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Dollars and Diets

A Quantitative Analysis of Proponents of Dietary Adherence Among Plant-Based Consumers

Pransee Patel
50829

Abstract: The adoption of plant-based diets are on a rise, driven by their numerous advantages in addressing climate change, improving health and well-being, and supporting animal-welfare. This study aims to understand the role of internal, social and economical factors on the intention of Swedish plant-based consumers to continue to maintain their plant-based diet. Economic uncertainty emerged as a significant influencer of intention to maintain a plant-based diet, with consumers valuing having control over their food choices and affordability. Conversely, subjective norms show a negative correlation with the intention to maintain a plant-based diet, particularly among male consumers who may succumb to societal pressures and abandon their plant-based diet. Lastly, I find no evidence that resonating with a plant-based identity has any relationship with an intention to maintain the diet, however there is evidence to suggest that individuals with longer adherence to a plant-based diet are more inclined to continue it in the foreseeable future. Within academia and research, this study furthers the knowledge on plant-based consumers and their behaviours and by including a novel element of economic uncertainty. Additionally, the study offers vital insights for retail practitioners in informing their understanding of the dynamics within the market, offering detailed managerial implications on topics ranging from marketing strategies to pricing considerations.

Keywords: Plant-based Consumers, Plant-Based Diet, Economic Uncertainty, Social Factors, Motivation, Duration, Subjective Norms, Identity, Intention to Maintain Diet

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1. Introduction

This section provides a background on plant-based consumers and the maintenance of a plant-based diet. Further, it discusses the purpose of this study, the research question, expected contribution and delimitations.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Background on Plant-Based Consumers

In the recent decades, the adoption of plant-based diets (PBDs) has seen a remarkable trajectory. The number of plant-based consumers (PBCs) in America who follow a vegan diet increased 600% from 2014 to 2018 (Forgreive J., 2018). In the UK, the percentage of population that follows a PBD has almost doubled, from 6.7% to 13.1% over the last decade (Alae-Carew C. et al, 2021). In Australia, 22% of the population say they are trying to eat less meat (Statista, 2024). In Scandinavia, Denmark has just launched the world's first action plan for plant-based foods. (Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, Denmark, 2023). Global adoptions come with global perceptions, diverse interpretations and unique implementations of the diet. Hargreaves et al. (2022), after conducting an extensive literature review, proposed an all encompassing definition of the plant-based diet. They define it simply as a *dietary pattern in which foods of animal origin are totally or mostly excluded*. Additionally, academics agree on the idea that the plant-based diet is a spectrum, consisting of multiple dietary preferences and practices, that in one way or another derive a majority of their diet from plants (Rosenfeld et al., 2020, Clem J., 2021, E. Beacom, 2021, Beardsworth and Keil, 1991b, 1992).

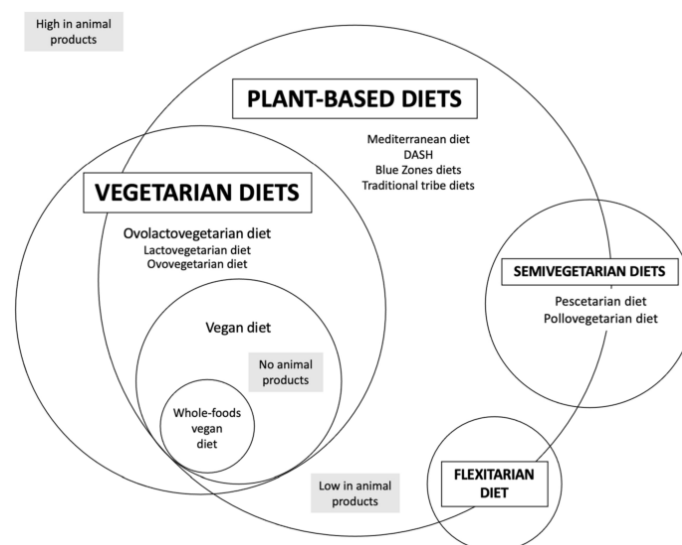


Fig. 1. Plant-based diets (Hargreaves et al., 2022)

Therefore, in this study, vegetarian, plant-based diet and vegan are used interchangeably to refer to a plant-based diet, as they all fall on a spectrum. In fig 1, Hargreaves et al. (2002), visualize plant-based diets. Accordingly, the term omnivorous is used to describe diets that derive majority consumption from animal-based products.

