

Marketing in field of vegetarian food products

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Abstract

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Introduction. The aim of the study was to identify problems and prospects for the development of marketing policies for vegetarian food brands.

Materials and methods. Data were collected using desk research from open sources of vegetarian food brands and retailers. The study was conducted using the methods of generalization, analysis and synthesis of information. The analysis based on J. McCarthy's 4P model was applied.

Results and discussion. India has the highest level of vegetarianism in the world (about 38% of the population). A high level of vegetarianism is also observed in Mexico (19% of the population). Since the beginning of the 21st century, vegetarianism has been spreading in Ukraine. Vegetarianism is present in almost all countries of the world. Even in countries with a high percentage of animal products consumption (the United States (88%), Australia (86%), Argentina (85%)), the movement to protect the rights of farm animals is gaining popularity (46% of global funding for this movement comes from the United States), which is one of the motivations for the transition to vegetarianism. According to Fortune Business Insights, the global vegan food market is expected to grow by 163%, or \$38.05 billion. Out of the total number of vegetarians, 6% are vegans, 8% are typical vegetarians, 9% refuse to eat meat, 33% limit their meat consumption, 15% limit their consumption of milk and dairy products, and 29% limit their consumption of both meat and dairy products. Among the motives for switching to vegetarianism, it is worth highlighting the environmental motive (64%), the health motive (24%), and the ethical motive (12%). Marketing strategies of vegetarian food producers include niche (according to F. Kotler) and concentrated differentiation strategies (according to M. Porter). The marketing product policy of vegetarian brands is represented by such categories as vegetable alternatives to meat and meat products (25%), vegetable alternatives to milk and dairy products (15%), vegetarian sweets (35%) and other categories, such as fast food, ready meals, and baked goods (25%). Considering the marketing mix of vegetarian brands according to J. McCarthy's "4P" model, a problem in the marketing pricing policy was identified. The average percentage of excess prices for vegan alternatives compared to conventional products is 236%, in particular by 87% for plant-based meat, by 170% for dairy products and by 450% for sweets. Such a price difference is one of the barriers to a faster transition to vegetarianism and the development of vegan products.

Conclusions. The problem points in the marketing mix of food brands can be eliminated through an improved marketing policy mechanism that will provide economic, environmental and marketing effects.

Introduction

There are many studies devoted to marketing issues. Scientific approaches to forming marketing strategies, developing marketing mixes and mechanisms for improving marketing policy are adapted to most areas of activity. Scientists have developed specialized marketing models for various industries. Factors that may prevent people from adopting a vegetarian diet or negatively impact the quality of life of those who follow it have been identified and investigated (Hargreaves et al., 2021). Vegetarianism has been found to have positive effects on humans: better physical health, positive feelings associated with adopting a morally correct attitude towards animals, an increased sense of belonging to the vegetarian community, and a reduced impact on the environment. Factors beyond human control have also been identified, including economic aspects, as well as socio-cultural (membership of social (cultural) groups) and natural aspects (restricted access to products) (Baroni et al., 2024). Vegetarianism is also defined from the perspective of a person's social identity, values, beliefs, and views (Nezlek et al., 2020).

However, marketing models and mechanisms that could be adapted and used in the field of vegetarian food products remain unexplored in many aspects. The solution to this issue is relevant, because, although it is niche marketing, a relatively significant segment of the world's population is to some extent a vegetarian diet. The theory of vegetarianism originated in India and the eastern Mediterranean in the middle of the first millennium BC (Petruzzello et al., 2024). In the 17th - 19th centuries AD, certain aspects of vegetarianism were practiced and popularized in the UK (Petruzzello et al., 2024). In 1847, the first vegetarian society was established in England, and in 1908, the International Vegetarian Union was founded in Germany with its headquarters in the UK (Petruzzello et al., 2024). In the West, until the beginning of the 20th century, vegetarianism was mostly seen as a dietary supplement to the usual diet, for example, for medicinal purposes (Petruzzello et al., 2024). The impetus for the further development of vegetarianism in the second half of the 20th century was the work of Peter Singer, an Australian ecophilosopher. Supporters of this theory were guided by an ethical motive. Opponents of P. Singer's views appealed to the lack of adequate protein in the human diet with a vegetarian diet, but further research largely refuted this statement (American et al., 2003; Petruzzello et al., 2024). At the beginning of the twentieth century, the vegetarian movement was developing in Ukraine, which could have become one of the centres of vegetarianism in Europe (Pyvovarenko, 2019). The basis was primarily ideological, although there were both medical and ideological (ethical) trends of vegetarianism. In total, there were 11 vegetarian societies in Ukraine. The most popular was lacto-ovo vegetarianism. In the early twentieth century, there were about 12 vegetarian canteens in Kyiv, about 10 in Odesa, 2 in Kharkiv, and 2 in Poltava. There was a price differentiation, and local culinary peculiarities of each city were taken into account. The promoters of vegetarian cuisine were people with high incomes, but the consumers were quite different, with students making up a significant segment of the vegetarian canteen customers. Vegetarian canteens were located near large educational institutions (Pyvovarenko, 2019). During the totalitarian era, the Ukrainian vegetarian movement was virtually stopped, but at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is being restored in line with global trends, so it is important to study, among other countries, the experience of Ukraine in marketing vegetarian brands, taking into account the specifics of the history, decline and revival of vegetarianism in this country. The study of marketing in the field of vegetarian food products will identify existing trends, as well as problems to be solved and prospects for solving these problems, which will enable domestic and foreign vegetarian brands to improve their operations and lead to economic, environmental and marketing effects.

The purpose of the research was to identify the problems and prospects for the development of marketing policy of vegetarian food brands.

Materials and methods

Materials

Publicly available electronic resources of more than 50 vegetarian food brands and retailers were used to assess the marketing policy in the field of vegetarian food products.

To assess the importance of such a study, the works of scholars and practitioners in the field of marketing and vegetarianism were used. To determine the methodological tools that formed the basis of the study, the scientific works of leading marketers were used.

Methods

In the process of studying the marketing of vegetarian food brands, the methods of desk research, observation, analysis and synthesis, and generalisation were used.

The desk research method (Ratchford, 2020) was used to study the marketing policy of vegetarian brands. In the course of desk research, information on product, pricing and communication marketing policies was collected, systematised and analysed from more than 50 electronic resources. The data obtained were further generalised to identify key trends, problems and prospects for the development of marketing tools for vegetarian food brands.

In the course of the study, the methods of analysis and synthesis (Silva, 2022) were used, which allowed to identify the main problems of the marketing policy of vegetarian brands and formulate recommendations for their elimination.

Method of observation (Silva, 2022) contributed to identifying current practices of vegetarian food brands in the field of marketing communications.

