

## Shades of Veg\*nism (and Beyond). A Socio-Cognitive Discourse Analysis of *Dietary* Hate Speech in YouTube Comments

**Abstract:** With growing awareness of health, environmental, and ethical concerns, the rise of veganism has become increasingly prominent on multiple fronts. However, the flourishing of this phenomenon should be understood not only in numerical and commercial terms, but also in terms of its impact on the identity of those who adopt these lifestyles. Within a group characterised by strong internal identification, at the same time, individuals' subjective interpretation and modulation of information can potentially lead to issues of discrimination and othering. By adopting a socio-cognitive discourse studies approach, the paper presents the results of an analysis of a corpus comprising 1,932 comments in response to the YouTube video entitled “Ending the Battle Between Vegans, Vegetarians, and Everyone Else | Brian Kateman | TEDxCUNY” to assess instantiations of hate speech targeting the VEGAN, VEGETARIAN, REDUCETARIAN, and MEAT-EATING groups. Results show that hate speech is predominantly addressed to vegans, that *negative character* is the most common strategy used, and that issues concerning morality and ethics in killing animals underpin the ideologies onto which hatred is modelled.

**Keywords:** *hate speech, social media discourse studies, socio-cognitive discourse studies, veg\*nism, YouTube comments*

### 1. Introduction

With growing awareness of health, environmental, and ethical concerns, the rise of veganism and other alternative eating habits has become increasingly prominent on multiple fronts. Suffice it to say that compared to a decade before, the number of vegans in the UK had increased by 360% in 2016<sup>1</sup> and that in 2021 the figure amounted to approximately 79 million vegans worldwide<sup>2</sup> so that “[t]he global vegan food market is...projected to reach a size of USD 37.5 billion by 2030”.<sup>3</sup> Also, notably, “72% of Gen Z vegans plan to stay that way for at least the next five years”,<sup>4</sup> emphasising a sustained commitment to the vegan lifestyle among younger generations which is a reassuring figure in terms of the growth prospects for the near future. However, the flourishing of this phenomenon should be understood not only in numerical and commercial terms, but also in terms of its impact on the (social) identity of those who adopt these lifestyles and the discrimination coming from other groups. Specifically, being a group characterised by strong internal identification and propensity for activism,<sup>5</sup> vegans might be perceived as more ‘dangerous’ as a minority threatening a majority – the omnivores. Indeed, it has been shown that veg\*ns<sup>6</sup> are “evaluated equivalently to immigrants, asexuals, and atheists, and significantly more

<sup>1</sup> Liana Minassian, “Why the Global Rise in Vegan and Plant-Based Eating is No Fad (30x Increase in US Vegans + Other Astounding Vegan Stats)”, *Food Revolution Network* (2022), [www.foodrevolution.org](http://www.foodrevolution.org).

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Anthony, “From Fringe to Mainstream: How Millions Got a Taste for going Vegan”, *The Guardian*, Sunday 10 October 2021, [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com), accessed 20 April 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Research and Markets, “Global Vegan Food Market Size, Share & Trends Analysis Report 2023-2030: Increasing Social Media Campaigns by Celebrities are Pushing Veganism into the Mainstream”, *Yahoo!Finance* (2023), [www.uk.finance.yahoo.com](http://www.uk.finance.yahoo.com), accessed 20 April 2024.

<sup>4</sup> Christine Zulkosky, “Gen Z, Veganism, and the Future”, *The Food Institute* (2023), [www.foodinstitute.com](http://www.foodinstitute.com).

<sup>5</sup> See: Chelsea Chuck et al., “Awakening to the Politics of Food: Politicized Diet as Social Identity”, *Appetite*, 107 (2016), 425-436; Matthew Feinberg et al., “Understanding the Process of Moralization: How Eating Meat Becomes a Moral Issue”, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 117 (2019), 20-72; Daniel L. Rosenfeld and Anthony L. Burrow, “Development and Validation of the Dietarian Identity Questionnaire: Assessing Self-perceptions of Animal-product Consumption”, *Appetite*, 127 (2018), 182-194.

<sup>6</sup> The expression is meant to include veganism and vegetarianism.

negatively than Blacks”<sup>7</sup> by omnivores, and that they are referred to as deviants, bigots,<sup>8</sup> sentimentalists and hostile extremists.<sup>9</sup> This testifies to the fact that dietary preferences lead to very strong and clear-cut positions against individuals as such, and also raise issues concerning ethnicity, gender and religion. However, this discrimination is not unilaterally experienced by vegans, rather, vegans can also perpetrate such discrimination against other groups. The variety of motivations leading people to adopt a vegan lifestyle<sup>10</sup> underscores the proneness of veganism to personal interpretations which can lead, in turn, to various redefinitions of the concept – in some cases quite major ones – and the emergence of related groups associated with them.<sup>11</sup> Not sticking painstakingly to the vegan norm, these groups might not be necessarily welcomed with open arms by vegans who also generally disapprove of omnivores. It has been noted, indeed, that “the attitudes of veg\*ns toward meat eaters are significantly more negative compared to the attitudes of meat eaters toward veg\*ns”<sup>12</sup> and that “[v]eg\*ns displayed notably negative attitudes towards flexitarians, who may be seen as a group that contaminates the vegetarian ingroup’s purity and morality”.<sup>13</sup> In practice, veg\*ns are discriminated against by omnivores, but at the same time they discriminate against both omnivores and those who partially adopt veg\*nism more than they suffer from it, creating a cycle of discrimination whose root is difficult to identify and therefore difficult to eradicate.

Considering this scenario and the assumption that social media “replicate and perpetuate the social discrimination and inequalities that people already experience in ‘real’ life”,<sup>14</sup> the paper presents the results of an analysis of a corpus comprising 1,932 comments in response to the YouTube video entitled “Ending the Battle Between Vegans, Vegetarians, and Everyone Else | Brian Kateman | TEDxCUNY” adopting a multi-method approach to: i) identify potential instances of hate speech directed towards individuals within four specific groups – VEGAN, VEGETARIAN, REDUCETARIAN, MEAT-EATING; ii) classify these instances according to their degree of intensity; and iii) identify the ideologies that support the instances of hatred. The first research question was addressed through the implementation of the comprehensive six-part *Rabat Threshold Test*;<sup>15</sup> after that, the instances of hate speech were categorised in accordance with Bahador’s *Hate Speech Intensity Scale*;<sup>16</sup> finally, a manual qualitative analysis focusing on the discursive structures revealing underlying ideologies informed by a Socio-Cognitive

<sup>7</sup> Cara C. MacInnis and Gordon Hodson, “It Ain’t Easy Eating Greens: Evidence of Bias toward Vegetarians and Vegans from both Source and Target”, *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 20.6 (2017), 726.

<sup>8</sup> Annie Potts and Jovian Parry, “Vegan Sexuality: Challenging Heteronormative Masculinity through Meat-free Sex”, *Feminism & Psychology*, 20.1 (2010), 53-72.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Cole and Karen Morgan, “Vegaphobia: Derogatory Discourses of Veganism and the Reproduction of Speciesism in UK National Newspapers”, *British Journal of Sociology*, 62.1 (2011), 134-153.