The rise of the diet has contributed to year on year growth in the global plant-based foods market, currently valued at 64.7 Billion US Dollars, is projected to grow to a colossal 161.9 Billion US Dollars by 2030.

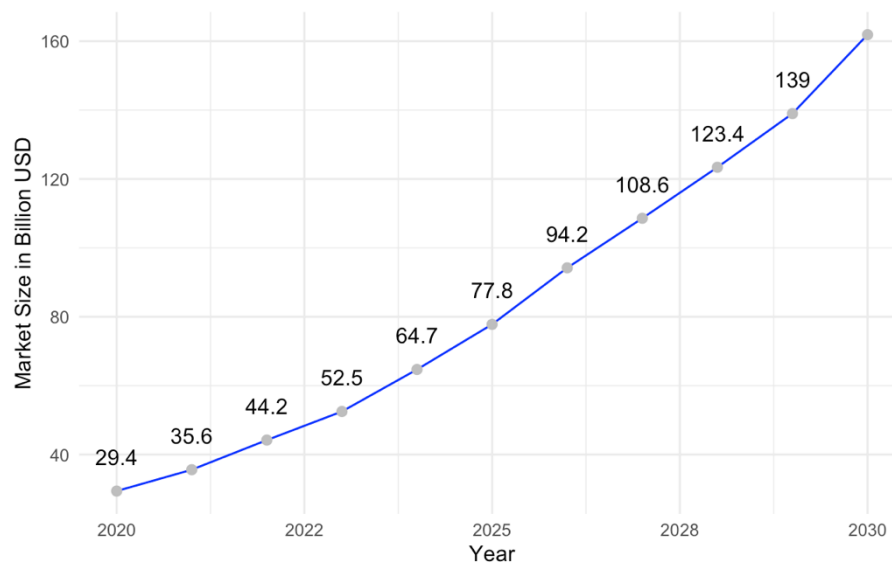


Fig. 2. Value of the global plant-based food market from 2020 to 2030 (Statista, 2024)

1.1.2 Background on Plant-Based Consumers in Sweden

Within Sweden, approximately 2% and 7% of the population reported themselves to be vegan and vegetarian respectively (Statista, 2021), implying Sweden has an approximately 10% plant-based population.

According to a 2023 study by the Good Food Institute (GFI) Europe, the market for plant-based foods in Europe is valued at €5.8 billion. Analyzing data from 13 European countries, GFI found a significant 21% increase in both euro sales and unit sales of plant-based foods between 2020 and 2022. In Sweden specifically, the plant-based food market is valued at 2.22 billion kronor (GFI Europe, 2022). Despite minimal growth of 0.3% between 2020 and 2022, and ranking seventh in Europe for overall plant-based food sales, Swedish consumers rank third in Europe for their per capita consumption rates of

plant-based foods. Despite some fluctuations across categories, Swedish consumers exhibit the highest per capita consumption rate of plant-based milk in Europe (GFI Europe, 2022). A survey also revealed that among respondents purchasing vegetarian food daily or sporadically, taste emerged as the primary consideration for 71% of Swedes, followed by affordability at 59%, and product texture at 38% (Statista, 2021).

1.1.3 Background on Maintenance of a Plant-Based Diet

As demonstrated, the outlook of the market is extremely optimistic. However, it is worth considering whether the entire market growth can be solely attributed to an increase in plant-based consumers. It is plausible that the market is also expanding due to a broader consumer base, primarily omnivores, who are integrating more plant-based options into their diets. This is accredited to the perception of the diet as a trend, a result of the extant media coverage of the diets being more than just food choices, and rather healthier lifestyles. For instance, popular athletes and celebrities have begun discussing their plant-based diets, resulting in their fans trying to emulate them (Grand View Research, 2019). Conformity to these trends is found to be a moderator of positive purchase intention of vegan foods among omnivores (Martinelli & De Canio, 2021). Furthermore, the growing availability of plant-based alternatives in supermarkets, restaurants and fast-food places, encourages consumers to try them. For example, Pret's, a local go to sandwich chain, opened exclusively plant-based locations across the UK. In Sweden, Max recently ran a campaign around its plant-based product line, Supreme Green (Max.se, 2023). MAX's goal is for every second meal sold in their restaurants to consist of something other than beef by 2022. Bastard Burgers also has an extensive plant-based menu which provides alternatives to every meat-based burger on their menu. Such conventionally meat-oriented restaurants have a predominantly omnivorous consumer base, of which many may be willing to try these plant-based options, as a result of nudging practices, attractive advertisement and simply, the availability of options.