Method of modelling (Silva, 2022) was used to develop a mechanism for improving the marketing policy of vegetarian food brands.

As a basis for the study of the marketing complex of vegetarian food brands, the J. McCarthy's "4Ps" model (Mada, 2024) was used (Figure 1).



Figure 1. J. McCarthy's "4P" model

Source: (Mada, 2024).

J. McCarthy's "Marketing Mix" or "4P" model is one of the fundamental concepts of marketing management, which defines the key elements of an effective marketing strategy. With its help, the following elements were analyzed:

- Product: tangible or intangible goods and services that a company offers to consumers. Important aspects include quality, design, packaging, assortment, product life cycle and unique characteristics that shape its competitiveness;

- Price: The cost of a product to consumers and includes pricing strategies, price levels, discounts, payment and credit terms. Price affects demand, profitability and brand positioning in the market;
- Place: The ways in which a product is delivered to the end user. This includes distribution channels, logistics, inventory management, and the choice of outlets (retail, online, etc.);
- Promotion: communication strategies aimed at attracting and retaining customers. The main tools are advertising, PR, personal selling, sales promotion and digital marketing. In terms of current trends, digital marketing methods in the field of vegetarian brands were separately investigated.

In order to make the proposals for the marketing policy of vegetarian brands more customer-oriented, the study was based on an improved transformation of J. McCarthy's model, the SIVA model (Mada, 2024) (Figure 2).

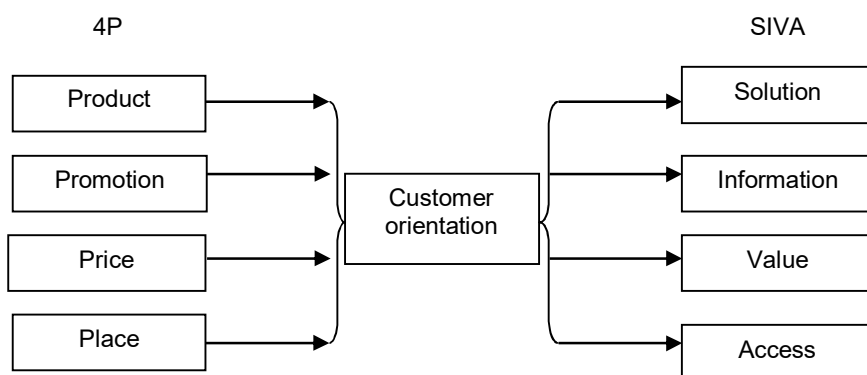


Figure 2. Transformation of 4P model into SIVA model
Source: formed by the authors based on the source (Mada, 2024).

The Solution element was considered from the standpoint of the value of the marketing offer solution for the consumer, the ability to solve the client's problems, and ensure the elimination of key undesirable phenomena.

Promotion was considered in terms of maximum nativeness and targeting of marketing messages for customers: the correspondence of communication channels, the concept of advertising messages and other types of promotion to the target audience.

The Price element was studied taking into account not only the price, but also the value for the customer, as a set of complex interrelated elements, which involves taking into account the following factors:

- the ratio of the marketing offer and the price of the product;
- alternatives for spending money and time on purchasing goods;
- the availability of alternatives in the form of substitute goods.

The Place element was considered from the standpoint of the availability of purchasing goods by end consumers.

To assess the effectiveness of SMM (social media marketing) in the aspect of digital promotion, the following indicators were calculated:

1. Average Number of Reels Views: the indicator is calculated by dividing the total number of views by the total number of Reels published during a certain period (Trunfio et al., 2021):

$$\text{Average Reels Views} = \frac{\text{Total Views on Reels}}{\text{Total Number of Reels Posted}} \quad (1)$$

2. Average Number of Comments on Social Media: is determined by dividing the total number of comments received by the total number of posts published over a certain period of time (Trunfio et al., 2021).

$$\text{Average Number of Comments} = \frac{\text{Total Comments}}{\text{Total number of posts}} \quad (2)$$

3. Engagement Rate (Activity Level on Social Media): Engagement rate measures how actively users interact with content. It is calculated using various engagement metrics, such as likes, comments, shares, and saves, relative to the number of followers or impressions. The overall level of engagement is calculated using all these indicators (Trunfio et al., 2021).

$$\text{Engagement Rate} = \frac{\text{Likes+Comments+Shares+Saves}}{\text{Total Followers}} \quad (3)$$

The higher the value of each of the indicators, the more effective the SMM strategy, and the higher the level of subscriber engagement.

Results and discussion

Competitive strategies of vegetarian food market players

Competitive strategies of vegetarian brands can be attributed to strategies that involve the formation of high-order competitive advantages, namely differentiation, uniqueness of the offer in a niche segment (Figure 3).

Thus, it can be argued that, according to the method of M. Porter (Dieffenbacher, 2023), most market participants use a competitive focus strategy based on differentiation or an optimisation strategy. According to the method of F. Kotler (Kotler, 2021), most producers are niche players in the overall food market, mostly striving for niche leadership. The share of vegetarians ranges from 1% to 38% around the world (Geeksforgeeks, 2024; Palyvoda, 2021), meaning that the target audience of market players is quite narrow, so the competitive strategy of market players is niche. Within the niche, the strategies of niche leaders are also used: market expansion through variations in positioning (search for new needs), reaching new consumers and intensifying promotion (Kotler, 2021). According to the method of I. Ansoff (Heubel, 2024), strategies of deep market penetration (within a niche), market expansion (entering a market related to an existing one), product line expansion, or product development are usually used. In terms of diversification, there is limited (modified product, related market) or partial (new product, related market) diversification. Full diversification is rarely used. The STP (segmentation, targeting, positioning) marketing strategy (Kotler, 2021) of vegetarian food brands is characterised by targeted concentrated marketing and positioning of the marketing offer based on three main motives: environmental friendliness, health, ethics, and an emphasis on modernity and progressiveness.

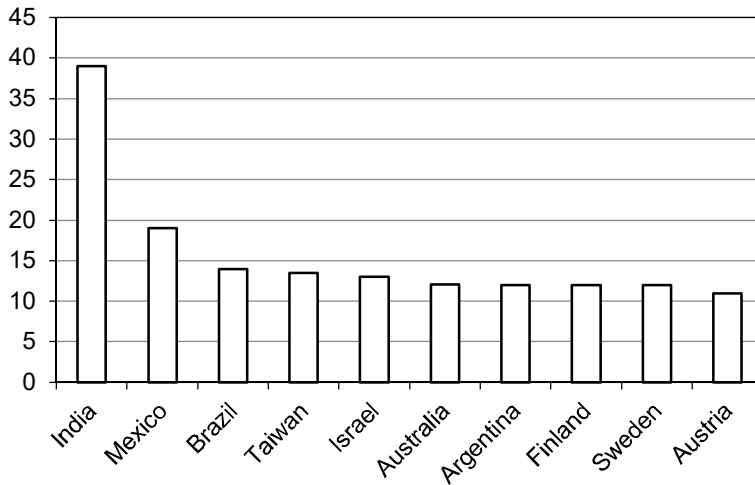


Figure 3. Characteristics of marketing strategies of vegetarian restaurants food brands
 Source: Own study based on the approaches to marketing strategies (Dieffenbacher, 2023; Heubel, 2024; Kotler, 2021) and open source materials of vegetarian brands.

