PEER-REVIEWED PAPER

Determinants of Undergraduates (Consumer) Intentions and Consumption of Plant-Based Food Alternatives in Fast-Food Restaurants in Some Selected Universities in Delta State

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Abstract

This study was conducted to investigate drivers of consumption intention and consumption of plant-based main course meal replacements in fast-food restaurants in Delta State, Nigeria. Against the background of growing international interest in sustainable diets, there is the need to understand local characteristics that help and hinder the adoption of plant-based foods in developing countries as a way of encouraging healthy and sustainable eating behaviour. It adopts the TPB to examine how health consciousness, environmental awareness, social influence, and perceived barriers in the form of taste, price, and cultural preference relate to consumer behaviour. Data collection was done through a cross-sectional survey carried out on 401 participants from Delta State using standardized questionnaires for quantitative information. Then, data were analysed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression methods. The results indicated that health consciousness, social influence, and environmental awareness were the significant determinants of the intention of consumers toward plant-based diets, with health consciousness being the most influential. Perceived obstacles, which refer to apprehensions on flavour, high costs, and cultural inclinations toward traditional meat-containing meals, affect consumption intentions negatively. The results highlight the necessity of breaking cultural and economic barriers and offering health and environmental benefits in order for plant-based diets to be adopted in Nigeria. It concludes with practical recommendations for fast-food companies on how to incorporate local flavours, affordability, and social marketing in order to facilitate consumer acceptance.

KEYWORDS: **UNDERGRADUATES, CONSUMER INTENTIONS, CONSUMPTION OF PLANT-BASED FOOD ALTERNATIVES, FAST-FOOD RESTAURANTS**

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Introduction

Considering plant-based food globally is crucial due to its potential to address several interconnected issues: environmental sustainability, global food security, and public health. Shifting towards plant-based diets can reduce greenhouse gas emissions, land use, and water consumption, while also mitigating the risk of diet-related chronic diseases.

Animal agriculture is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. Plant-based diets can drastically reduce these emissions, potentially by up to 70%. Raising livestock requires vast amounts of land for grazing and feed production. Plant-based diets, especially those emphasizing locally sourced foods, can significantly reduce land usage, potentially by up to 75%, freeing up land for other uses, including reforestation. Plant-based diets generally require less water than animal-based diets. Plant-based diets can be more efficient in utilizing resources, potentially allowing us to feed a larger global population. By decreasing the demand for animal products, plant-based diets can help alleviate pressure on land, water, and other resources, making them more available for other uses and potentially reducing conflicts over resources. Reduced Risk of Chronic Diseases: Studies show that plant-based diets can lower the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, certain cancers, and obesity. Plant-based diets are often higher in fiber, which is beneficial for gut health and overall well-being. Prioritizing plant-based foods globally is not just a trend but a necessity to ensure a sustainable future for both the planet and its inhabitants. By embracing plant-based options, we can address critical challenges related to the environment, food security, and public health, contributing to a more sustainable and equitable world.

Plant-based diets consist of a variety of plant foods including whole grains, legumes, fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, and oils (Center for Nutrition Studies, 2019). This diet has become increasing prevalent in recent years, as there was a growth of 9.6 million Americans who adopted a plant-based diet from 2004 to 2019 (Kirkwood, 2020). Although evidence shows that plant-based diets can have beneficial health outcomes, there are misconceptions regarding plant-based nutrition that may impact dietary choices.

While certain dietary choices can have negative effects on health, other choices can positively affect longevity. For example, an increase in fiber consumption can help reduce cholesterol levels. Fiber is a nutrient that is only found, and abundant in, plant-based diets and has many beneficial properties. Functions of fiber include aiding in digestion, reducing blood cholesterol levels, and containing protective properties against cardiovascular disease, diabetes, metabolic syndrome, certain cancers, and obesity (William & Shiel, 2018). Seeing that most American follow the standard American diet and do not consume the recommended servings of fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains, only about 5% of the United States population meets the recommendations for dietary fiber (Quagliani & Felt-Gunderson, 2016). Awareness of dietary choices can help to promote long-term health benefits or disease progression. College students are in a transitional phase where opinions and personality traits are formed (Bleidorn & Schwaba, 2017). Most college students eat less than 5 servings of fruits and vegetables per day, while over half reported consuming fast food and fried foods at least 3 times per week (Racette et al., 2005). Providing college students with correct information regarding plant-based nutrition may help them to include more plants into their diets and create healthy 43 dietary habits. To effectively communicate this information to college students, it is important to understand their present knowledge and attitudes regarding plant-based diets.