<sup>10</sup> Despite being founded primarily on animal welfare, the main reasons why individuals choose to adopt a vegan diet are ‘health benefits’ (52.1%) and ‘environmental benefits’ (17.1%), with ‘animal welfare’ (‘do not want to eat animal-based products’) ranking third (16.9%), followed by ‘family factors’ (10.7%) and ‘inspiration from influencers’ (3.3%). Liam Gilliver, “Gen Z is Most Likely to go Vegan for their ‘Health’ but Meat Cravings are a ‘Big Barrier’ – Survey Finds”, *Vegan Food & Living* (2023), [www.veganfoodandliving.com](http://www.veganfoodandliving.com).

<sup>11</sup> Micol Forte and Francesco Nacchia, “Vegan or Vegetarian? An Investigation into the Current Usage of the Terms in English, French, Spanish and Italian”, *Rivista Internazionale di Studi Europei*, 1.4 (2015), 50-67.

<sup>12</sup> Sara Pabian et al., “Meating Halfway”: Exploring the Attitudes of Meat Eaters, Veg\*ns, and Occasional Meat Eaters toward Those who Eat Meat and Those who do not Eat Meat”, *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 163.3 (2022), 408.

<sup>13</sup> Sabahat C. Bagci et al., “Intergroup Attitudes between Meat-eaters and Meat-avoiders: The Role of Dietary Ingroup Identification”, *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 25.5 (2022), 1240.

<sup>14</sup> Giuseppe Balirano and Bronwen Hughes, “Fat Chance! Digital Critical Discourse Studies on Discrimination Against Fat People”, in Giuseppe Balirano and Bronwen Hughes, eds., *Homing in on Hate: Critical Discourse Studies of Hate Speech, Discrimination and Inequality in the Digital Age* (Naples: Paolo Loffredo Editore, 2020), 11.

<sup>15</sup> United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, “Threshold Test on Hate Speech Now Available in 32 languages”, *United Nations* (2020), [www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org).

<sup>16</sup> Babak Bahador, “Monitoring Hate Speech and the Limits of Current Definition”, in Christian Strippelet et al., eds., *Challenges and Perspectives of Hate Speech Research* (Berlin: Digital Communication Research, 2023), 291-298.

Discourse Studies (henceforth also SCDS) approach was performed. The outcomes of this study aspire to make a substantive contribution towards evidencing the main forms, delineating the underlying reasons, and elucidating the inherent peril of hatred within and beyond the veg\*n community in social media.

## 2. Theoretical Framework and Key Concepts

In light of the premises above and considering that this study seeks to elucidate power dynamics among different social groups with a specific emphasis on out-group attitudes influenced by ideologies, often resulting in othering and discriminatory practices, from a theoretical standpoint it is grounded in Socio-Cognitive Discourse Studies:<sup>17</sup>

SCDS deals with the ongoing communicative Common Ground and the shared social knowledge as well as the attitudes and ideologies of language users as current participants of the communicative situation and as members of social groups and communities.<sup>18</sup>

SCDS make a crucial step by including a cognitive relationship between discourse and society, whereas most Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) concentrate on defining discourse within its social and political settings. They emphasise the fundamental importance of cognitive representations as well as the fact that many discourse structures can only be fully understood in terms of a variety of cognitive notions:

many properties of words, sentences and discourses cannot be accounted for without at least partial description of properties of underlying mental representations, such as models, knowledge and other forms of social cognition – besides the socioculturally shared knowledge of grammar and discourse genres – of individual language users on the one hand, and of social groups or communities on the other hand.<sup>19</sup>

Within this framework, members of society embody not only social but also discursive structures. This means that they can mentally align to these structures before manifesting them; furthermore, as social actors, they can engage and communicate within ideological groups, sharing perspectives on crucial social issues and contributing to exacerbating polarisations<sup>20</sup> potentially connected to discriminatory practices and hate speech. As concerns this latter concept, although certain common features have arisen over the last several years, hate speech is commonly regarded as a wide, contentious notion with ill-defined boundaries, making a definitive definition difficult to come by. Generally:

hate speech is understood as all types of expression that incite, promote, spread or justify violence, hatred or discrimination against a person or group of persons, or that denigrates them, by reason of their real or attributed personal characteristics or status such as “race”, colour, language, religion, nationality, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, sex, gender identity and sexual orientation.<sup>21</sup>

One attempt to categorise hate speech was made by Bahador<sup>22</sup> who distinguished four typologies of hate speech groups: *immutable characteristics* (traditional hate speech groups); *occupations and industries*;

<sup>17</sup> Henceforth also SCDS.

<sup>18</sup> Teun A. van Dijk, “Socio-Cognitive Discourse Studies”, in John Flowerdew and John E. Richardson, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 28.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>20</sup> Teun A. van Dijk, *Ideology – A Multidisciplinary Approach* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1998).

<sup>21</sup> Recommendation CM/Rec (2022)16 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on Combating Hate Speech (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 20 May 2022 at the 132nd Session of the Committee of Ministers).

<sup>22</sup> Bahador, “Monitoring Hate Speech”, 293.

*countries*; and *others*, which includes other groups of people (such as ‘the elite’) that are generally excluded in traditional definitions. Bahador<sup>23</sup> also designed a *Hate Speech Intensity Scale* comprising six levels – *disagreement*; *negative actions*; *negative character*; *demonising and dehumanising*; *violence*; and *death* – which are accompanied by descriptions and expressions associable with that specific level. The most ‘alarming’ categories are the last three, while the first three categories are understood as ‘early warnings’. In this context, an important tool in the fight against hate speech is the *Rabat Plan of Action*<sup>24</sup> “on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence”<sup>25</sup> which gathers the results of several OHCHR (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) expert workshops. The tool was devised to tackle the issue of incitement to hatred and provide a threshold test for identifying possible cases of hate speech by taking into account six factors: ‘context’; ‘speaker’; ‘intent’; ‘content and form’; ‘extent of the speech act’; and ‘likelihood including imminence’.<sup>26</sup> The last point is particularly interesting and is the one that needs to be investigated further to distinguish “between permissible speech and speech that may amount to incitement”,<sup>27</sup> since an incitement does not have to result in an offence for it to be considered a crime; at the same time, there has to be some recognition of real danger:

even if negative words towards groups such as insults do not constitute hate speech, it is an early warning that should be addressed before it becomes acceptable and builds tolerance for more extreme forms of speech.<sup>28</sup>

Nowadays, one of the most powerful vehicles of hate speech is certainly the Internet, especially considering the increasingly central role that social media play in our lives, to the point where drawing a line between offline and online life is hardly possible. Online social media – which “[p]rovide a means for users to connect with one another”<sup>29</sup> – have made it possible for individuals to produce news and information in addition to consuming it. Despite its democratising nature, however, digital conversations have become dominated by disrespect and rudeness which have contributed to creating a more poisonous set of online behaviour norms and therefore paved the way to unchecked offensive behaviour. In particular, YouTube, the video-sharing platform founded in 2005, is a platform where users can interact through the comments section therefore “provid[ing] a medium for viewers to share their feelings and opinions about the YouTube video and to engage in other kinds of meaning-making”<sup>30</sup> and a multi-level interaction. Like other successful Social Networking Sites, YouTube comments sections have been

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

<sup>24</sup> The UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech also refers to this test. See: Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, “United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech”, *United Nations*, [www.un.org](http://www.un.org).