Characteristics of vegetarian food consumers and motives for switching to vegetarianism

The global plant-based meat market was worth \$8.6 billion as of 2020. According to forecasts, by 2026, the market is expected to grow to \$10.1 billion (Mishler, 2023). According to research by Sana Ijaz, as of 2018, about 5% of the world's population identifies as vegetarians and 3% as vegans (Ijaz, 2023). The percentage of vegetarians is on the rise. According to a Statista Consumer Insights survey conducted in 21 countries, as of 2023, 86% of the population adheres to a meat diet. That is, about 14% limit or exclude meat and other livestock products from their diets to some extent. The main consumer segment that prefers a vegetarian diet by age is young people, and women predominate by gender. According to Fortune Business Insights (as of 2021), the global vegan food market is expected to grow by 163%, or \$38.05 billion (Ijaz, 2023). According to research by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, the highest level of vegetarianism in the world is observed in India, followed by Mexico, then Brazil, Taiwan, Israel, Australia, Argentina, Finland, Sweden, and Austria in descending order (Figure 4) (Geeksforgeeks, 2024).

According to research by Glanbia Nutritionals and UA Plant-Based, the following structure of vegetarianism was observed in Western Europe (Figure 5).



**Figure 4. Level of vegetarianism in the world
(% of the total population)**
Source: (Geeksforgeeks, 2024).

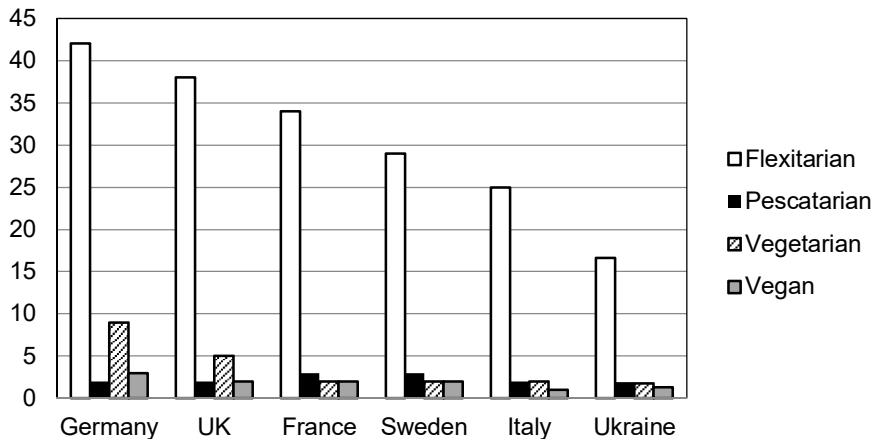


Figure 5. Level of vegetarianism in European countries (% of the total population)
Sources: (Glanbia, 2023; Kozachok, 2022).

The diagram shows that vegetarianism is present in all the countries analysed, and the level of flexitarianism (conditional vegetarianism, which involves limiting meat without completely giving it up) is generally high. This indicates that there is a demand in European countries for vegetarian products, including plant-based meat and milk substitutes, and thus the importance of developing this area. Countries with low levels of vegetarianism include the United States, Australia, Argentina, and China (Geeksforgeeks, 2024). However, general global trends in vegetarianism are gradually introducing the popularity of this food concept in these countries as well (Ijaz, 2023).

For example, one of the world's most famous vegetarian brands, which has made a significant contribution to the development of vegetarianism in the world, is the Beyond Meat brand (California, USA). Even McDonald's Corporation has expanded its targeting of vegetarians in some countries by offering dishes with Beyond Meat plant-based burgers. Also, according to Animal Charity Evaluators (2024), the United States is the world leader in funding for the protection of animal rights on farms (45.75% of total global funding), The UK is in second place (8.29%), followed by Germany (6.14%), France (5.87%), Sweden (4.46%), the Netherlands (4.40%), Israel (3.02%), Brazil (2.29%), China (2.17%), and the share of other countries is 17.6% (Figure 6).

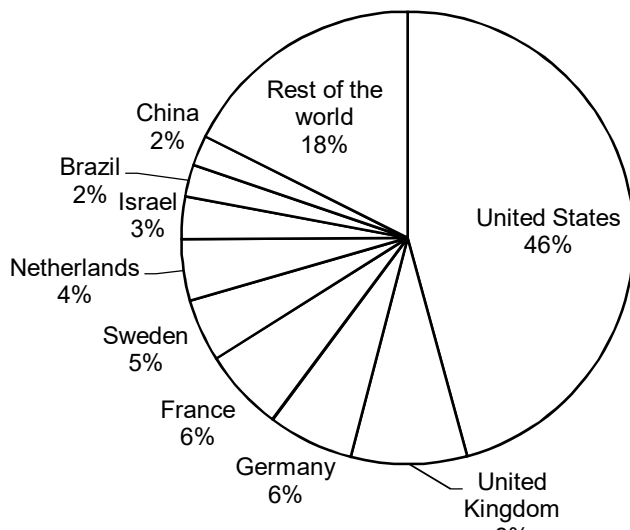


Figure 6. Geographical structure of funding for the protection farm animals

Source: (Animal, 2024).

In other words, even in countries where vegetarianism is not popular, ethical issues of protecting the rights of farm animals are being actively raised, which is an impetus for the development of vegetarianism. Despite the relatively low level of vegetarianism in the United States, many of the world's best-known vegetarian brands belong to this country (Mishler, 2023). The markets of Brazil and China are also promising for the development of vegetarian food brands, in particular due to rapid urbanisation and the need for access to various products, including vegetarian ones (Mishler, 2023).