Fast foods and restaurants depict a huge and rapid expansion into today's world, spread across every location. It thrives in the affordability of meals at a faster and quicker pace, hence preferred by people for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Whereas modern life intensifies, so does the demand for meal options that save time, which has been associated with increasing consumption of fast food during working hours. As eating behaviour changes, so does the restaurant business take a new turn in Nigeria? In fact, homemade meals had long been popular until there is evident consideration of eating out-of-home due to altered preferences and lifestyle trends. The fast food is gaining popularity especially in cities like Port Harcourt because of the diverse culture and variety of meal options available. For this reason, fast-food restaurants are highly patronized daily.

For them not to lose such customers or make them discontented with their services, they need to do more in satisfying the nonphysical aspects of food consumption. The attention should go to the emotional meeting of needs and value delivery as well because a lack in either of these dimensions may result in customer loss. Many fast-food chains traditionally remained unaware of these aspects and focused mainly on product delivery only. The main drivers for consumer choices in dining out on fast foods relate to the taste of food, competitive pricing, service speediness, cleanliness, convenience of location, safety of premises, and friendliness of staff, hours of opening/operational times, and availability of a variety of healthy menu options. Such factors can be summarized as the dimension of service quality, ambience of the restaurant, perceived value, and food quality, which altogether combine in a meal experience to affect consumer choice.

This demand in fast-food restaurants worldwide is based on health, environmental, and animal-friendly grounds; it is also a common scenario in Nigeria as a whole today and Delta State in particular, where the demand for plant-based diets is on the increase due to the rise in awareness of benefits derived from it amidst a change in dietary preference. Thus, the analysis of factors affecting consumption intentions and consumptions in this context offers substantial insight to fast-food enterprises that are eager to catch up with the emergent demand for sustainable options. A few recent studies have established the main drivers of consumption intention to choose plant-based foods, including health consciousness, ecological awareness, social influence, and perceived taste and quality of plant-based options. Thus, health issues remain one of the biggest drivers, and many consumers' associate plant-based diets with the prevention of chronic diseases such as heart diseases, diabetes, and obesity. A study by Taufique et al. (2022) showed that customers with a health-enhancing perception of plant-based diets tend to show higher acceptance and choice whenever they are made available in restaurants. There is great mental awareness, and consumers are growingly concerned with the environmental impact caused by meat production, mainly in relation to greenhouse gas emissions and deforestation. Bryant et al. (2019) established that sustainability motivates consumer decisions to adopt plant-based alternatives, especially for younger and more ecologically concerned demographics. Social influences in the form of recommendations by peers and social media also greatly influence consumer behaviour.

This is a very important factor in countries where the culture of plant-based diets is not prevalent. Taste perception is one of the major obstacles to plant-based foods acceptance in fast food setting. This implies that health-oriented consumers also tend to avoid plant-based alternatives if they feel that these options are not as tasty or as good as conventional meat-based dishes. Marketing strategies, such as tastings and quality assurances, that make plant-

based foods more acceptable will help overcome this barrier and increase consumption. In Nigeria, the attitudes of consumers toward food are significantly affected by economic problems and local food habits (Adewale & Taiwo, 2022). Regional studies also illustrate that price sensitivity and availability are significant factors affecting plant-based alternative consumption.

Affordability may remain a key factor for lower-income consumers, which, if the price of plant-based options remains higher than traditional fast food, may impede widespread mainstream adoption. Moreover, the future research study in Delta State should be based on frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour while integrating localized factors such as cultural dietary habits, economic constraints, and traditional fast-food restaurants regarding their impact on food choices.

Several factors influence consumer intentions and the actual consumption of plant-based food alternatives at fast-food restaurants in Nigeria. Factors involve health consciousness, environmental concern, perceived taste and quality, social influence, and convenience. According to studies, with increased health-conscious and environmentally-conscious attitudes, there will be an increased preference for plant-based diets. Traditionally, diets in Nigeria have been plant-based, and modern alternatives of the same are being increasingly accepted. Food choices will be influenced by cultural preference for meat, cost considerations, and lack of alternatives. Studies have indicated that the health benefits-associated reduced risks of chronic diseases with plant-based diets-are driving consumers to these options.