<sup>25</sup> United Nations, “Threshold Test”.

<sup>26</sup> United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, “OHCHR and Freedom of Expression vs Incitement to Hatred: The Rabat Plan of Action”, *United Nations* (2020), [www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org).

<sup>27</sup> United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, “Opening Remarks by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein at a Press Conference during his Mission to Fiji”, *United Nations* (2018), [www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org).

<sup>28</sup> Bahador, “Monitoring Hate Speech”, 294.

<sup>29</sup> Luke Sloan and Anabel Quan-Haase, *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media Research Methods* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2016), 5.

<sup>30</sup> Michele Zappavigna, “Ambient Affiliation in Comments on YouTube Videos: Communing around Values about ASMR”, *Journal of Foreign Languages*, 44.1 (2021), 23.

described alternatively as sites of swearing,<sup>31</sup> conflict,<sup>32</sup> antagonism,<sup>33</sup> and racialised hostility<sup>34</sup> thus providing fertile ground for this study. Therefore, far from considering YouTube simply as a source of data, a Social Media Critical Discourse Studies (SM-CDS) perspective – whereby “digital discourse [is analysed] from a critical perspective that is technologically aware and socially oriented at the same time”<sup>35</sup> – is adopted.

### 3. Corpus and Method

The corpus is represented by the script and comments extracted from the YouTube video “Ending the Battle Between Vegans, Vegetarians, and Everyone Else | Brian Kateman | TEDxCUNY”,<sup>36</sup> which was selected for analysis as one of the most popular videos concerning reducetarianism, one in which the coiner of the term and co-founder of the practice, describes the concept.

Basically, YouTube comments come in the form of short texts accompanied by the user’s profile picture, username, a timestamp, and the number of likes the comment received. Commenters are allowed to post comments in response to previous comments; these are indented and concealed under the first comment to form a conversation thread. The extraction took place on October 10, 2023, through the *Mozdeh* software. For the purposes of the study, it was considered useful to also extract the script of the video and analyse it in order to better understand the nature of the comments based on the content to which they are addressed. After the extraction phase, the REDU\_PEACE Corpus described in Table 1 below was created:

	REDU_PEACE Corpus	
	<i>Video transcript</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<b>Date</b>	2014	2014-2023
<b>#</b>	1	1,932
<b>Tokens</b>	2483	95,587
<b>Types</b>	764	8,667

Table 1. The REDU-PEACE Corpus

Note that the number of comments decreased from 3,322 at the time of extraction to 1,932. This is due to certain criteria implemented in the extraction process, namely

- elimination of duplicates;
- inclusion of English comments only;
- elimination of comments from the same user.

While the choice of language is justified by the author’s research interest, the other two criteria were set to avoid altering the corpus with potential spam and trolls.

<sup>31</sup> Mart Dynel, “Swearing Methodologically. The Impoliteness of Expletives in Anonymous Commentaries on YouTube”, *Journal of English Studies*, 10 (2012), 25-50.

<sup>32</sup> Patricia Bou-Franch and Pilar Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, “Conflict Management in Massive Polylogues: A Case Study from YouTube”, *Journal of Pragmatics*, 73 (2014), 19-36.

<sup>33</sup> Anthony McCosker, “Trolling as Provocation: YouTube’s Agonistic Publics”, *Convergence*, 20.2 (2014), 201-217.

<sup>34</sup> Dhiraj Murthy and Sanjay Sharma, “Visualizing YouTube’s Comment Space: Online Hostility as a Networked Phenomena”, *New Media & Society*, 21.1 (2019), 191-213.

<sup>35</sup> Eleonora Esposito and Majid Khosravini, “Discourse in the Digital Age: A Critical Introduction”, in Eleonora Esposito and Majid Khosravini, eds., *Discourse in the Digital Age* (New York: Routledge, 2024), 8.

<sup>36</sup> Available at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJtRWFL\\_gw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJtRWFL_gw).

The study's objective is to identify instances of hate speech coming from and/or directed at distinguishable groups, consequently, only comments made by or addressed to individuals who identify with the lifestyle in question were taken into account. Given the difficulty in distinguishing between vegans, vegetarians, reducetarians and meat-eaters – e.g. a straightforward reference to abstaining from meat does not provide sufficient information to ascertain whether one is a vegan or a vegetarian –, the subsequent stage involved the identification of comments containing the keywords related to the four macro-groups of interest: VEGAN (keywords: 'vegan' and 'veganism'), VEGETARIAN ('vegetarian' and 'vegetarianism'), REDUCETARIAN ('reducetarian', 'reducetarianism', 'reducitarian', 'reducitarianism'), and MEAT-EATING, ('meat eater', 'meat-eater', 'meat eating', 'meat-eating' 'omnivorous', 'omnivore', 'omnivorism', 'carnism', 'carnist', 'carnivore').<sup>37</sup> Upon completion of this process, the final REDU\_PEACE comments corpus amounted to 1125 comments in total (see Table 2).<sup>38</sup>

Group	Number of comments
VEGAN	746
VEGETARIAN	227
REDUCETARIAN	157
MEAT-EATING	641

Table 2. Number of comments per group

At this point, the initial analytical step involved a meticulous qualitative manual analysis, following the procedural steps of thematic analysis<sup>39</sup> for getting an understanding of the main themes covered by the video. Then, the comments were analysed manually by triangulating different methods in order to answer the following research questions:

1. Are there potential instances of hate speech directed towards individuals within specific groups?
2. How can these be classified by intensity?
3. Which ideologies underpin hatred?

In order to answer the first research question, the comprehensive six-part *Rabat Threshold Test* was implemented to the set of comments targeting the four groups for the identification of hate instantiations. The second phase was carried out in accordance with Bahador's (2023) *Hate Speech Intensity Scale* through which comments were categorised by intensity; finally, in the third phase the comments containing instances of hate speech were analysed according to a SCDS approach in an attempt to pinpoint the discursive structures revealing the main ideologies associated with hatred. The procedure described here was employed while dealing with a limited corpus in order to ensure transparency and replicability in future studies utilising larger corpora.

### 3.1 (Not Just) Dietary Identities

The purpose of this subsection is to provide the definitions of the four lifestyles covered in the study – vegan(ism), vegetarian(ism), reducetarian(ism) and meat-eat(ing)(er) – in order to provide background

<sup>37</sup> The *Mozdeh* search function is utilised with the inclusion of the conjunction 'or', which returns all comments in which one or the other word appears.

<sup>38</sup> Note that there can be more than one keyword in the same comment, so the final number of comments in the corpus is not the sum of them all.