Figure 5 shows that along with Western European countries that have long been developing on the basis of a market economy, Ukraine, which began to implement a market economy only in early 1990s, has significant potential for the development of vegetarian food brands. Another noteworthy fact is that vegetarianism was actively developing in Ukraine in the early twentieth century, and having been destroyed by the Soviet authorities, it has been gaining popularity again since the beginning of the twenty-first century, which has led to the establishment of a large number of companies producing vegetarian products, some of which are entering the international market. Although the overall level of vegetarianism in Ukraine is slightly lower than in many European countries, the percentage of people who adhere to

this type of diet is still quite high, which has led to the emergence and development of many national vegetarian brands. According to the results of UA Plant-Based research published at the end of 2022, 21.6% of the total number of Ukrainians refuses to consume animal products to some extent (Kozachok, 2022). The largest percentage is made up of people who simply limit their consumption of meat products (7%), followed by people who limit their consumption of meat and dairy products (6.3%) and people who limit their consumption of dairy products (3.3%). Thus, the total share of conditional vegetarians in Ukraine is about 16.6%. The share of people who completely refuse to eat meat but consume other animal products is 1.9%, and vegetarians - 1.8%. Hard vegetarianism, i.e. veganism, is only 1.3% (Kozachok, 2022). At the same time, the overall ratio of supporters of traditional food and supporters of vegetarianism is about 80/20%.

Below is a diagram of the structure of vegans and vegetarians for Ukraine (Figure 7).

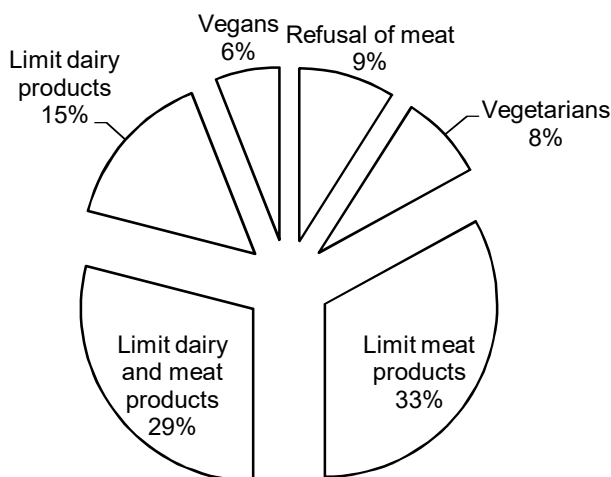


Figure 7. Approximate structure of vegetarians and vegans in Ukraine

Source: (Kozachok, 2022).

What motivates people to choose a vegetarian diet? According to the pyramid of Maslow (Dar, 2022), these will be higher-order needs, as physiological needs are mostly easier to satisfy with classical food: vegetarian brands focus on differentiation and concentration, which leads to a high-price marketing policy. This judgement is also supported by research by scientists from Poland and the United States. For example, John B. Nezlek, Catherine A. Forestell consider social identification, including values, life philosophy, motivation, media influence, friends, relatives, and religious beliefs, among the factors influencing the decision to become a vegetarian (Nezlek et al., 2020).

Let's describe the portrait of the target consumer of vegetarian food producers. Segmentation should be based on the factor of motives for switching to vegetarianism. Three motives are considered to be the most important (Figure 8): concern for the environment (64%), concern for health (24%), and the philosophy of "Cruelty Free" (12%).

Eco-lovers (64%): the main motive is love of nature, environmental friendliness, and the desire to preserve the environment. Healthy eaters (24%): the main motive is health care. Cruelty Free (12%): the main motive is humane, not harming living beings. Thus, concern

for the environment is the main motivation for consumers to go vegetarian. The negative impact of livestock on the Earth's ecosystem is confirmed by numerous studies: UN News, World Wildlife Fund, Florida International University (Machovina et al., 2015) and other studies (Figures 9–10).

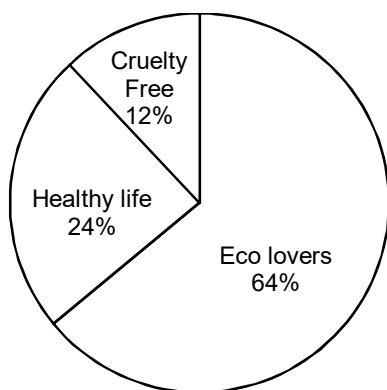


Figure 8. Segmentation of vegetarian food consumers by motivational component Source: (Bielkina, 2020).

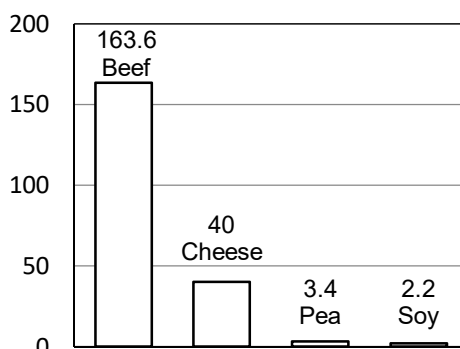


Figure 9. Area of land required to produce 100 grams of protein from different sources, m² Source: (Ritchie, 2017).

It takes 48 times as land to produce 100 grams of protein from beef as it does from peas, and it takes 12 times as much land to produce 100 grams of protein from cheese (dairy animal protein) as it does from 100 grams of plant protein (Ritchie, 2017).

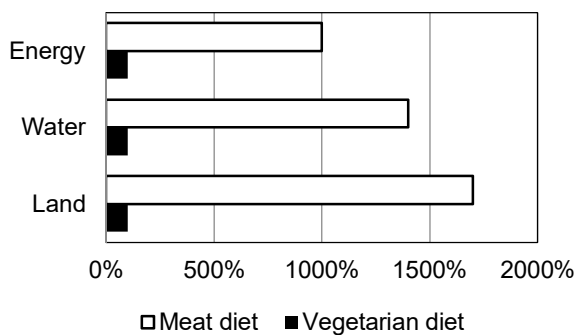


Figure 10. The prevalence of necessary natural resources meat diets compared to vegetarian diets, %. Source: (Lukianova, 2021).

To provide the population with a meat diet compared to a vegetarian diet, 17 times more land resources, 14 times more water resources, and 10 times more energy resources are required (Lukianova, 2021). Harmful air emissions from mass livestock production account for 8% of CO₂, 29% of methane, and 39% of nitrous oxide in the total amount of harmful air emissions (Figure 11) (Baran, 2020).

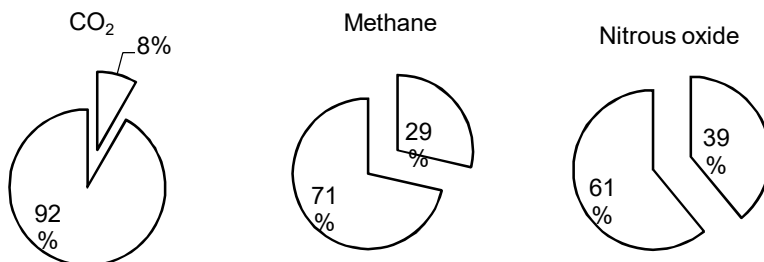


Figure 11. Percentage of air emissions from livestock farming (out of the total air emissions of the respective substance)

Source: (Baran, 2020).

