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Examining The Influence of TPB And Curiosity in Gen Z's Plant-Based Meat Consumption

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Abstract

In Malaysia, rising food demand and growing sustainability concerns have driven interest in plant-based meat products, particularly among Generation Z as they are influential in shaping future food trends. This study using the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) with the extension of curiosity to investigate the influence of attitude, perceived social pressure, perceived autonomy and curiosity towards intention to consume plant-based meat products in Klang Valley. A quantitative method was employed, using purposive sampling, a total 206 valid responses were collected and data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The findings indicate that attitude emerged as the strongest predictor, while curiosity showed the least influence. These results contribute to the

growing body of literature on food consumption by offering practical insight for businesses and policymakers to design targeted strategies that promote more sustainable dietary choices among consumers.

Keywords:

Plant-based meat products, food consumption, Theory of Planned Behaviour, and curiosity

1   Introduction

The growth of the population globally is projected to reach around 10 billion by 2050, along with longer life expectancy, higher income levels, and urbanization, will place greater pressure on the world's resources (Malek & Umberger, 2021; Sridhar et al., 2022). The expected rise in food demand, with a 50% increase in overall food consumption and 70% increase in animal-based food consumption, will significantly put pressure on a struggling food system (Choudhury et al., 2020; Gastaldello et al., 2022). Additionally, there are concerns that animal husbandry, as a whole, has a detrimental effect on environmental sustainability (Choudhury et al., 2020; Gastaldello et al., 2022). The global acknowledgement of this issue has prompted the development of worldwide strategies aimed at expediting the transition towards a sustainable and healthier food system (Sridhar et al., 2022; Malek & Umberger, 2021). The increasing preference for sustainable food consumption has resulted in a global surge in demand for plant-based food products (Grasso et al., 2020). This is supported by recent market data indicating the plant-based food sector expanded by 13.3% due to an increase in health conscious and environmental concerns (The Business Research Company, 2024). Hence, the emergence of plant-based meat products in the market is the result of these push factors.

The advancement of plant-based meat alternatives is influenced by various factors. Animal protein is often regarded as a scarce commodity in numerous underdeveloped nations (Salter & Lopez-Viso, 2021; Costlow et al., 2024). Hence, the emergence of plant-based meat alternatives reflects a deliberate strategy to address the need for protein and mitigate protein-energy malnutrition, particularly in low- and middle-income countries where traditional diets are cereal-based and animal-sourced protein is limited (Tziva et al., 2019; Bedsaul-Fryer et al., 2023). The primary factors motivating the development of plant-based meat alternatives are the concerns related to the environment, health, and animal welfare that have emerged due to conventional meat production and consumption practices (Tziva et al., 2019; Andreani et al., 2023).

Research uses the underpinning Theory of Planned Behaviour's attributes; Attitude, Perceived Social Pressure and Perceived Autonomy with an extended element of Curiosity. In past studies, the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) has effectively been used to comprehend and forecast behaviours associated with food, encompassing healthy eating (Arya et al., 2024), dietary habits (Sogari et al., 2023), and adoption of novel products like functional foods. For instance, Bakti et al. (2020) found that attitude

and subjective norms strongly influenced young consumers' intentions to purchase functional foods, reinforcing the TPB's relevance in this area.

Curiosity, defined as the desire to explore and try something new, has recently been identified as a key factor influencing willingness to try unfamiliar foods. When balanced with a sense of comfort or familiarity, curiosity can significantly increase acceptance of new food products (Sakai & Ma, 2025). This makes it particularly relevant for Generation Z, who are frequently exposed to food innovations through social media and online platforms. By investigating these variables, research seeks to provide valuable insights into the factors that shape the intention to consume plant-based meat products among Generation Z in Klang Valley. The findings of this study may contribute to developing effective strategies for promoting healthier and more sustainable dietary choices among the younger population, ultimately leading to improved public health outcomes and reduced environmental impact.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Theory of Planned Behaviour

The research framework for this study was supported by the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), which was put forth by Ajzen (1991). The intention to consume plant-based dairy alternatives is significantly influenced by a positive attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (i.e. autonomy), and the intention serves as an immediate antecedent for plant-based product consumption behaviour (Rosenlöw et al., 2020). The TPB model has been employed in numerous studies on organic food (Ismail et al., 2024). In the past, the TPB model has been used to comprehend and forecast dietary behaviour, consumption of green foods, healthy eating patterns, and the use of novel products like functional foods (He & Sui, 2024). Additionally, this theory has demonstrated its applicability, potency, and validity by offering an excellent framework for calculating, conceptualising, and identifying variables that affect behaviour and behavioural intentions (Alhamad & Donyai, 2021). In this study, TPB was used to explain four aspects of consumer behaviour: intention, attitude, subjective norm, and perceived autonomy.