Although many people experiment with plant-based diets, fewer are prepared to adhere to them long term (Ruby, 2012, Smithsonian, 2014). Those that defer from the diet cite the main reasons for defecting to be being vegetarian as “too much work,” “inconvenient”, “more expensive,” and of eating separately being “too difficult” as a social activity (Menzie & Sheeshka, 2012, Ruby, 2012). Historically, Western countries' socio-political discourses over masculinity, vitality and racial superiority, have been associated with meat over the long arc of history pre-20th century (Adams, 1991, Willard 2002). The end product of these discourses has been a form of “naturalism” that normalizes humans' use of animals for food as being somehow innate (Peñaloza 2000) and even,

necessary (Joy, 2011). Subsistence societies turned to animal agriculture to meet their nutritional needs. As societies became progressively more complex, meat became increasingly important for political-economic reasons (Chiles & Fitzgerald, 2018). In a genealogical analysis of the history of meat, its production and consumption, the authors discover the nuanced role of culture in the demand and legitimating meat in the Western world over the course of history (Chiles & Fitzgerald, 2018). For these reasons, even in modern times, as a result of the embeddedness of meat in Western traditions and culture, plant-based consumers often feel ostracized or excluded from family and friends for following a plant-based diet (Jabs et al., 2000). Furthermore, it has also been found that vegetarians in the Western world suffer from lower psychological well-being than meat-eaters (Nezlek et al., 2018). Lastly, it is also important to highlight that plant-based diets are perceived as expensive counterparts to the omnivorous diet, typically due to higher prices of meat substitutes or alt-meats, as well as the higher costs of fruits and vegetables (Pais, D.F. et al., 2022). A large study conducted on US consumers found that the second largest barrier to eating plant-based foods was perceived cost, with 58% of the consumers saying “it costs too much to buy plant-based foods” (Yale Program on Climate Change Communication, 2019). This perception of high cost is particularly significant given the prevailing economic crisis and food inflation being experienced by OECD countries (OECD Economic Outlook, 2023). Particularly in Sweden, food inflation was at a historical high of 20.95% in February of 2023 (Statistics Sweden, 2023). This phenomena may heighten the cost perception and further drive down the consumption of plant-based foods and adoption and maintenance of the plant-based diet.

In addition to the above mentioned reasons, issues that stem from each plant based consumers' individual diet also lead to a large percentage of them deferring from the diet. While there is lack of data regarding withdrawal figures of plant-based consumers in Europe, a study conducted in the United States among 11,000 respondents, particularly on vegans, found that 84% percent of vegetarians and vegans return to eating meat (Smithsonian, 2014). The markets have followed suit, with many prominent players like Nestle, Oatly and Innocent reducing the line length of their plant-based products (Guardian, 2023) and Pret's closing most of its 'Veg-only' outlets (BBC, 2024).

In conclusion, while plant-based diets have gained popularity, many individuals struggle to maintain them over time due to various challenges. including personal (internal), socio-cultural, and economic factors. The return to meat consumption among plant-based consumers underscores the complexity of sustaining these dietary choices. This phenomenon of maintenance is rarely studied by academics, with research focused largely on the development and adoption of diet. To bridge this gap, this study aims to contribute to the extant literature by examining the maintenance of diet through three lenses,

internal, social and external. The study holds an aim of providing a holistic and nuanced understanding of dietary adherence among existing PBCs, whilst incorporating a novel determiner- particularly economic uncertainty.

1.2 Purpose and Research Question

As motivated in the previous section, the primary goal of this thesis is to examine the effects of internal, social and external (economic) factors on the intention of plant-based consumers in Sweden to uphold their plant-based diet. The research question is then formulated as below:

What are the effects of the prevailing economic uncertainty, social factors and internal factors on the intention of Swedish plant-based consumers to maintain their plant based diet?