According to Food & Nutrition Research, food should be considered as an issue that affects the environment (Jackson et al., 2024). Research shows that vegetarian diets are one of the key drivers of lifestyle changes that can reduce greenhouse gas emissions (Krpan et al., 2020).

The ethical motive for switching to vegetarianism has also been confirmed (Roser, 2023). Thus, annual number of animals killed for human consumption is about 772 billion, including about 4.5 billion farmed mammals, 86 billion farmed poultry, and more than 100 billion farmed fish. The daily consumption of meat worldwide is about 360 million tonnes, which means that about 900,000 cows, 1.5 million goats, 1.7 million sheep, 3.8 million pigs, 12 million ducks and 202 million chickens (Figure 12) (Roser, 2023; Millstein, 2024).

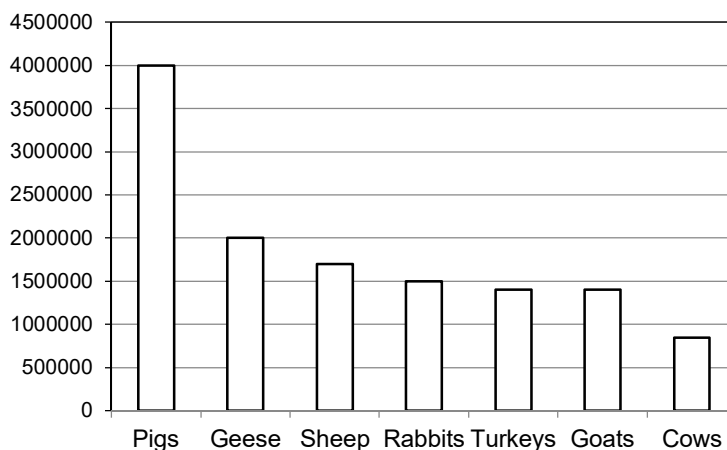


Figure 12. Number of animals killed per day for consumption in the world meat, individuals

Source: (Millstein, 2024).

It is sad from both ethical and economic perspectives that about 24% of livestock (about 18 billion animals per year) that die are not used for food (Millstein, 2024). The global average is 2.4 animals per person per year (Millstein, 2024). In addition to slaughter, the ethical motive for going vegetarian is also related to the suffering of animals during their confinement, restriction of movement, and medical manipulations, including castration, without anaesthesia.

Characteristics of Ukrainian market of vegetarian food brands as new market in the international arena of vegetarian brands

Let's move on to analysing the demand for vegan alternatives to meat products in Ukraine. 73% of the supply of vegan food alternatives (by number of brands) on the market is made up of Ukrainian brands, and only 27% is imported, which is positive. Imported brands include those from Poland, Italy, Germany, the UK, Romania, the Czech Republic, Greece, Spain, Denmark, India, Thailand, Belgium, France, Sweden, and Mexico. Poland has the largest share of imported brands (about 29%), Italy, Germany and the UK account for 8% each, and other countries account for 4% each (Figure 13).

Thus, Ukraine is actively engaged with the global market of vegetarian food brands.

The largest numbers of producers of vegetarian food brands are located in Kyiv and the region (up to 60%). The percentage of producers in other regions of Ukraine is approximately the same. The largest share belongs to Kharkiv and its region (8%), Lviv and its region (6%), Chernihiv and Volyn regions (5% each), Vinnytsia and Dnipro regions (3% each). The share of other regions varies from 1 to 2%.

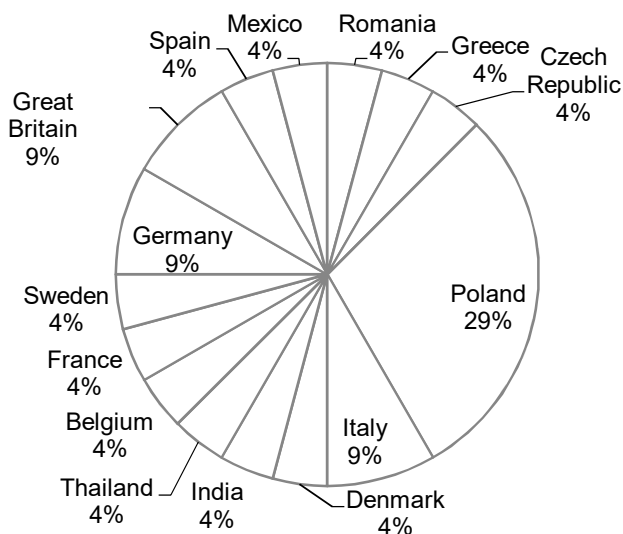


Figure 13. Structure of imports of vegetarian food alternatives to Ukraine (by number of brands)

Source: Own study based on the desk (Internet resources) and field (retail outlets) research

Characteristics of the marketing mix of vegetarian food brands

Let us characterise the marketing complex of vegetarian food brands according to J. McCarthy's 4P model (Mada, 2024).

Marketing product policy of vegetarian brands. Let's take a look at the vegetarian alternatives available on the market (Figure 14).

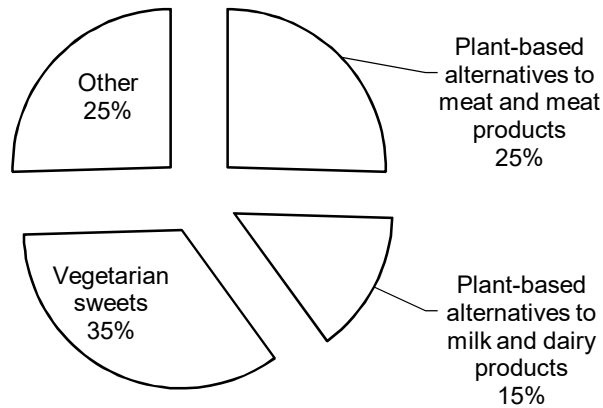


Figure 14. Structure of vegetarian food brands by product type (by number of brands)

Source: Own study based on the desk (Internet resources) and field (retail outlets) research

The most relevant category for meeting the demand of vegetarians is the category of alternatives to meat and meat products. In terms of, the share of brands offering such alternatives is 25%. The assortment is characterised by sufficient width and depth, which practically meets vegetarian demand for plant-based meat substitutes. In addition, some manufacturers offer plant-based alternatives to fish and seafood. In addition to meat, fish and dairy vegetarian alternatives sweets, other vegetarian products are available on the market: super foods, convenience foods, ready-to-eat meals, natural food for children, sauces, hummus, bread and pastries, balanced diets, polenta, vegan food pastes, etc.

The emphasis is on uniqueness, differentiation of the offer, as well as on the naturalness of the products and their health benefits. In general, the marketing product policy of vegetarian brands is well developed. There is room for improvement in this area, especially since 64% of vegetarians are motivated by environmental concerns (Bielkina, 2020).