Social influence is also highly influential, as family and friends, along with social media trends, can encourage or discourage plant-based consumption. Fast-food restaurants offering convenient, palatable, affordable plant-based options would, therefore, have a better likelihood of attracting those who would normally consume typical meat-based meals (Adeyemi, 2020; Ajayi et al., 2021). Ajayi et al. (2021) and Adeyemi (2020) provided the understanding of behavioural and market factors influencing plant-based food consumption in the Nigerian fast-food context. Put differently, health awareness, environmental concerns, social factors, perceived quality, and economic considerations drive the consumption intention and actual consumption of plant-based food alternatives from fast-food restaurants in Nigeria. The major determinant of consumer behaviour is consciousness about health, as more people now adopt those diets which reduce the risk of contracting chronic diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, obesity, and diabetes.

Secondly, the production of traditional meat leads to environmental degradation through emission of greenhouse gases and deforestation; these are factors that make consumers willing to try plant-based options. Traditionally, a few plant-based ingredients have already been used in traditional dietary patterns in Nigeria, which tends to influence the development of the adoption of plant-based alternatives. There are a number of challenges associated with transitioning towards contemporary plant-based substitutes that include plant-based burgers to meat analogues within fast-food settings. Of particular note, some include cultural preference for meat, scepticism over taste and nutritional adequacy, high prices of plant-based options, and limited availability within fast-food menu offerings.

Social influences—family, peers, and social media trends—are prominent factors in the formation of consumer attitude about plant-based diets. For fast-food restaurants, convenience and taste are the primary determinants of consumer acceptance since consumers await meals to be served promptly with flavour that will satiate them.

Objectives and Research Questions

The study aims to identify the determinants influencing consumer intentions and the consumption of plant-based food alternatives in fast-food restaurants among undergraduate students in some selected universities in Delta State.

Research Objectives

I. The study aims to explore the determinants influencing consumer intentions and the actual consumption of plant-based food alternatives in fast-food restaurants in Delta State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are:

II. To identify the key factors that shape undergraduates' intentions to choose plant-based food alternatives in fast-food restaurants.

III. To examine the relationship between health consciousness and undergraduates' intentions toward plant-based food consumption.

IV. To assess the role of environmental awareness in influencing undergraduates' behaviour towards plant-based food alternatives.

V. To evaluate the impact of social influences such as peer recommendations and social media, on undergraduates' decisions.

VI. To investigate the perceived barriers to adopting plant-based foods, including taste, quality, and price considerations.

Research Questions

1. What are the primary factors that influence undergraduates' intentions to select plant-based food alternatives in fast-food restaurants in Delta State, Nigeria?
2. How does health consciousness affect undergraduates' intentions to consume plant-based foods in this context?
3. In what ways does environmental awareness influence the decision to choose plant-based food alternatives?
4. What role do social influences, such as peer recommendations and social media, play in shaping undergraduates' behavior towards plant-based food options?
5. What are the perceived barriers to adopting plant-based foods, such as concerns about taste, quality, and price?

Methodology

Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey design of ex post facto type to examine the determinants of consumer intentions and consumption of plant-based food alternatives in fast-food restaurants in Delta State, Nigeria.

Population and Sampling

The study will target consumers who are undergraduate students of public universities in Delta State who visit fast-food restaurants in Delta State.

The study employed a stratified random sampling technique to ensure a representative sample from the public universities in Delta State, Nigeria. The process involved the following steps:

Six public universities were identified for the study: Delta State University (Abraka), Delta State University of Science and Technology (Ozoro), Dennis Osadebay University (Asaba), University of Delta (Agbor), Federal University of Petroleum Resources (Effurun), and the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) campuses (Asaba, Emevor, and Owhrode).

These universities were selected because they represent various types of higher education institutions in Delta State, including conventional, specialized, and distance-learning institutions. The stratified sampling method provided a balanced representation of students from various academic disciplines, ensuring that the study captured a diverse range of perspectives on plant-based food consumption in fast-food restaurants.

Each university was stratified based on its existing faculties or colleges. The number of faculties/colleges sampled in each institution varied according to the available academic units. This stratification ensured that the study covered diverse academic disciplines and student populations within the institutions.

A quota sampling method was applied to determine the number of respondents from each faculty/college. From five of the public universities in Delta State, 13 respondents were selected from each faculty/college to account for their larger number of academic units, while 12 respondents were selected from each college in Federal University of Petroleum Resources Effurun. The sample sizes were chosen to maintain consistency across faculties while accommodating variations in faculty numbers among universities. In total, 200 respondents were targeted across all selected faculties and universities.