<sup>39</sup> Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Reflecting on Reflexive Thematic Analysis", *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11.4 (2019), 589-97.

for those less familiar with the subject and allow for a sound interpretation of the results of the subsequent analysis:

- Veganism is a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude – as far as is possible and practicable – all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose; and by extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of animals, humans and the environment. In dietary terms it denotes the practice of dispensing with all products derived wholly or partly from animals.<sup>40</sup>
- Vegetarians don't eat fish, meat or chicken.<sup>41</sup>
- Reducetarianism is the practice of eating less meat – red meat, poultry, and seafood – as well as less dairy and fewer eggs, regardless of the degree or motivation. This concept is appealing because not everyone is willing to follow an "all-or-nothing" diet. However, reducetarianism is still inclusive of vegans, vegetarians, and anyone else who reduces the amount of animal products in their diet. ... Eating fewer animal products reduces your risk of heart disease and certain types of cancers, decreases your carbon footprint and the suffering of farmed animals, and even alleviates the global food and water crises. ... While flexitarians primarily eat plants with the occasional inclusion of meat, eggs, and dairy, reducetarians mindfully and gradually reduce their consumption of these animal products with respect to their own diet.<sup>42</sup>
- [A meat eater is a] person or animal that eats meat.<sup>43</sup>

As the definitions indicate, while vegetarianism represents a distinct dietary practice in itself, veganism encompasses a philosophy that extends to various aspects of an individual's life, prioritising rejection of the commodity status of animals<sup>44</sup> and considering human welfare and environmental concerns as correlated aspects.<sup>45</sup> In practice, being strictly limited to the mere consumption of animal flesh, a vegetarian may identify as such while consuming a meatless sandwich in a fast-food chain that primarily focuses on meat sales. Conversely, a vegan would likely refrain from ordering meatless food from such a restaurant as this would mean indirectly supporting a company that promotes the killing of animals, even without buying meat directly. The common perception of veganism solely in terms of dietary restrictions, namely the abstinence from meat, eggs, and dairy products thus fails to acknowledge the multifaceted nature of veganism. Therefore, while it is appropriate to consider the value of food as a "central [element] to our sense of identity [and how t]he way any given human group eats helps it asserts...both its oneness and otherness of whoever eats differently",<sup>46</sup> it is necessary to consider the role of the driving principle of veganism – animal welfare – and at least two sub-elements integral to its definition – human health and the environment – in order to accurately frame it. Then, the definition of reducetarianism is just as intricate. Indeed, it encompasses all the elements considered by veganism – namely environmental, health and animal-related concerns – while placing less emphasis on the degree of adherence to its norms. Unlike veganism, animal exploitation is still allowed at varying and customisable levels according to one's taste. It should be noted, however, that a distinguishing feature of reducetarianism is its emphasis on reduction, which distinguishes it from other practices, such as flexitarianism. Consequently, according to reducetarian pioneers, individuals who adhere to a vegan or vegetarian diet are to be considered reducetarians at the final stages of the reduction process. Finally,

<sup>40</sup> "Definition of Veganism", *The Vegan Society*, [www.vegansociety.com](http://www.vegansociety.com).

<sup>41</sup> *The Vegetarian Society*, [www.vegsoc.org](http://www.vegsoc.org).

<sup>42</sup> "Faq", *Reducetarian Foundation*, <https://www.reducetarian.org/>

<sup>43</sup> *Collins Dictionary*, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com>.

<sup>44</sup> Helena Pedersen and Vasile Stanescu, "Conclusion: Future Directions for Critical Animal Studies", in Nik Taylor and Richard Twine, eds., *The Rise of Critical Animal Studies: From the Margins to the Centre* (London: Routledge, 2014), 262-276.

<sup>45</sup> Dana Hudepohl, "Why going Vegan is one of the Best Things you can do for the Environment", *Forks Over Knives*, Thursday 6 January 2021), [www.forksoverknives.com](http://www.forksoverknives.com), accessed 20 April 2024.

<sup>46</sup> Claude Fischler, "Food, Self and Identity", *Social Science Information*, 27.2 (1988), 275.

the definition of meat-eating concerns a lifestyle that involves incorporating meat into one’s diet, regardless of the type and quantity. It is important to note that in this context there may be an overlap with reducetarianism, which still includes meat consumption. For this reason, individuals who consume meat are understood to be those who consider eating meat to be an important personal trait,<sup>47</sup> one of the fundamental aspects of their identity,<sup>48</sup> and, of course, those who have not embarked on a reducetarian path.

### 3.2 Research Ethics

Although no explicit consent to partake in this research was received from the commenters, the comments were extracted from an open access Social Networking Site (YouTube), freely accessible by anyone having an Internet connection even without creating a personal account. For this reason, it is considered appropriate to use the posted comments without the explicit consent of the commenters; at the same time, it should be noted that private information such as photo, nationality, nickname, and any other personal information was left out.<sup>49</sup>

## 4. Analysis

In the next subsection (4.1), the results of the thematic analysis of the transcript are presented. The next four subsections (from 4.2 to 4.5) present, instead, the results of the analysis of the comments. The instances of hate speech identified are presented in ascending order of intensity for each group. The classification of hate speech by intensity excludes the first level, namely *disagreement*, being considered of little use for the ideological characterisation of social groups. In the tables, the nouns are presented in the singular form, while the verbs are presented in the base form in order to enhance the accessibility of the work, with the exception of instances where it was deemed appropriate to report words/expressions as written by commenters. In the tables, spelling was corrected where necessary; instead, comments were reported in their original form. Finally, due to the limited space available, only excerpts from relevant comments are shown.

### 4.1 Thematic Analysis of the Transcript

A thematic analysis of the video transcript was conducted as the initial step to identify the content users were responding to. Specifically, it was imperative to comprehend the meaning of ‘peace’ in relation to the definitions of ‘vegan’ and ‘vegetarian’. The following table (Table 3) reports the themes generated.

#	Themes
1.	veg*ns make you feel awkward
2.	avoiding meat is hard because of its unequalled taste
3.	vegans are reducetarians in their last phase
4.	reducing still means making an impact
5.	the word reducetarian is imbued with negative connotations
6.	few people consider themselves 100% veg*ns
7.	meat-free diets are a romantic ideal

<sup>47</sup> Alison J. McAfee et al., “Red Meat Consumption: An Overview of the Risks and Benefits”, *Meat Science*, 84.1 (2010), 1-13.

<sup>48</sup> Lisa F. Clark and Ana-Maria Bogdan, “The Role of Plant-Based Foods in Canadian Diets: A Survey Examining Food Choices, Motivations and Dietary Identity”, *Journal of Food Products Marketing* 25.4 (2019), 355-77.

<sup>49</sup> Ruth Page et al., *Researching Language and Social Media*, Second Edition (New York: Routledge, 2022), 75.