Marketing price policy of vegetarian brands. There is a problem of significant price overcharging compared to non-vegetarian products. Compared to conventional meat, fish and dairy products, as well as sweets, vegetarian alternatives follow a high-price policy for the following reasons: focused strategy, niche segment; low economies of scale; unique offer, competitive advantage based on differentiation; natural ingredients, sometimes unique recipes and cooking methods; little choice for consumers, and virtually no similar offers outside the niche segment. Figure 15 shows the percentage of prices for vegan and conventional products in the categories of sausages, milk, and sweets.

Thus, the pricing policy of vegetarian food brands is one of high and even premium prices. The average percentage of price excess is 87% for vegetable sausages, 170% for vegetable milk, and 450% for vegan sweets. This price difference is one of the barriers to transition to vegetarianism, as well as the inability to meet the nutritional needs of vegetarians.



Figure 15. Percentage of for vegan products compared to conventional products
Source: Own study based on the desk (Internet resources) and field (retail outlets) research

Marketing policy of promotion. Vegetarian brands are mainly promoted in the SMM format and are targeted. The marketing communication channels used are Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and sometimes YouTube. In addition, many vegetarian brands have their own website, where they also use Google analytics tools, SEO optimisation, Google Ads, branding, etc. (official websites and social media pages of vegetarian food brands, 2024). SMM is the most popular promotion tool for vegetarian brands. Let's analyse the activity of vegetarian brands on Instagram. The brands chosen for the study are Beyond Meat (USA), Veganz (Germany), Alpro (UK), RĚBA (Poland), and Wanted Vegan (Ukraine). For clarity, let's build a polygon of the studied brands' activity on Instagram in terms of absolute and relative indicators (Table 1).

Table 1
Polygon of absolute indicators of vegan brands' activity in social media

Indicator, units	Vegan brand				
	«Wanted Vegan», Ukraine	«Beyond Meat», USA	«RĚBA», Poland	«Veganz», Germany	«Alpro», UK
Number of publications	275	2420	76	3054	1216
Number of subscribers	8547	995000	535	154000	332000
Average number of «likes»	111	3923	36	368	5462
Average number of comments	2	295	3	103	16
Reels average views	5855	104056	1395	25244	237887

Source: Own study based on the open Internet resources of RĚBA, Beyond Meat, Veganz, Alpro, Wanted Vegan brands

The highest level of social media activity is demonstrated by Beyond Meat (USA), which is confirmed by the largest number of publications, subscribers, and the average number of likes, comments, and views of video content. This indicates the brand's strategic

focus on digital communication and promotion in the global space. The lowest indicators of social activity were recorded for the RĖBA brand (Poland), which may indicate the limited use of digital marketing tools or the early stage of brand development in social media. The Ukrainian brand Wanted Vegan demonstrates a high level of audience engagement relative to the number of subscribers, as evidenced by the ratio between video views and the number of subscribers. This indicates the effective use of the available resource and the potential for growth. Alpro (UK) and Veganz (Germany) have a stable presence in social media, which is reflected in the average level of engagement and audience size. In particular, Veganz stands out for its active interaction with subscribers in the form of comments. However, relative indicators are also important, namely engagement rates. Let's show the engagement of the brands under study on Instagram in the form of a triangle (Table 2).

Table 2

Polygon of relative activity indicators of vegetarian brands in social media

Indicator, %	Vegan brand				
	«Wanted Vegan», Ukraine	«Beyond Meat», USA	«RĖBA», Poland	«Veganz», Germany	«Alpro», UK
Level of engagement by «likes»	1.299	0.394	0.294	6.687	0.239
Level of engagement by comments	0.021	0.030	0.014	0.498	0.067
Level of engagement by views of reels	68.50	10.46	154.44	260.73	16.39

Source: Own study based on the open Internet resources of RĖBA, Beyond Meat, Veganz, Alpro, Wanted Vegan brands

The German brand «Veganz» is clearly the leader in all three engagement indicators. Despite the relatively small number of subscribers, activity of Polish brand «RĖBA» is quite high, meaning that the brand's SMM works well in a narrow niche. The highest level of engagement in terms of the number of likes was demonstrated by the Veganz brand (Germany) - 6.687%, which indicates a high interest and emotional response from the audience, regardless of the total number of subscribers. This is a sign of an effective content marketing strategy and the content's compliance with target expectations. The Ukrainian brand Wanted Vegan was ranked second in terms of engagement by likes - 1.299%, which is significantly higher than similar brands from the US, UK and Poland. This indicates a high level of emotional attachment among subscribers and the potential of the local brand to expand its influence. The Veganz brand is the leader in terms of engagement by comments - 0.498%, which confirms active communication and two-way interaction with the audience. This may indicate the high quality of the content that encourages subscribers to discuss. Veganz (260.73%) and RĖBA (154.44%) recorded the highest level of video views in relation to the number of subscribers, which indicates the effective use of video formats to reach both existing and new audiences. RĖBA's high score is especially noteworthy given the low total number of subscribers, which indicates the potential for viral content. The lowest relative scores across all parameters are observed for the Alpro brand (UK), which may indicate the need to revise the social media strategy to increase audience engagement and activity.

Marketing policy of the point of sale (access). Availability in specialised vegan online stores is quite good. However, it is difficult to buy a wide range of vegetarian products from retailers focused on broad market coverage. The widest range of products for vegetarians is available in Silpo supermarkets. Among the Ukrainian vegetarian brands represented there are “Eat me at”, “Wanted Vegan”, “Meet Not Meat”, “Green Chef”, “Kyivkraut”, “Vega's” (Kyiv), “Khors” (Kremenchuk), “Prema” (Rivne region). European brands include “Plenty reasons”, “Wege Siostry”, “Roleski” (Poland), “Liveg Ber” (Italy), “Wasa” (Sweden), “Exquise”, “Bett'r” (Germany), “Remia” (Netherlands), “Ppura”, “Polli” (Italy), “Jealous Sweets” (UK) and “Little Pleasures” (Belgium). In addition, products for vegans and vegetarians are sold under the Lavka Tradytsii brand, which was originally created as a proprietary Silpo brand and later developed into a separate business with outlets in Silpo stores. In general, Silpo stores offer the following categories of vegetarian and vegan products: sausages and deli meats (about 18 items), cheeses (about 7 items), canned food, sauces and condiments (about 8 items), sweets (about 4 items), frozen food (about 28 items), bread and bakery products (about 2 items), pickles, as well as regular fresh vegetables and fruits. Vegetarian and vegan products at Lavka Tradytsii include approximately 13 items.

