

Plant-Based versus Vegan Labels: The Role of Perceived Restrictiveness in Sustainable Food Choices

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Abstract

As environmental challenges increase, promoting sustainable food choices has become crucial, and growing polarization around this topic highlights the need for effective communication strategies. This research examines whether identical products are evaluated differently when labeled vegan versus plant-based and whether perceived restrictiveness explains this difference. Across two online experiments, we replicate findings that purchase intention is lower for products labeled vegan compared to plant-based. We further identify perceived restrictiveness as the mechanism behind this effect: vegan labels are viewed as more restrictive, resulting in lower purchase intention. These findings align with reactance theory and suggest that negative stereotypes around veganism extend to labels. By identifying perceived restrictiveness as a key psychological driver, this study offers a first step toward understanding how communication may shape responses to sustainable food choices.

Track: Advertising & Marketing Communications