1.3 Expected Research Contribution

This thesis is expected to make important contributions to the understanding of how PBCs are affected by, and react to the current economic crisis that is accentuating the perceived economic barriers of eating plant-based foods. This study aims to contribute to the extant literature by shedding light on the dynamics driving the maintenance of plant-based diets, particularly of consumer behaviour given economic uncertainty. Furthermore, it intends to deepen the understanding of how social and identity-oriented factors surrounding PBCs interact with the intention of a plant-based consumer to continue to engage with their diet in the future. An empirical understanding of the strength of these factors as well the overall behavioural intention to remain a PBC under prevailing economic uncertainty has important implications for both retailers and academics. Consumer insights derived from the thesis can enable retailers to adapt their strategies to the prevailing dynamic forces in the increasingly relevant and rapidly growing plant-based foods market. Insights derived would potentially assist in increasing effectiveness of marketing, segmentation, product development and risk mitigation practices. Within academia, the thesis is expected to further advance theoretical knowledge and provide interdisciplinary insights to the research surrounding social identities, crisis behaviour, and plant-based consumers.

1.4 Delimitations

This section discusses the limitations of the study, highlighting the constraints and scope of the thesis. The first limitation lies in the fact that the study is geographically bounded to Sweden and its PBCs. This means that its findings are constrained in application to other regions with different cultures, pressures, and macroeconomic settings. Secondly, the nature of the thesis' research question entails that the study is a cross-sectional study, whose findings represent the characteristics of the population in a particular point of time, and may remain applicable largely in times of economic crises. Lastly, due to the scope constraints, I did not examine the relationships between the various factors - internal, social and economic - which might have deepened the contextual insights and provided greater explanations for why PBCs behave the way that they do.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This section explores previous literature on a model's framework, intention, plant-based consumers and factors that motivate adoption and sustenance of a plant-based diet. The analysis is used to formulate hypotheses for this research paper.

2.1 Theory of Planned Behaviour

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) devised by Icek Ajzen is an influential study that examines human behaviour. Since its publication in 1991, it has been cited by over 44,000 researchers as indicated by the Web of Science. According to Ajzen, attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control of individuals together form the intention, which in turn leads to overt behaviour (1991). The central factor of the model is an individual's intention to perform a given behaviour. Intention to perform a behaviour are indications of how much effort an individual is willing to exert in order to perform a behaviour, or how hard they are willing to try. As a general rule, the stronger the intention to engage in a behaviour, the more likely is its performance (Ajzen, 1991).

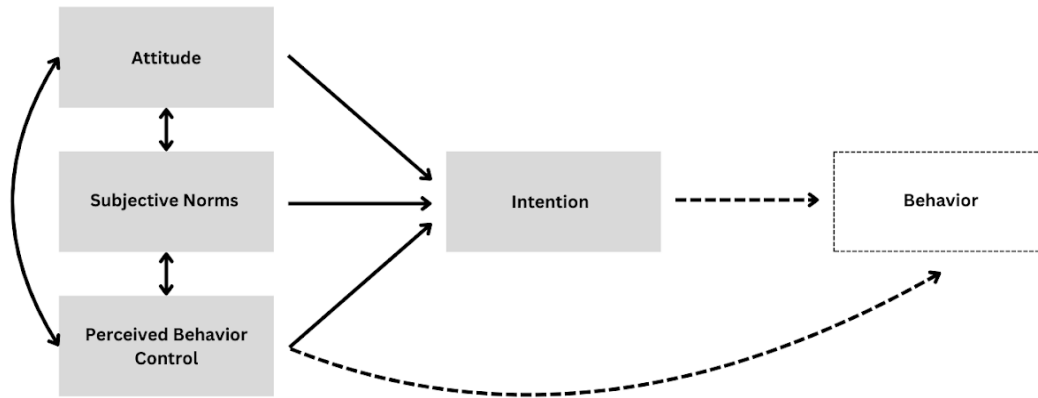


Fig. 3. Model of the Theory of Planned Behaviour. As proposed by Azjen (1991). Dotted parts of the diagram are not studied, merely indicated

In the TPB, attitudes refer to the extent to which the individual has favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behaviour in question. Subjective norm is a social factor, which refers to the social pressure to perform or not perform a behaviour. Perceived behavioural control refers to the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour and is assumed to reflect past experiences as well as anticipated impediments and obstacles (Ajzen, 1991).