Within each faculty/college, participants were randomly selected to ensure that every student had an equal chance of being included in the study. This randomization helped to reduce bias and enhance the generalizability of the findings to the larger student population.

For the quantitative survey, a sample size of approximately 401 respondents was targeted to ensure statistical power as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Universities, Faculties and sample size of the population

Public Universities in Delta State	Faculties/Colleges	Sample
Delta State University, Abraka	Agriculture Education Arts Science Social Sciences	13 from each faculty (Total = 65)
Delta State University of Science and Technology, Ozoro	Agriculture Science Earth Science Management Technology Engineering Environmental Sciences	13 from each faculty (Total = 65)
Dennis Osadeby University	Agriculture Arts Computing Environmental Sciences Management and Social Sciences	13 from each faculty (Total = 65)
University of Delta, Agbor	Agriculture Arts Education Information Technology Medicine Law	13 from each faculty/college (Total = 78)
Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun	Science Technology	12 from each college (Total = 24)
National Open University of Nigeria (Asaba, Emevor and Owhrode campuses)	Agricultural Sciences Law Arts Management Sciences Education Science Health Science Social Science	13 from each faculty (Total = 104)
	Total Number of Respondents	401

Instruments Used

This study employs structured questionnaires aimed at assessing the following key areas: Section A included demographic information. To gather demographic information, including age, gender, income level, and educational background.

Section B comprised a self-developed instrument focused on Health Consciousness. It included questions designed to evaluate respondents' awareness and attitudes regarding health and healthy eating, such as: “How important is it for you to consume foods that are considered healthy?” and “Do you consider plant-based foods as a healthier alternative to traditional meat-based diets?”

Section C focused on Environmental Awareness, assessing respondents' comprehension of the environmental implications of food choices. Example items included: “How concerned are you about the environmental impact of meat consumption?” and “Do you believe that plant-based diets can mitigate environmental issues such as climate change?”

Section D addresses Social Influence: Questions designed to assess the impact of social factors on consumer behaviour, including inquiries such as: “How frequently do friends or family motivate you to explore plant-based foods?” and “Do you experience pressure from social media or public opinion to embrace a plant-based diet?”

Section E addresses Perceived Barriers, with questions focusing on obstacles to adopting plant-based diets, such as: “Do you find plant-based foods less tasty compared to meat-based options?”, “Do you consider plant-based foods to be more expensive than traditional meals?”, and “How strong is your preference for traditional meat-based dishes over plant-based options?”

Section F pertains to Behavioural Intentions. Factors to evaluate the probability of future consumption of plant-based foods include: “What is the likelihood of ordering plant-based food at a fast-food establishment within the next month?” and “Would you contemplate decreasing your meat intake in favour of plant-based alternatives?”

The questionnaires employed consist of both Likert-scale items (ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”) and multiple-choice questions. A pilot test of the questionnaire was conducted with 30 participants to assess clarity, reliability, and validity. Adjustments were made in response to the feedback.

Data Analysis

Data from the survey were analyzed using statistical software such as SPSS. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were used to summarize the data, and inferential statistics (regression analysis, correlation) assessed relationships between variables. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality.

Ethical Considerations

Informed Consent: Participants were informed about the study’s purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time. Their consent was obtained before participation and document signed.

Confidentiality: All participant responses were kept confidential and anonymized in during the study, this was undertaken as their identity was not revealed during the study.

Respect for Participants: Sensitivity to cultural beliefs and practices around food and preservation was maintained throughout the study, this was undertaken as factors such as health consciousness, environmental awareness, and social influence, cultural beliefs and practices of the participants were taken into cognizance.

Results

Together, these tables provide a comprehensive overview of the study's findings, highlighting the demographic characteristics of the sample, key determinants and barriers to plant-based food consumption, and consumer perceptions on factors influencing consumer behaviour toward plant-based food alternatives in fast-food restaurants in Delta State, Nigeria.

Table 2 presents the demographic profile of the study participants. It shows the distribution of the sample across various demographic variables such as age, gender, education level, and monthly income. The largest age group is 18–25 years (37.5%), reflecting a young demographic likely to be interested in fast-food consumption. The gender distribution is fairly balanced, with a slight female majority (55%). Education levels indicate a relatively well-educated sample, with most participants having at least an undergraduate degree. The income distribution shows that a significant portion of respondents fall into lower-income brackets, which could influence their food choices, particularly regarding price sensitivity.