Marketing mix problems of vegetarian brands and prospects for their solution

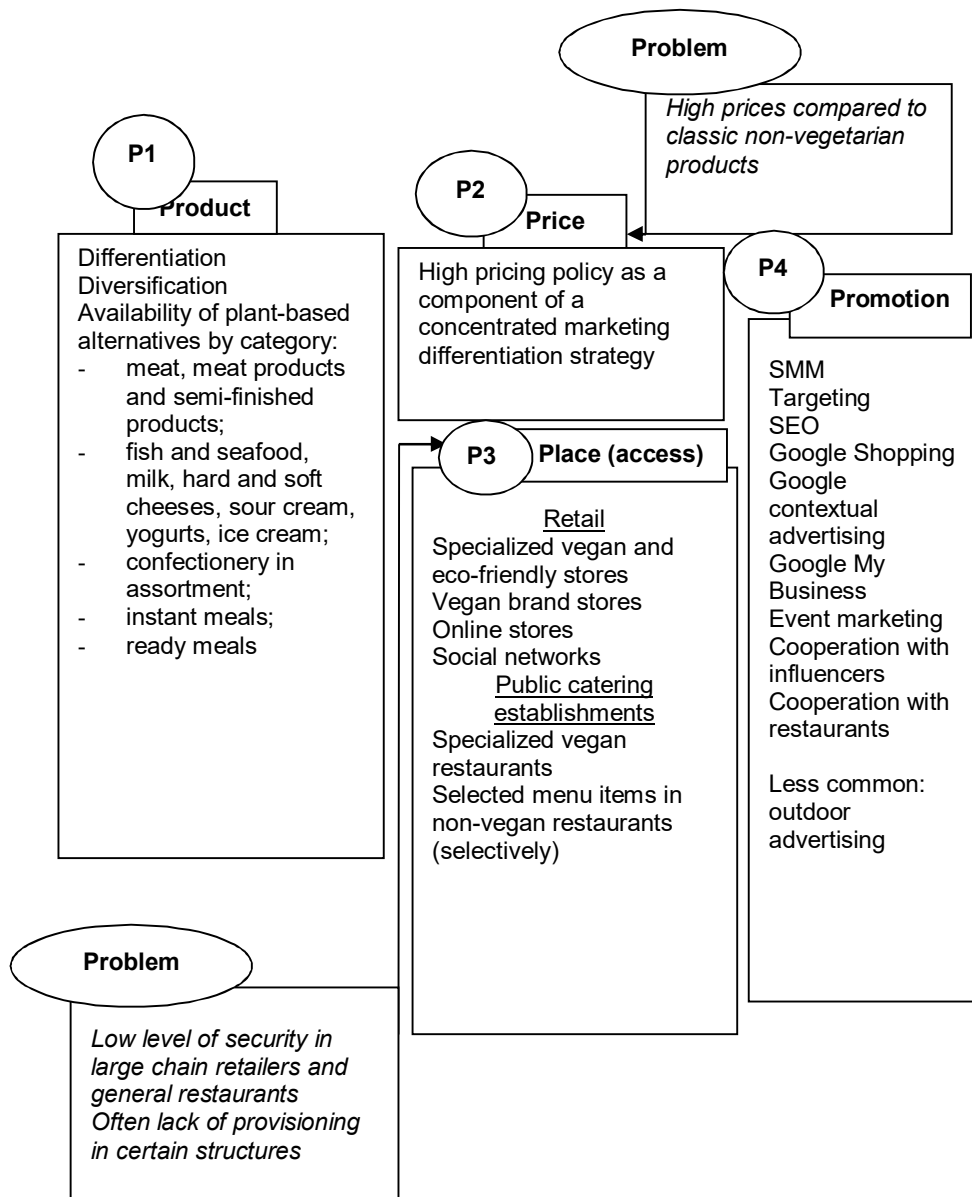
Based on the research conducted on the 4P marketing mix model in the field of vegetarian food products, it was found that the most painful point for consumers is price, as prices for vegetarian alternatives are on average 236% higher than prices for similar non-vegetarian products. The second problem is accessibility (point of sale), but in the niche segment (specialised vegetarian shops and specialised vegetarian catering) accessibility is adequate. Accessibility in non-vegetarian catering establishments and in large chain retailers is problematic. Therefore, the main problem is the policy of high prices.

Figure 16 presents a generalised description of the marketing mix of vegetarian food brands.

According to a study by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology commissioned by UA Plant-Based, 65.3% of consumers are ready to switch to vegan alternatives if they are affordable (Palyvoda, 2021). Currently, on average, about 15% of consumers consume plant-based alternatives to meat, and about 14% consume milk (including not only vegetarians but also those who consume these products as a partial replacement for their meat diet) (Palyvoda, 2021). This means that the consumer segment could potentially grow by 65% only if prices were reduced.

Figure 17 shows the proposed mechanism for improving the marketing policy in the field of vegetarian food products.

The starting point of this mechanism is the marketing policy of promotion: improving and intensifying this policy should lead to the popularisation of vegetarianism and vegetarian brands and, accordingly, to an increase in demand for plant-based alternatives to meat and dairy products among both vegetarians and non-vegetarians. The tools for promotion should mostly be the same as those that are available now: SMM, BTL, event marketing and synthetic elements of promotion (participation in exhibitions and fairs). Improvement requires more active use of these tools, maximum adaptation of strategies and activities to the preferences of the target audience, enhanced targeting, increased native content, improved content planning, further study and detailing of the target audience portrait, and cooperation with influencers.