8.	the word <i>reducetarian</i> can help focus on shared commitments
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Table 3. Themes in the speaker's talk – chronological order

The speaker initially assumes the persona of a vegan for the first three minutes before unveiling his true *reducetarian* identity. The perspective he embraces during this parody plays a crucial role in shaping the first theme, which involves suggesting that vegans make others feel out of place (theme 1) due to their perceived superiority, thereby indirectly accusing them. Subsequently, he argues that primal urges, such as taste, are the reasons why some individuals cannot forgo meat consumption (theme 2), thus justifying omnivores in their dietary choices. Following this, he introduces his own interpretation of veganism, appropriating the concept by asserting that it represents the final stage in a transition from omnivorism to veganism, with *reducetarianism* serving as a stepping stone (theme 3). He advocates for his perspective by citing evidence supporting the principles of *reducetarianism*, particularly emphasising the positive impact *reducetarians* can still have while not completely eliminating meat from their diets (theme 4). Furthermore, he contends that vegans misinterpret the term '*reducetarian*' (theme 5) and questions the efficacy of their campaigns (theme 6), deeming them unrealistic (theme 7). Finally, he concludes by asserting that one of the virtues of *reducetarians*, in comparison to other groups, lies in their promotion of dialogue through a shared focus on common ethical and environmental objectives (theme 8). Based on the results of the thematic analysis, it can be affirmed that the promotion of peace takes place through the promotion of an innovative dietary style that presents itself as an intermediate pole between two extremes on the same continuum and the concurrent mockery of veganism. The guiding principle for the speaker seems to be related to the environment rather than animal welfare, which is instead subordinated to the sacredness of taste. This, however, is not the case with diets encompassing meat-eating which the speaker seems to embrace. These findings served as the foundation for the subsequent comments' analysis.

#### 4.2 *Against Meat-eating*

The categorisation of hate speech addressed to the group of meat-eaters by intensity (see Table 4) reveals that accusations of negatively impacting the environment, denying their responsibility, and blaming vegans are classified as level-two (*negative actions*). Then, their intelligence is disparaged (e.g., 'closeminded idiot', 'psychopath', 'ignorance', etc.), as is their resoluteness (e.g., 'lacking self-discipline', 'irresponsible', etc.), morality (e.g., 'hypocrite', 'unethical', etc.), and selfishness ('selfish', 'egoistical', etc.). In addition to an instance of conventional dehumanising ('dick'), accusations of generating pain – not only to animals – also through harsh references to concentration camps for animals and support to slavery are found. Meat-eaters, however, apart from being accused of behaving violently, suffer external threats as in the case where one commentator, speaking on behalf of the entire vegan community, states that they are looking for them to attack them. Finally, they are accused of being murderers ('murder', 'murderer', etc.) and of loving the taste of death, as well as being tempted to make death threats.

MEAT-EATING	
Intensity	Instantiations
Negative Actions	blame (the vegan); cheat; destroy (the environment); go into denial; go into anger; screw up (the planet).
Negative Character	brainwashed (x2); can't self-discipline; closeminded idiot; coward; egoistical (view);

	extreme; extremist; full of bullshit; hypocrite; ignorance; immoral; irresponsible; laughable; lying ass; psychopath; recklessness; selfish; unethical; weak.
Demonising and Dehumanising	dick.
Violence	abuser; (entire veg movement out there that is coming for you and your knives; (to be with) concentration camps for animals; harm others; (generate) suffer; support slavery.
Death	(ready for the) death threats; kill; murder; murderer; support murder; the flavour of death.

Table 4. Instances of hate speech targeting the MEAT-EATING group categorised by Intensity according to Bahador's *Hate Speech Intensity Scale* from level 2 to level 6

The most salient ideology that emerges against meat-eaters is that eating meat is immoral, unethical and adopted by people with a guilty conscience and no sensitivity:

1. He seems to miss the point. Vegans are practicing morals, and ethics. Carnivores are immoral, and unethical because their diet choice is destroying the environment...<sup>50</sup>
2. Someone talking about things he hasn't experienced, again. Carnists are just laughable. Oh, and by the way: people that are vegan (or vegetarian, in a process of change) or have the potential to be one just recognise themselves without speaking about it. They are at peace with their conscience and you can definitely feel it if you're at peace too. You did trick just other carnists that don't know either what you're speaking of.
3. The reason that dinner is uncomfortable is because the carnist feels judged. You know by who? By their own conscience. Some then go into denial, projection and anger, blaming the vegan. But yes, there IS a division between vegans and carnists; the only division that's valid between people: that of the moral vs. the immoral. If you're sitting with a known abuser, it shouldn't be comfortable, and it shouldn't be put aside as a "lifestyle choice" so we can have a nice evening.

This is shown in comment 1 by means of two positive terms associated with vegans ('morals' and 'ethics') being juxtaposed to the same couple of terms in the negative form for meat-eaters ('immoral' and 'unethical'). To promote this view, comment 2 refers to the meat-eater's conscience; while it is stated that those who do not eat meat can feel at peace with their conscience, the meat-eater is rhetorically invited to feel whether he or she feels at peace with his or her conscience, pragmatically implying that he or she cannot – this is achieved by the intensifier 'definitely' as well as the previous offences. Similarly, comment 3 attempts to polarise the discourse (meat-eaters VS non-meat-eaters) by using a similar technique to comment 1, that is by juxtaposing words with positive ('moral') and negative values ('immoral'), and associating the latter with meat-eaters.

In addition to comment 3, where it is somehow detectable, other comments seem to display accusations against meat-eaters of having an exclusively anthropocentric view, excluding everything that is not human from the sphere of beings that deserve living their life:

<sup>50</sup> As stated in section 4, comments are reported in their original form. Grammar, punctuation and spelling mistakes were not fixed in order not to omit potential deliberate linguistic choices.

4. being vegan is about ANIMAL CRUELTY. WHY the hate?? So all vegan haters love to see animals get tortured?? psychopaths. Its not about your egotistical views. its about ANIMAL WELFARE. stop being SELFISH.
5. I'm not the nazi...you are with your concentration camps for animals...Yeah...I'd like to stop animals being bred to be eaten...its so fucked up!!!
6. Nothing is more hateful than murder of innocent and voiceless beings. Shame on you. If some vegans are hateful of murderers, I can understand it.

This can be seen, for example, in comment 4, where insults and other explicit expressions are used with regard to the treatment of animals (e.g., ‘torture’); also the use of capital letters for words that encapsulate the concept (‘animal cruelty’, ‘why’, ‘animal welfare’, and ‘selfish’) contributes to conveying the message. Similarly, in comment 5 animals are equated with humans (‘concentration camps for animals’). Replacing a term commonly used for animals, such as, for example, ‘intensive farming’, with a term that has historically and tragically been used to describe humans (‘concentration camps’), helps personify animals and attribute them feelings commonly neglected to them. Finally, in comment 6, a similar idea is expressed via the use of adjectives that mark a potential vulnerability of animals (‘innocent’ and ‘voiceless’) in contrast to the violence inherently attributed to humans (‘murderers’). Once more, the status of the animal is elevated by associating it with the act of being murdered, which is typically used between humans – “the crime of intentionally killing a person”.<sup>51</sup>

#### 4.3 Against Reducetarianism

Those who adhere to the reducetarian lifestyle are subjected to a range of insults, including those pertaining to their intellectual abilities (e.g., ‘daft’, ‘dumb’, ‘stupid’, and ‘stupidity’) as well as relational ones (e.g., ‘selfish’, ‘self-centred’, and ‘in-compassionate’). Additionally, they are insulted based on their physical appearance (e.g., ‘does not look healthy’) and subjected to more general insults (e.g., ‘ridiculous’ and ‘mediocre’). Then, only one instance of conventional dehumanisation (‘shit’) is reported. As regards the two most dangerous levels, they are accused of being cruel towards animals (see Table 5).