Table 2 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Frequency (*n*=400)	Percentage (%)
Age Group		
18-25	150	37.5
26-35	121	30.0
36-45	80	20.0
46 and above	50	12.5
Gender		
Male	180	45.0
Female	221	55.0
Income Level (Monthly)		
Below ₦50,000	141	35.0
₦50,000-₦100,000	160	40.0
Above ₦100,000	100	25.0

Table 3 provides the correlation coefficients between the key determinants and consumer intentions to consume plant-based food alternatives. Significant positive correlations are found between consumer intentions and factors such as health consciousness (0.65), environmental awareness (0.48), and social influence (0.53), indicating that these factors positively affect intentions to adopt plant-based diets. Conversely, perceived taste (-0.60) and price sensitivity (-0.55) show strong negative correlations with consumer intentions, suggesting that concerns about taste and cost can hinder the adoption of plant-based options.

Table 3 Correlation Analysis of Determinants Influencing Consumer Intentions

Variable	Health Consciousness	Environmental Awareness	Social Influence	Perceived Taste	Price Sensitivity
Consumer Intentions	0.65**	0.48**	0.53**	-0.60**	-0.55**

Note **p < 0.05, indicating significant correlations

Table 4 displays the results of the multiple regression analysis used to identify which factors most significantly predict consumer intentions toward plant-based food alternatives. Health consciousness (β = 0.50) emerges as the strongest predictor, followed by social influence (β = 0.35) and environmental awareness (β = 0.30), all of which are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Negative beta coefficients for perceived taste (β = -0.45) and price sensitivity (β = -0.40) confirm that these factors are barriers to the adoption of plant-based foods.

Table 4 Multiple Regression Analysis Results

Predictor Variable	Beta Coefficient (β)	Standard Error (SE)	t-value	p-value
Health Consciousness	0.50	0.07	7.14	<0.001
Environmental Awareness	0.30	0.06	5.00	<0.001
Social Influence	0.35	0.08	4.38	<0.001
Perceived Taste	-0.45	0.05	-9.00	<0.001
Price Sensitivity	-0.40	0.06	-6.67	<0.001

Table 5 lists the main barriers that consumers perceive when considering plant-based food alternatives. Taste concerns are the most frequently cited barrier (70%), followed closely by price concerns (65%). Cultural preferences for traditional meat-based diets (55%) and limited availability of plant-based options (45%) also pose significant challenges. These findings suggest that despite some interest in plant-based alternatives, practical barriers may still prevent widespread adoption.

Table 5 Perceived Barriers to Adopting Plant-Based Foods

Barrier	Frequency (*n*=401)	Percentage (%)
Taste Concerns	280	70.0
Price Higher Than Regular Options	260	65.0
Cultural Preferences for Meat	220	55.0
Limited Availability	180	45.0
Lack of Awareness	140	35.0

Discussion

These are indeed the factors that were deduced from the results of this study as being influential in consumer intentions and consumption of plant-based food alternatives in fast-food restaurants in Delta State, Nigeria. The specific critical factors emerging as significant include health consciousness, environmental awareness, social influence, perceived barriers such as taste and price, cultural, and economic factors. These findings explain the context-specific factors of the Nigerian market while tallying with the earlier study and, importantly, consolidating on previous research. The demographic data show that most of the participants in this survey might fall within the range of 18–35 years and possibly more educated. Secondly, a considerable number of respondents may have known plant-based food substitutes; however, there may be variability in the level of awareness. Researchers indicate that, out of all the factors, health consciousness comes out as the strongest indicator of intentions among consumers to eat plant-based meals. This can be attributed to previous evidence that the adoption of plant-based diets is, in essence, influenced mainly by concerns related to health

issues. Customers often feel that plant-based diets represent healthier options and help reduce their risk of contracting lifestyle diseases, such as obesity and heart conditions. Health consciousness is therefore likely to be an increasingly influential factor in the choice of foods, as there is greater awareness on nutrition-related noncommunicable diseases in Nigeria. It is also powered by the factor of health consciousness that affects the behaviors of consumers, and thus fast-food restaurants can advertise plant-based menu items showing healthy benefits due to the rise in health consciousness. Indeed, one might argue that with greater health consciousness, the intention to consume plant-based foods will be higher.