2.2 Attitude

It is well known that attitudes, which are influenced by beliefs, are important predictors of behavioural intention (Ajzen, 1991). Vegetarians have more positive attitudes than non-vegetarians towards the value of health, product information, novelty, ecological products, social relationships, and social events, while non-vegetarians are less concerned with health issues than vegetarians are (Lee & Lee, 2025). It has been demonstrated that attitudes towards a vegetarian lifestyle are significantly correlated with nutritional knowledge (DeMay et al., 2019; Saintila et al., 2021). Science-based information and facts were what sparked favourable attitudes towards vegetarian lifestyles (Shah & Thanki Joshi, 2024). Recent studies show that people usually have positive views about their own diets and less positive views about

other diets. Having a strong health or environmental identity can encourage them to try plant-based meat alternatives. For example, Meixner et al. (2024) found that Generation Z consumers with strong personal values were more willing to pay for and adopt plant-based meat products.

2.3 Perceived Social Pressure

The choice to eat plant-based meat is influenced not only by personal preference but also by social pressure, emotions, and cultural expectations. People who choose plant-based meals sometimes feel left out because their choice does not match common eating habits, especially when dining with others (Sharps et al., 2021). Social norms play an important role: descriptive norms, which are about what people think others usually eat, encourage similar behaviour, while injunctive norms, which are about what people think others approve of, can either support plant-based eating or keep people eating meat (Sharps et al., 2021; Stok et al., 2016). Feelings such as pride, guilt, and the desire for approval also affect food choices, especially among young consumers (Pham et al., 2023). The setting matters as well, since plant-based meals are often seen as more suitable in casual situations, and negative stereotypes can reduce their appeal in formal settings (Michel et al., 2021). Public opinion about plant-based eaters is mixed, with some people respecting their choices and others reacting negatively, which shows the tension around changing eating habits (Goulson, 2024; Bryant et al., 2019). Overall, research shows that eating plant-based meat is shaped by complex social and cultural factors, and that wider acceptance may be achieved by reducing stigma, presenting it as a positive choice, and using peer influence to normalise it.

2.4 Perceived Autonomy

Perceived autonomy refers to a person's belief in their ability to act according to their interests and values and to perform a specific behaviour effectively (Azjen,1991). Latip et al. (2020) highlight that perceived autonomy is used to present the construct of the control factor, as both reflect an individual's belief in their ability to perform a behaviour in line with their values and capacity. Research shows that autonomy, along with attitude and perceived social pressure, significantly influences the intention to adopt sustainable food behaviours, such as plant-based diets (Alam et al., 2020). Studies based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour also confirm that perceived behavioural control strongly predicts sustainable food consumption intentions (Nuh et al., 2024). In this study, perceived autonomy will be examined as a potential driver of plant-based meat consumption.

2.5 Curiosity

Curiosity is the innate human desire to explore, learn, and understand. The information gap between what one already knows and what one wants to know is known as the state of cognitive deprivation, known as curiosity (Loewenstein, 1994). One of the top drivers for buying plant-based meat was said to be curiosity (Hwang et al., 2020). When peers discuss plant-based meat more, young people's curiosity will be aroused (Hwang et al., 2020). When it comes to food, a consumer's curiosity may take

the form of a desire to learn everything there is to know about the food, including how it was made, prepared, and consumed.