REDUCETARIANISM	
Intensity	Instantiations
Negative Actions	/
Negative Character	apathetic; (a big load of) bullshit; daft; dumb; full of crap; hypocrite; in-compassionate; irresponsible; lazy; (does not) look healthy; mediocre; moronian; ridiculous [x2]; self centered; selfish; stupid; stupidity.
Demonising and Dehumanising	shit.
Violence	(animal) cruelty; (to be for) suffering and violence.
Death	murder (less animals); kill (animals) [x2].

Table 5. Instances of hate speech targeting the REDUCETARIAN group categorised by Intensity according to Bahador’s *Hate Speech Intensity Scale* from level 2 to level 6

<sup>51</sup> Cambridge Dictionary, “Murder”, [www.dictionary.cambridge.com](http://www.dictionary.cambridge.com).

As concerns the analysis of other discursive structures, two key points emerge. In the following excerpts, a notion of moral absolutism envisaging the adoption of a specific lifestyle and concurrently condemning all partial choices is observed:

7. Reducitarian ? That’s for mediocre people who just don’t care enough about this planet or their health or old people who don't want to change their habits because ‘God knows how many days I have on this world’.
8. Btw: ‘To my vegan and vegetarian friends: You too are ‘Reducitarians’, because you are so very much committed to reducing your consumption of meat.’ I’m vegan and i kindly disagree... I don’t reduce my meat consumption...i cut it out completely. Just one more thing: Do you think farm animals care if you order a smaller steak? Do you really think that? ...Next time I’ll only rape a person for 30 minutes instead of 1 hour...i feel better about myself now...
9. Reducitarian? LOL There are already so many words to describe people who can’t be consistent in what they are doing. There is only ONE question: Are you for suffering and violence or are you against it. According to your answer you live your life. Not according to some ridiculous new word which changes its meaning every now and then...
10. Reducitarianism is whack..IF youre gonna do something you might aswell go all the way (vegan) ... no animal was happy: oh were gonna be killed just 2 days out of 7 -.-

In comment 7, the commenter attributes the difficulty in making a definitive decision regarding the total elimination of meat to the inability of the older generations to change their habits. This reveals a negative conception of the past from which the models we are used to drawing our ideas about the world are inherited. In comment 8, absolutism is evidenced by a hyperbolic comparison to emphasise the brutality in killing animals, with a parallel drawn between this and the crime of sexual violence. In comment 9, the frame of violence is activated through the expressions ‘suffering’ and ‘violence’. This specific frame is commonly rejected by the brain, which fails to register the pain experienced by an animal at the moment of consumption by means of a phenomenon known as *meat paradox*, attributable to a “[c]ognitive dissonance[,] whereby one omits to acknowledge the animal behind the meat – the origin of meat is dissociated from living animals, as ‘meat’ and ‘animals’ become two unrelated categories”.<sup>52</sup> The discourse then extends to meat-eaters, informing them that eating meat is tantamount to generating and perpetuating violence. In comment 10, thanks to a personification of an animal sarcastically claiming to be happy to be killed less often than usual, it is argued that reducetarianism is inadequate for safeguarding animals from harm.

Another view that emerges from the set of comments targeting reducetarians concerns the potential dangers of creating new words to justify one’s own interests:

11. Ridiculous. So...reducetarians, now that they have a label, will reduce more? That’s daft.
12. This guy in a moronian.
13. Reducitarian? LOL There are already so many words to describe people who can’t be consistent in what they are doing.

This is exemplified in comment 11, where the use of pejorative terminology is employed in a sarcastic question about the extent to which employing a label can help accomplish certain objectives. In comment 12, a blend with the same structure as the term ‘reducetarian’ is used to create an insult. A

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<sup>52</sup> Elisa Aaltola, “The Meat Paradox, Omnivore’s Akrasia, and Animal Ethics”, *Animals (Basel)*, 9.12 (2019), 3.

presupposition is evident in comment 13, where a negative opinion is expressed towards other existing terms that have not led to practical results.

#### 4.4 Against Vegetarianism

Hate speech towards vegetarianism does not fall into the categories of those who engage in negative actions, demonise and dehumanise (see Table 6). Vegetarians, instead, are perceived as uncompromising, as evidenced by their association with the negative terms ‘hypocrite’. This perception is distinct from the other two groups vegetarians are often compared to, namely, ‘stupid’ and ‘hypocrite’. Similarly, they are also perceived as instigators of violence. Furthermore, they are accused of being generators of death while at the same time are subjected to death-wishing hatred.

Vegetarianism	
Intensity	Instantiations
Negative Actions	/
Negative Character	hypocrite; laughable; stupid; worse (than meat eaters).
Demonising and Dehumanising	/
Violence	(vegetarians) generate pain; (vegetarians) generate suffering.
Death	(please) Die and RIP; (vegetarians) generate death; kill (vegetarians).

Table 6. Instances of hate speech targeting the VEGETARIAN group categorised by Intensity according to Bahador’s *Hate Speech Intensity Scale* from level 2 to level 6

A common view retrieved in the comments is that of human inability to really change things:

14. DUDE: Life here on Earth is short for ALL of us, whether human, or animal/bird/sea life creature Life, (even insect and microscopic Life.) If you truly believe Earth life is all there IS ever going to be for ANY of us, then your preaching of not eating ‘each other’ might make a little sense to me... ..ONLY that it seems logical to yOu. By the way, is Life before being given birth to it, (which Life FEELS emotions and physical sensations before birth,) JUST as important to you? Alright then : this life seems SHORT to the REST of us in the human race who avoid becoming exclusively vegetarian, so we’re inSTEAD surviving and thriving the best we CAN, while here.
15. To all the vegans and the vegetarians with the same argument below: Your vegetables also generate death, pain and suffering. Harvesting machines kills mices, birds and many insects that by your beliefs, deserves the same amount of respect given to a cow, pig, chicken and fish. Pesticides even more... And not everybody has space, time and patience to grow vegetables in a garden. And organic food is very expensive. And if you are not doing everything, you are a hypocrite.(sarcasm) All those comments just generate more distinction and hate.
16. Vegans ,Vegetarians....Please Die and RIP!! (or) Let others live their lives...

In comment 14, the use of the personal pronouns ‘me’, ‘you’, ‘we/us’ promotes a confrontation between vegetarians and non-vegetarians in which the former are attributed ideas vegetarians themselves might

not necessarily agree with. The commenter appeals to the brevity of life to support their argument that humans should make the most of the time they are given. In comment 15, the powerlessness of humans is seen in their inability to avoid pain by using negative terms and intensifiers. This can also be seen in comment 16, where the inability to really change things is summed up in the proverb ‘live and let live’, preceded by an explicit instantiation of hate speech.