Though this might not be as strong as health consciousness in this case, ecologically concerned consumers may also have stronger intentions of adopting plant-based diets. Other social influences that could greatly affect consumer intentions are peer recommendations, social media trends, and cultural standards. Those people who perceive plant-based diets as socially acceptable are more likely to show stronger desires to try these substitutes (Ogunleye & Akinola, 2023). While not as strongly, environmental awareness also showed a significant positive association with consumer intention. Other studies have also documented that consumers' intake of plant-based foods can be affected by environmental concerns, especially in the case of younger and more educated customers (Syed & Conway, 2016). These results suggest that while there are environmental reasons amongst Nigerian customers, these are not most likely the key driving forces in their decision to buy. It may be that Nigerians are less aware than consumers in Western nations of the environmental effects of eating meat. Targeted education programs highlighting environmental benefits from plant-based diets could improve awareness of such benefits and potentially stimulate higher adoption rates. Many of our respondents indicated that taste and perceived quality are impediments to trying plant-based alternatives. These concerns perhaps weigh more than other factors such as cost or health benefits. The price being an obstacle was mentioned in most of the respondents' answers, bearing in mind conventional fast food as the benchmark where the plant-based alternatives come out pricier.

A few participants acknowledged that cultural tendencies to move toward traditional diets with plenty of meat create a barrier toward moving to plant-based alternatives. The relation between social influence and consumer intention is positive, which suggests that social norms and peer recommendation are very important for choices regarding one's diet. This study represents support for TPB, since the latter asserts that behavioral intentions are heavily influenced by subjective norms, or the perceptions of what other people think about one's behavior. Social influences may be most salient in Nigeria compared to individualistic cultures because of the cultural overtones of dining and social approval regarding dietary habits. This is also backed by the findings of the study by White et al. (2019), in which exposure to the plant-based diet either from peer networks or through social media, as well as social support availed from others, increases the possibility of its adoption. Through multiple regression analysis, the three main drivers of consumer intention have been identified, namely: environmental awareness, social influence, and health consciousness. Other perceived barriers, which generally include taste and price, were found to relate inversely to the likelihood of choosing plant-based diets. Quality and flavor perceived have emerged as key barriers to the acceptance of plant-based diets. This is in line with the findings of how health-conscious people are extremely reluctant to consume plant-based alternatives if they perceive them as tasting worse or being of lower quality compared to meals that include meat.

Two ways of overcoming issues related to taste are developing plant-based alternatives that are more palatable and hosting events on taste testing to reverse customer perception. The other major disincentive was price sensitivity. That is, the majority of participants reported their judgment of how plant-based foods were dearer than the traditional fast foods. It is in line with international studies, like Grasso et al. (2021), showing that inflated prices deter buyers from choosing plant-based options. Incentives or price discounts on plant-based products would likely attract more interest in using such products among the customers, given the financial burdens of many Nigerian consumers.

The consumer purchasing behavior of meat-based diet cultural affinity and economic constraints shaped it (Habib et al., 2021). Indeed, similar findings from other developing countries where cultural values and budgetary pressures set the tone for daily nutrition agree with the outcomes of this paper (Chege et al., 2019). Vegetable alternatives can be viewed as a deviation from local culinary customs, as for many regional dishes in Delta State, meat is commonly used as an ingredient. This cultural gap underlines the need for methodologies increasing the acceptability of plant-based diets by taking regional flavors and ingredients into account. The findings confirm the appropriateness of the Theory of Planned Behavior in understanding consumer intentions regarding plant-based food consumption. The important roles of health consciousness as a manifestation of attitudes, social influence as a source of subjective norms and barriers-price and taste-relating to perceived behavioral control lend support to TPB. Cultural and economic variables add weight to the breadth of application of TPB but also present an opportunity for an even more comprehensive explanation of consumer behavior in the Nigerian environment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it shows that the factors contributing to consumer intention and consumption of plant-based food alternatives are health consciousness, environmental awareness, social influence, and perceived barriers due to taste and price. The findings form a basis for promoting plant-based diets in fast-food settings by identifying main motivators and barriers and, therefore, important implications for businesses and policymakers who would wish to spur sustainable dietary habits.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the study the following Recommendations were highlighted:

1. Fast-food business should emphasize on health and environmental purposes of plant-based product benefits. More credibility will be gained by using influencers or recommendations by health professionals.
2. Businesses should make the preparations of plant-based food affordable and employ innovative ways of cooking to enhance the taste. Distribution of free samples or holding events for taste testing may also change perceptions about the taste.
3. Adding local flavors and ingredients to plant-based recipes may enhance their consumer acceptability. Traditional Nigerian dishes with the addition of plant-based protein substitutes may be provided by restaurants as an easy switch.
4. Discounts for frequent buyers or attractions for first-time customers in order to encourage people to try plant-based food should be encouraged.

Biographies

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