3   Methodology

The correlation study was adopted in this effort to investigate the relationship between attitude, perceived social pressure, perceived autonomy, curiosity and intention to consume plant-based meat products among Generation Z in Klang Valley. The study results were derived from the statistical analysis carried out via Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The target population of the study was Generation Z consumers in Klang Valley aged 18 years old until 28 years old. According to Jayatissa (2023), Generation Z refers to people who were born between 1996 and 2010, and they present 30% of the total population. This generation has its own set of values, attitudes and beliefs (Jayatissa, 2023). Moreover, UN population data projection stated that in the year 2020, Generation Z will comprise nearly a quarter of the growing economic force (Statista, 2021) with substantial purchasing power (Jayatissa, 2023). Therefore, to ensure a generalised finding, the minimum sample size of the targeted population is a must (Kang, 2021).

In this study, the G*Power tool is employed to determine the suitable sample size. The input parameters were set as follows: effect size $f2 = 0.15$, α error probability = 0.05, power (1-β error probability) = 0.95, and the number of predictors = 4. Details of the required sample size calculation using G*Power software are 129 respondents and it is the minimum sample size required for the data analysis (Kang, 2021). The data were collected by using purposive sampling via an online platform, thereby deemed the right approach due to consumers shifting towards technology (Jayatissa, 2023). This approach was utilised as of January 2025 data, showing that about 70.2% of the Malaysian population were active social media users, according to the We Are Social & Meltwater (2025). The link containing the study survey was distributed through online groups and subsequently, a total of 206 valid respondents was included for data analysis.

Furthermore, the measurement utilised in this study was adapted from past literature through an in-depth investigation geared towards fulfilling the research objectives. The construct was created by adapting information obtained from previously published studies, which had been tested for their reliability and validity to ensure a valid conclusion. The constructs were: (1) attitude, (2) perceived social pressure, (3) perceived autonomy, (4) curiosity, (5) intention to consume (Chen, 2022; Knaapila et al., 2022; Latip et al., 2020b; Pandey et al., 2021).

3.1 Demographic

A total of 260 responses were collected and only 206 samples were valid for data analysis for this study. The respondents were majority from male (62.6%) compared to females (37.3%). The majority of the respondents were aged 21-26 years old and all of them had a level of education in university/college. 87.9% from the respondents are single and the majority of them were from the Malay race and were currently enrolled

as students. Table 1 displays the comprehensive demographic profile of the respondents.

Table 1: The Demographic Profile of The Respondents

Profile	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	129	62.6
	Female	77	37.4
Age	18-20 years old	12	5.8
	21-23 years old	84	40.8
	24-26 years old	97	47.1
	27-28 years old	13	6.3
Marital status	Single	181	87.9
	Married	25	12.1
	Divorce	0	0
Race/Ethnicity	Malay	175	85
	Chinese	10	4.9
	Indian	11	5.3
	Others	10	4.9
Occupation	Currently employed	2	1
	Government sector	17	8.3
	Private sector	27	13.1
	Student	160	77.7
Education	No formal education	0	0
	Primary school	0	0
	Secondary school	0	0
	University/College	206	100.0
Salary	No salary	155	75.2
	Less than Rm1000	9	3.9
	RM1000-RM2000	16	7.8
	RM2000-RM3000	27	13.1

3.2 Data Analysis and Results

Table 2: The Regression Analysis

Relationship tested			Std. est.	SE.	R^2	p
H1	Attitude	Intention to consume plant-based meat products	.551	.042	.304	.000
H2	Perceived social pressure	Intention to consume plant-based meat product	.536	.030	.287	.000
H3	Perceive autonomy	Intention to consume plant-based meat product	.537	.041	.288	.000
H4	Curiosity	Intention to consume plant-based meat product	.418	.073	.175	.000

The results showed that the attitude exhibited a positive and statistically significant impact on the intention to consume plant-based meat products (β = 0.551; R^2 = 0.304; p = 0.00). When the element went up by 1 standard deviation, intention to consume plant-based meat products also rose by .551. The findings indicated that perceived social pressure had statistically significant effects on the intention to consume plant-based meat products (β = 0.536; R^2 = 0.287; p = 0.00). When this factor increased by 1 standard deviation, there was a corresponding increase of 0.551 in the inclination to consume plant-based meat products. The research revealed that perceived autonomy had a substantial and statistically significant impact on the intention to consume plant-based meat products (β = 0.537; R^2 = 0.288; p = 0.00). When perceived autonomy increased by 1 standard deviation, the inclination to consume plant-based meat products also rose by 0.551. The study found that curiosity had a significant and positive influence on the intention to consume plant-based meat products (β = 0.418; R^2 = 0.175; p = 0.00). An increase of 1 standard deviation in curiosity resulted in a corresponding increase of 0.551 in the willingness to consume plant-based meat products.