#### 4.5 Against Veganism

Accusations of being intolerant (‘dogmatic’, ‘moralize’, ‘the purest’, etc.) and critic (‘criticise’, ‘finger pointing’, ‘harass, etc.) towards those not sticking to their ideals are frequent in level two. In the *negative character* level, then, references to the sphere of (moral) superiority (‘elitist’, ‘snob’, ‘sanctimonious’, ‘superior’, ‘self-rigorous’, ‘self-righteousness’, etc.) and radicalism (‘fanatical’, ‘extreme’, ‘zealot’, ‘cuckoo fundamentalist’, ‘militant’, etc.) are common. Other recurring references are to the physical traits and health of vegans (‘ugly’, ‘look bad’, ‘malnourished’, etc.), followed by violent character traits (‘aggressive’, ‘bully’, ‘hostile’, etc.). Offenses concerning their intelligence and sensibility (‘simple-minded’, ‘idiot’, ‘stupid’, etc.) as well as two linguistic blends (‘dirtarian’, ‘judgementarian’) that have negative connotations are reported. Demonisation here draws from the political sphere. Indeed, it is observed that vegans are frequently associated with members of the right-wing and left-wing extremism (‘fascistoid’ and ‘communist’). With regard to dehumanising, references to the animal world and the world of atmospheric phenomena (‘snowflake’)<sup>53</sup> are found. In the context of *violence*, vegans are accused of generating violence and suffering. However, this argument is further complicated by the fact that vegans often condemn those who do not share their beliefs. In this set, some commenters rhetorically claim that eating vegans alive/raw might solve the problems vegans claim to be solving through their approach. However, to a greater extent, death threats and accusations of vegans being murderers and exerting violent to those who do not embrace their ideals are frequent (see Table 7).

Veganism	
Intensity	Instantiations
Negative Actions	alienate (anyone/people) [x2]; brow beat; cheat; criticize; crow that they’re the ‘purest’; dick move; finger pointing; force (their ideas) on the others; (don’t give a shit about anything but) get(ing) <i>phat</i> ; harass (vegetarians); hate; (egovegans) hijack (science/veganism); make hateful comments; make irrational comments; moralize; (reduce everything to) propaganda [x2]; push their ideas; (egovegans) sabotage (veganism); shame (vegetarians); throw insults; troll (vegetarians).
Negative Character	aggressive [x2]; angry [x2]; annoying; bigot; brainwashed; brat; bully; butthurt [x3]; childlike (mindset); cuckoo fundamentalist; cunt; dirtarians; disappointing (waste of a human); dogmatic; dumb; elitist; embarrassing (waste of a human); extreme; extremist [x5]; (puritanical)

<sup>53</sup> “[A]n insulting way of referring to someone who is considered by some people to be too easily upset and offended”. Cambridge Dictionary, “Snowflake”, [www.dictionary.cambridge.com](http://www.dictionary.cambridge.com).

	fanatic; fanatical; freaks; hated; hateful [x2]; hater; head in the sand (mindset); hipster; hostile; hostility; hypocrite [x4]; idiot [x2]; indignant; inquisitionesque (attitude); intolerant (left); irrational; (huge) jackass; jacked up; judgementarian; laughable; little (waste of a human); little [x2]; look bad; lunatic; malnourished; militant; (hypersensitive) morality; moron; naive (mindset); obsessive; pathetic (waste of a human) [x2]; phat phucking phucks; (unable to do) physical work; pouting (waste of a human); preachy; (pretentious) prick [x2]; primitive; radical; sanctimonious; self-absorbed; self-righteous [x2]; self-righteousness; simple-minded; (douchy) snob; stupid [x3]; suck [x3]; (morally) superior [x2]; (moral) superiority (ego) [x2]; twat; ugly; (religious) zealot.
Demonising and Dehumanising	communists; fascistoid (attitude); Hitler; jihadists; ostriches with their head in the sand; prick; snowflake; waste (of a human).
Violence	(vegans) chastise people; (vegans) generate pain; (vegans) generate suffering.
Death	(please) die and rip; eat vegans (alive/raw) [x3]; (vegans) generate death; kill (vegans); (vegans) kill plantae species; mass murderers; (vegans) put down dissenters; (vegans) shoot.

Table 7. Instances of hate speech targeting the VEGAN group categorised by Intensity according to Bahador's *Hate Speech Intensity Scale* from level 2 to level 6

There is evidence of comments that perpetuate the idea of veganism as unnatural and unhealthy and that, conversely, only an animal-based diet is a comprehensive and healthy one:

17. You need a comma in there lol it looks like you're saying you're a vegan rancher - which to my knowledge doesn't exist. Could you imagine a vegan actually doing the physical work required in your job lol plus obviously if they tried, they'd understand the issues you raise & immediately dump their vegan ways!
18. ...Scientifically it's well known vegans suffer malnutrition unless they're very CAREful and are consulting experts which seems ridiculous to need to do, to ARTIFICIALLY, meaning through LABS, supplement their diet to dodge becoming anemic and so forth... ..and to need to seek out other weird vegan foods to FIX the malnourishment, (such as Vitamin B-12 deficiency, as only ONE example.)...
19. I hear 'Veganism' and immediately think Pretentious pricks who think because the live on a vitamin deficient diet that they are superior. Ask any vegan where they get their B12 or Bio-available (bio-available means you body can actually make use of it) Vit A and they immediate point to supplements. A perfect diet does NOT need to rely on supplements.
20. Malnourished vegan trying to tell us how healthy lack of animal foods is...

In addition to the explicit terms ‘malnourished’ and ‘malnutrition’, comment 17 activates the masculinity frame associated with physical strength, stating that being a rancher requires physical labour and that, as a consequence, is not suitable for vegans. Comment 18 draws to authoritative sources in order to assign its claims to scientific sources that validate the commenter’s thesis. Reference is also made to the need for supplements that makes veganism not naturally sustainable for the human body, as is also observable in comment 19. Finally, in comment 20, the naturalness of the consumption of animal foods is presupposed to be the carrier of a state of health.