**Figure 16. Marketing mix of vegetarian food brands
(J. McCarthy's 4P model)**

Source: Own study based on the model of J. McCarthy and cabinet research

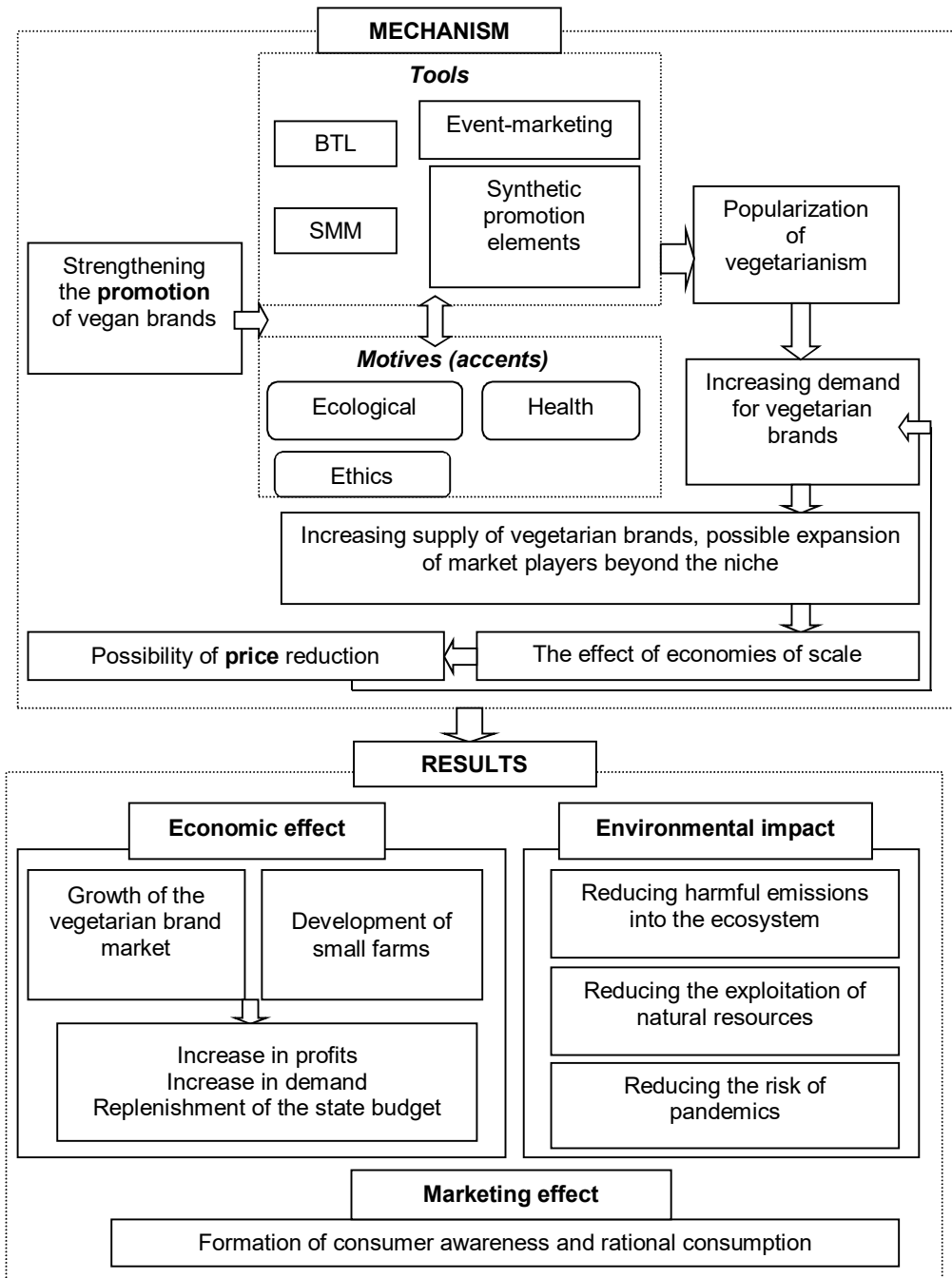


Figure 17. Mechanism for improving marketing policy in the field of vegetarian food products

Source: Own study

It is also necessary to appeal to all three existing motivations that encourage people to consume plant-based alternatives to meat and dairy products: ecology, health, and ethics. The growing demand for vegetarian food will allow vegetarian brands to expand their consumer base and, possibly, in the future, go beyond the niche market to a broader market where the effect of production leverage will be applied. The latter will allow for a slight reduction in prices, which in turn will stimulate an increase in demand. Then the mechanism goes in a circle, leading to even greater production leverage and the possibility of lower prices. It is expected that the market will expand not only due to vegetarians, but also due to consumers with a classical approach to nutrition who will show interest in plant-based meat substitutes, as well as flexitarians. The launched mechanism should lead to the following results:

1) economic effect: increased profits for vegetarian brands, increased contributions to the state budget, and more jobs. In addition, the popularisation of vegetarianism, including the ethical and health and wellness motive, will boost demand for farm products. This is especially true for mild vegetarians, flexitarians and people who do not give up meat at all. The ethical motive appeals not only to slaughter, but also to the conditions of animal welfare and the intense fear and pain of slaughter. The health and wellbeing motive is related, among other things, to the adrenaline that remains in animal meat, to antibiotics, and to the unnatural feeding of animals to increase weight quickly, which also worsens the quality of meat. Farms, providing free range, less antibiotics and natural outdoor nutrition for animals, will produce products, even if they are animal products that will be in demand by the eco- lovers, health-conscious and even partially by the cruelty-free (soft vegetarian, flexitarian) segments. The development of farming will stimulate the state budget, ensure a healthier diet for people and preserve the environment. The main thing is to ensure that farmers comply with the conditions of production and animal husbandry that make them attractive to customers;

2) environmental effect: increasing the consumption of plant-based foods as opposed to animal-based foods will save natural resources, reduce harmful emissions into the atmosphere, reduce the risk of pandemics, and preserve biodiversity;

3) marketing effect: strengthening of the marketing function to form the right needs in terms of conscious and rational consumption, which will have a positive impact on the structure of consumer demand and, accordingly, on the supply (not only of vegetarian brands). As a result, there will be an environmental effect and improved human health.

The proposed mechanism for improving the marketing policy in the field of vegetarian brands takes into account aspects that have not been taken into account before. The works of most authors in this area relate to in-depth studies of a single vegetarian brand (Rybalchenko, 2024) or a wider range of studies from the standpoint of environmental friendliness and ethical marketing policy, but without reference to vegetarianism (Kirmosova, 2023). Authors, who have studied vegetarianism in more detail and extensively, analyze a significant number of factors, including both factors that may prevent people from adopting a vegetarian diet and the positive effects of vegetarianism (Hargreaves et al., 2021; Baroni et al., 2024). But, the issue of an integrated approach to the marketing strategy of vegetarian brands in terms of all elements of the marketing mix has not been considered in recent years, so the identified problems and proposed solutions will allow a broader view of the marketing of vegetarian food brands and the application of the proposed areas of improvement in the marketing policy of enterprises producing vegetarian food products.

Conclusions

1. The study made it possible to determine the specifics of marketing strategies of vegetarian food brands:
 - the basic marketing competitive strategies are focused differentiation and optimisation strategies;
 - niche strategy: niche leadership for strong brands and integration for new market players;
 - product/market ratio: deep market penetration, expansion of product lines, product development, limited and partial diversification;
 - STP marketing strategy: targeted concentrated marketing and positioning based on health, environmental friendliness, and ethics.
2. Features and problem points in the marketing mix of food brands are identified: high price policy due to a focused marketing strategy and to a high level of differentiation.
3. A mechanism for improving the marketing policy in the field of vegetarian food brands is proposed, based on strengthening and optimising the marketing policy of promotion, which should lead to an increase in demand and economies of scale. This will partially solve the problem of high prices, which will also contribute to demand growth. This will result in economic, environmental and marketing benefits.

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