4   Discussion and Study Implications

The intention to consume plant-based meat products had been found to be statistically significant in relation to the four variables tested. Attitude was found to be the most significant while curiosity was the least significant among other variables. A study conducted by Kotchen and Reiling (2000) provided evidence that a person's attitude influences their propensity to purchase a product. Previous research (Teng & Weng, 2015) has also substantiated the results obtained in this study. When consumers have a positive attitude toward plant-based meat products, it leads to an increased inclination to consume them. Recent research reinforces these findings in the context of plant-based meat: Liao et at. (2025) found that attitude and perceived behavioural control significantly predict non-vegetarian consumers' intention to buy plant-based meat products, while curiosity and nutrition information positively influenced subjective norms. This provides further confirmation that a positive attitude is a robust driver of consumption intention in this domain.

Research shows that there is a relationship between perceived social behaviour and the intention to consume plant-based meat products. According to Spence et al. (2018) research, perceived social pressure ranked as the second most influential factor in determining the intention to make a purchase. On the other hand, the study in Germany by Dupont et al. (2022) explained that perceived social behaviour exhibited the least impact when contrasted with perceived behavioural control and specific attitudes toward an alternative meat concerning the readiness to consume such a product.

Perceived autonomy refers to individuals' belief in their ability to perform behaviours aligned with their own values. A significant relationship was found in this study between perceived autonomy and the intention to consume plant-based meat products, echoing findings from past TPB-based research. For instance, Luong et al. (2024) found that positive attitudes and supportive social norms significantly predicted

plant-based meat intake among undergraduates, even though perceived behavioural control was higher among non-consumers. These findings reaffirm the role of autonomy-related constructs within the TPB model in shaping intention. In the present study, perceived autonomy will be explored as a key determinant of plant-based meat consumption.

Regarding curiosity, there exists a relationship with the intention to consume plant-based meat products. These results are supported by studies done by (Stone et al., 2022; Hwang et al., 2020). Consumers may opt to try alternative meats, considered innovative products or novel food, out of curiosity.

5   Study Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The study has certain limitations that warrant consideration. Demographic scope is restricted to Generation Z in Klang Valley, limiting the generalizability of findings to a broader population. This confinement is necessitated by product availability, emphasising the need for future research to expand its reach. The use of a quantitative approach introduces another limitation, as the reliance on numerical data and online surveys excludes potential respondents who may not have internet access, a traditional approach may be applied in future research. Opportunity for future research portrays that the study suggests promising research avenues. Scholars can explore consumer behaviour and preferences, investigating the myriad factors influencing choices and delving into the psychological and sociocultural aspects at play. Additionally, there is a call for academic investigation into the nutritional implications of plant-based meat consumption, comparing traditional meat and plant-based alternatives to assess their nutritional content.

On a practical standpoint, entrepreneurs and food industries can seize market opportunities and foster business innovation by introducing new plant-based products to meet the growing demand. Lastly, collaboration between businesses and policymakers is essential for promoting sustainable agricultural practices, aligning economic interests with environmental sustainability initiatives. These practical implications underscore the potential for positive change and innovation in both the market and environmental spheres.

6   Conclusion

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the remarkable and widespread interest exhibited by Generation Z in the Klang Valley towards plant-based meat products. The findings underscore a substantial positive correlation between various attributes and the inclination to consume these alternatives. Recognising the significance of plant-based meat substitutes in mitigating environmental impact and combating climate change, strategic recommendations emerge. These include integrating these products into promotional campaigns, offering a diverse range of options, and highlighting the dual benefits of enhancing individual health while making positive contributions to the

environment in marketing efforts. The implications of this research extend beyond consumer preferences, signalling a potential transformative shift towards more sustainable and eco-friendly choices among the younger generation. As Generation Z continues to shape market trends, businesses and policymakers alike should leverage these insights to align with evolving values and preferences, fostering a more sustainable and environmentally conscious future.

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