The most overarching ideology, however, is one that describes vegans as intolerant, dogmatic and unwilling to open to dialogue with people who do not share their ideals:

21. To all the butthurt vegans here (I’m one myself, just not butthurt (o): We wanna save animals, right? Encouraging people to eat less meat saves animals. Fact. People who already reduced their meat intake are more likely to go vegan. Fact. If you really wanna help the animals as much as possible, swallow your pride and suggest a reduction of meat consumption when people say they don’t wanna commit fully to a vegan lifestyle.
22. That’s why most moderate ‘vegans’ don’t call themselves vegan anymore. There is a new dietary lifestyle called ‘Plant based diet’, which is what vegans who aren’t radical cult members call themselves solely to differentiate from these lunatics. I rather support the plant based dieters....as they aren’t pricks, and actually stand by their values. Hopefully, it won’t wind up being infected with these intolerant radicals like the vegan community did.
23. Title is extremely misleading. Also, even if I never ate another bite of animal product for the rest of my life, I will NEVER call myself a vegan because I don’t want to be associated with a group of hateful self-righteous people. Vegans are a big reason most meat eaters don’t stop eating meat.
24. What the Health, Cowspiracy, etc were possibly the worst thing that could happen to veganism. These documentaries convert many people, yes. But then they put their supervegan capes and go around chastising people. They’re young and were vegan for 1 month to 1 year, and think they know everything about the world. Normal vegans call them ‘egovegan’, for their huge egos. Learn a little about the vegan movement and you’ll see ‘egovegans’ have hijacked and sabotaged the movement time and time again since it’s beginning.
25. User 19021473 Yes, for those who are exploited (humans I mean) by industries it’s just as bad. Oh, of course, all vegan information is out there. But few people are interested. And few people think a vegan dish is more than a salad that can’t be compared to a nice juicy steak. So the fact that vegan cuisine is somewhere on google is irrelevant because that information who could persuade people won’t be doing it. I see a problem there. Finger pointing doesn’t change people’s mind, it makes people take distance and consider it twice before joining a club that behaves like that. Veganism will take much longer to change the world. Not that I have a problem with it, but it’s funny to see the vegan ego sabotaging the vegan cause.
26. Ofc im a lame excuse. for jihadists, all other 99,99% of people who doesnt blow themselves are lame excuses, for hitler all other races were lame excuses, but hey, the 0.1% of people (vegans) that agree with u are right, not the other 99,9% ;)
27. This is the exact attitude why people hate vegans, this fashistoid, inquisitionesque attitude that can be observed down below in the comment section. Your moral high ground is non existent. Have a look at the agriculture, basically you are eating frikking oil. What you need to do is knowing where your food is coming from.
28. I love meat, and I will continue to eat them on a frequent basis with no remorse. If you think that is wrong, you’re a bigot. Good for you for choosing to be a vegetarian or a vegan. Now scurry off, and don’t tell me what or what not to eat.



In comment 21, the expression ‘vegans’ is preceded by the negative adjective ‘butthurt’ in order for the commenter to subsequently disassociate themselves from that group; however, they suddenly rejoin the group by using the inclusive ‘we’ but immediately dissociate themselves from the ‘butthurt vegans’ by addressing them as ‘you’. In comment 22, the dissociation is achieved thanks to the use of the positive adjective (‘moderate’) to the less rigid group of vegans and the concurrent series of insults targeting ‘strict’ vegans. In contrast to the previous comments, in comment 23 a total rejection of the label ‘vegan’ is reported – no alternatives by means of positive or negative adjectivation are proposed by the commenter. In comment 24, the distinction is again made thanks to lexical and morphological means. In particular, the commenter addresses the disdain for strict vegans by creating two blends (‘supervegan’ and ‘egovegan’). In comment 25, another very common and shared ideology is observed, that is the one according to which vegans are sabotaging their own cause due to their attitude. Perhaps, the most serious accusation is found in comment 26, in the form of an analogy comparing the thinking of vegans to that of Hitler and jihadists. Comments of this kind are very common (see also comment 27, in which vegans are described as ‘fascistoid’), albeit using more general terms such as ‘extremist’. Another very common idea is that vegans are simply incompetent, unintelligent or uneducated, as seen in comment 28, where the assumption that eating meat is the norm and that the vegan is the abnormal is also evident.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, through a triangulation of different methods applied to a specific case study, this research has attempted to analyse the discursive strategies used to generate and perpetuate out-group dynamics between the VEGAN, VEGETARIAN, REDUCETARIAN and MEAT-EATING groups within the Social Networking Site YouTube, with a specific focus on the instances of hate speech.

Specifically, it aimed at answering three research questions concerning the trajectory of hate speech to the four groups, its intensity and the ideologies underpinning the hostility. Results show that most of the hate speech is directed at vegans (62 comments), followed equally by reductetarians and meat-eaters (14 comments) and finally vegetarians (5 comments). Considering that the talk in the video essentially covers themes against vegans and given the conception of veganism as a true lifestyle, several comments within the selected micro-corpora display vegans arguing in favour of their own perspective to counter the speaker’s, possibly triggering the hatred towards them. Therefore, this study shows that while it is true that vegans do object to the ways of being/eating of others, this rarely leads to instances of actual hate speech, or at least much less than they themselves experience.

In terms of intensity, level 3 (*negative character*) is the most common, followed by level 2 (*negative actions*). Few instances of *demonising and dehumanising* (level 4) are reported, albeit harsh ones, associating vegans with fascists and Nazis. Interestingly, when it comes to the more serious categories, instances of *violence* (level 5) and *death* (level 6) are mostly present as accusations that the group is violent and causes death rather than as direct (death) threats.

Then, with regard to the ideologies emerging out of comments containing instances of hate speech, meat-eaters seem to be discriminated against because of their immorality and anthropocentric perspective whereby the right to life seems to be limited to human beings only. Reductetarians, in a similar way, are discriminated against for their perceived moral instability deducible from their tendency to privilege partial and temporary choices, whereas moral absolutism – encompassing an all-or-nothing perspective – should be the norm. This might exacerbate polarisations by limiting people’s choice to either veganism or meat-eating, with no chance to choose a more flexible and/or slow-paced transition suited to one’s nature. The hostility towards vegetarians, then, seems to stem from a general lack of confidence in humans’ ability to change things, as if initiatives are required that are too far beyond human power, therefore making all efforts – like going vegetarians – pointless. Finally, vegans are, as

said, the most targeted group. The main accusations levelled against this group are that they are intolerant and not very open to dialogue with those who do not – or only partially – share, their ideas. Hatred towards the perceived dogmatism of vegans is evidenced by instances in which the more tolerant vegans seem to justify the discrimination directed at strict vegans by non-vegans which also leads them to create labels (e.g., ‘egovegans’) to distance themselves from their fellows. Their diet is also considered unnatural and unhealthy, therefore standing as a complementary perspective to that according to which meat-eaters “rationalize that meat consumption is natural, normal, necessary, and nice [thus enabling themselves] to continue in a dietary practice that has increasingly come under public scrutiny”.<sup>54</sup>

The results therefore contribute to the study of online hatred around animal exploitation/eating; however, some limitations are present. Firstly, the corpus building criteria implemented in this study probably led to the exclusion of those comments addressed to the speaker that do not include any of the keywords. This is because, although the speaker may be understood to be a member of the reductarian community, including them would have led to a disproportionate number of comments towards the latter, which would have altered the purposes of the study. Also, this video calls for peace among all dietary groups, but proposes a particular viewpoint: that of reductarianism. A ‘technical’ issue has to be considered too: *Mozdeh* may have missed some comments. Finally, this is a case study limited to one video; future studies could extend it to a larger corpus including comments from more videos. Also, they might consider other videos on this topic, perhaps focusing on a different practice. In addition, exploring these issues on alternative platforms and conducting more targeted studies of partial-vegan groups could provide further valuable insights into how to deal with this type of hate.

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<sup>54</sup> Jared Piazza et al., “Rationalizing Meat Consumption: The 4Ns”, *Appetite*, 91 (2015), 126.