan products is more competitive than meat. As most consumers are price-sensitive, companies should consider setting lower prices to attract more consumers. This finding gives the health food industry a new angle to promote its products.

When asked how they learned and gathered information about vegan products, most interviewees said they usually learned from online advertisements. In addition, some of them also learned from their parents or through the promotion of supermarkets like Coles or Woolworth's brochures. According to the responses, the health food industry can focus more on online promotion to identify potential consumers. Moreover, most interviewees believe that during the pandemic, vegan products will become a trend as raw meat is more likely to contain viruses, and the price of meat is higher than veggies. Therefore, promoting vegan food can align with a healthier lifestyle, with less chance of virus exposure.

Lastly, most interviewees are willing to recommend vegan food to their friends and parents as they believe it suits their health. Some also think that a balanced diet is essential, as Wen said, "I cannot accept a meal without meat."

In summary, the results show that Australian adolescents' attitudes towards vegan food are mainly affected by social factors. The pandemic has made them realize the importance of a healthy lifestyle and consider obesity a significant issue in society. Thus, the health food industry will have more opportunities to capture the market in the post-pandemic world.

#### **2.4. Analysis of problem with consumer behaviour theory**

In this section, the authors will mainly use consumer psychology theories to explain the issues that both consumers and the industry may encounter, and the authors will give further recommendations in the recommendation section based on the identified insights as follows.

Consumer psychology can help us determine what factors influence consumers to choose a product. Thus, having a deeper understanding of this theory can help the consumer avoid impulse shopping and help the industry to make specific strategies. Based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, people will focus more on self-actualization than the most basic needs in the post-pandemic world. Nowadays, millions of consumers sleepwalk through a fog of impulses, habits, addictions, and decision biases (Bahl et al., 2016). Thus, companies can use their buying habits to find more potential customers.

Behavioural learning theories assume that learning occurs due to responses to external events. In society, the outer environment alters adolescents' consumption patterns through the stimuli of obesity and viruses. According to the survey, adolescents responded to the situation because they have learned from the news or online videos that healthy food can

help improve immunity; based on this operant conditioning, they are willing to consume vegan products.

The pandemic is the most significant external stimulus to affect consumer consumption patterns. As the theory does not focus on internal thought processes, we can see the response from consumers. Under the pandemic, people are more likely to be motivated to choose vegan products. Due to the information search bias, consumers can only access limited resources, and the marketer can develop more customers through the difference in information. With the limited information, consumers may have lower confidence in vegan products, especially for those price-sensitive customers who may choose lower quality products due to the low price and become disappointed. Therefore, learning consumer psychology is helpful for marketers to design specific strategies and solve dilemmas.

Social factors are essential in encouraging adolescents' consumption behaviour [11]. The social factors can be divided into two parts: involvement and motivation. As the pandemic thrives on the development of social media, social stimulus becomes an essential tool for firms to promote their products. However, capturing the value focus of customers is an essential issue in this fast-paced era, especially for adolescents. The fundamental requirement is whether the industry can find out consumers' inherent needs, values, and interests to create high involvement in them.

To create positive motivation for customers to choose vegan products, which is vital to understanding why consumers do what they do, marketers can differentiate motivations based on their level of involvement. Low-involvement purchases can create tension to drive future purchase behaviours but cultivate higher loyalty for those high-involvement customers.

To summarize, based on Behavioural learning theories, outer environment stimuli are pandemic and obesity issues, which have influenced adolescents' attitudes toward vegan products. Consumers' behaviour is affected by operant conditioning through social influence. According to the above findings, the health food industry should consider consumer involvement and motivation more.

#### **2.5. Strategic marketing mix recommendations**

In this section, the author will provide three strategic marketing mix recommendations to the health food industry to help them better understand consumers' demands and improve their business activities.

The first recommendation emphasizes the significance of transparency in the food industry, particularly regarding vegan food products. As more people adopt a vegan lifestyle, the demand for vegan food products has increased significantly. However, consumers might have concerns about the quality of such products, which can negatively impact their trust and confidence. Recent research has shown that a food safety crisis can lead to stronger negative emotions than a non-food product crisis, which can erode consumer trust [12]. Therefore, companies must ensure transparency by providing detailed information about the ingredients used in their products and the production process. This can help build customer trust and improve their confidence in the product. In addition to displaying ingredient lists and providing more information on the production process, companies can also consider obtaining certifications from reputable organizations to demonstrate the quality and safety of their products. By

taking these steps, companies can enhance their relationship with existing customers and attract new ones who prioritize transparency and quality in the products they purchase.

The second recommendation is related to pricing. Most consumers are price-sensitive, and a reasonable price strategy can help the industry grow. High-priced products may be more readily accepted if labelled with quality logos [13], which can create a positive attitude among consumers. Another way to achieve this is by placing quality logos on high-priced products, which can create a positive perception among consumers. Quality logos act as a stamp of approval and indicate that the product has been tested and verified to meet specific standards. This assurance can alleviate consumers' concerns about the product's price and encourage them to purchase. Another way to approach pricing is by varying it based on customer preferences. For instance, companies can use a low-price strategy to attract new customers and set higher prices for loyal customers who value the product's quality. This approach can help build customer loyalty and increase the chances of repeat purchases.

The third recommendation is related to promotion. Many potential consumers may think vegetarian food could taste better, which may deter them from trying it. Research shows that meat eaters are likelier to choose a menu with 75% vegetarian items [14]. Therefore, restaurants and physical stores can update their menu with more vegan products or highlight them to attract consumers' attention. Adolescents are also more influenced by social stimuli like dietary recommendations [15]. Thus, health food companies can use online advertisements to promote their products, mainly through well-known KOLs.

### 3. Conclusion

In conclusion, Australian adolescents can benefit from the health food industry implementing these three strategic marketing mix recommendations: transparency in the food industry, pricing strategies, and promotion. Health food companies can build trust and confidence in their brand among young consumers by providing more information about the ingredients used in their products and the production process. By using quality logos, companies can assure adolescents that the product's price is worth the investment in their health. Finally, promoting vegan products through updated menus and online advertisements can attract new adolescent customers and build customer loyalty. By considering these recommendations, the health food industry can better understand the demands of young consumers and improve their business activities to meet their needs.

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