For the purpose of this study, the structure of the TPB model is adapted to better fit the intention variable being studied. Keeping the inherent structural aspects the same, attitude is adapted to internal factors, subjective norms are adapted to social factors, and perceived behavioural control is adapted to economic uncertainty.

2.1.1 Adapting the Model: Attitude to Internal factors

In an influential nutrition education study, attitude is viewed as one part of a larger factor, labeled intrapersonal factors, that include aspects such as beliefs, motivations, values, perceptions and personal meanings (IR Contento, 2008). All of these ideas, particularly beliefs, perceptions, values and personal meanings can be encapsulated into an individual's identity. Identity is an individual's self concept, and it consists of all those aspects of self-image that derive from the social categories (here, plant-based consumers) that an individual perceives themselves to belong to (Tajfel, H. & Turner J. C., 2004). Therefore, in order to encapsulate all aspects of self-image that form an individual's identity, including their attitudes, this thesis expands the attitude factor to a larger concept, identity. Furthermore, I acknowledge that individuals have multiple identities (PJ. Burke, 2003), and therefore the construct of

identity is weighted by how important the plant-based identity is to their overall identity or self-concept through a measure of centrality.

Furthermore, internal factors also consist of motivations, i.e., the reasons for choosing a plant-based identity. Food-choice motivations may express the values of an individual's personal identity (Lindeman & Stark, 2000). As motivations are an individual's own reasons for choosing to follow a diet, they are therefore included in internal factors.

In the context of this paper, duration refers to the period of time an individual reports being a PBC (Rosenfeld, 2017). Duration, as a variable, has shown to have significant effects on motivation (Hoffman et al., 2013 and Fox & Ward, 2008a), and identity (Fox & Ward, 2008b). In essence, duration can be subjective because individuals define plant-based diets in their own varying ways (Ruby, 2012). and therefore has been included as an internal factor.

2.1.2 Adapting the Model: Subjective Norms to Social factors

Subjective norms, adapted to social factors in this thesis, will measure the extent to which an individual experiences social pressure to maintain or withdraw from a PBD. Furthermore, social factors also include the variable of label, how one expresses their plant-based identity to others (Rosenfeld, 2017).

This personalized nature of labeling affords an individual some control over his or her food choice social identity. Because people are expected to engage in behaviours typical of individuals with their social identity (Hogg et al., 1995), a PBC's label may be used to indicate social group membership. Food has a central importance in social life, with social gatherings often organized around eating (Germov and Williams, 2008). As Beardsworth and Keil argue, food is a foundational aspect of human social organization (1997). The maintenance of a PBD is therefore, by existing literature, viewed, to be a process of continuous boundary work, i.e. negotiations with the social circle, thereby solidifying the importance of understanding how social factors influence a PBCs intention to maintain their diet.

2.1.3 Adapting the Model: Perceived Behavioural Control to Economic Uncertainty

In this study, TPB's perceived behavioural control is extended to also involve economic uncertainty. Azjen's work on perceived behaviour control is built on the systematic work by Bandura and Adams, who find that self-efficacy beliefs influence choice of behaviour, preparation for behaviour, effort expended during performance of behaviour, as well as thought patterns and emotional reactions to behaviour (Bandura, 1982; Bandura, 1991; Bandura, Adams and Beyer, 1977). Essentially, the belief

and confidence one has in their ability to perform a behaviour affects actual behaviour. Rephrased for flow: Accordingly, the model employed attempts to understand the degree of confidence exhibited by a PBC to continue following their PBD given the economic challenges they face. Therefore, the following conceptual model is proposed:

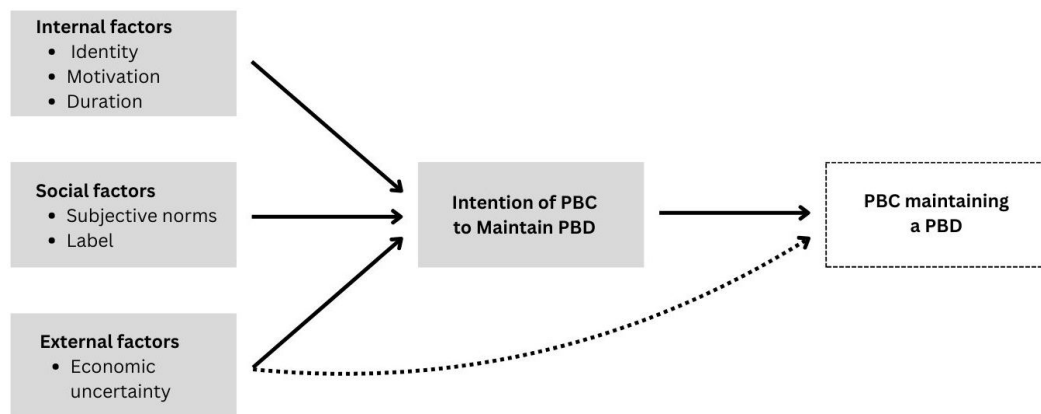


Fig. 4. The proposed conceptual model, an extension of the TPB

2.1.2 Criticisms of the Theory of Planned Behaviour

The TPB model, being a widely utilized model, has inevitably attracted a lot of criticism and academic discussion around its applicability. The main cited criticism lays within the compatibility principle of the TPB, wherein it is expected that strong correlations can only be expected between the factors (attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control) and behaviour if they are compatible in terms of the action involved, suggesting that they must be at the same level of abstraction. This however leads to a method-implied bias, wherein the results may not accurately reflect the true nature of the behaviour (Kaiser F.G et al., 2007, J Sok et al., 2021), making them ungeneralizable. Another issue is the shared method variance, wherein variance is attributed to the methods as they are measured similarly rather than the constructs the method is supposed to measure, which may inflate correlations (Campbell & O'Connell, 1982). Thus, it is theoretically possible that compatible measurement actually exploits shared method variance, rather than elucidating true associations between concepts (Kaiser F.G et al., 2007). Lastly, another criticism is that the TPB does not include external variables, as it makes a sufficiency hypothesis wherein external influences on behaviour are mediated through the TPB (Snichotta et al., 2013).

However, even studies that cite theoretical incompatibility issues, find that the TPB model is valid (Kaiser F.G et al., 2007, Kaiser F.G et al., 2005). Therefore, best attempts are made within this study

to minimize issues in the model by (a) ensuring consistent levels of abstraction and/or aggregation for all measures, (b) using slightly different measures for different measures to avoid shared method variance and (c) by including the external factor of economic uncertainty.

2.2 Internal Factors

The internal factors are identity, motivation and duration, which are further outlined and reviewed in this section.

2.2.1 Identity

Identity is a multilateral construct central to an individual's self-understanding, comprising beliefs, values, attributes, and lived experiences. For many, a plant-based diet is more than a diet: it is a philosophy and ethic (Greenebaum J., 2012). An identity encompasses internal perceptions, such as personal characteristics and values, as well as external factors through behaviours and engagements with the world (S. Stryker, 1987, Stets and Burke, 2000, MA Hogg et al., 1995, S. Stryker, 2007). According to Rosenfeld (2017), a plant-based identity involves both internalizations and externalizations; it not only emerges from food choices but also enables vegetarians to manage their food choices in an omnivorous society.

An individual's identification with an identity, in this case a plant-based identity, can manifest in coherent behaviour in the future. Deciding to engage in a behaviour requires for an individual to evaluate if it correlates with the perceptions of the chosen identity, as well as if the enactment of the behaviour in question adds value to their chosen identity (Gardner & Lally, 2018; Gardner & Rebar, 2019; Rhodes & Rebar, 2017). If the above two criteria are met, the individual is more likely to enact the behaviour and maintain this over time (Rebar et al., 2019; Danner et al., 2008; Gardner, 2015).

In this study, the identity in question is that of a plant-based identity. Central to this identity is the commitment to maintaining a plant-based diet (PBD), as it reflects and reinforces their chosen identity, thereby contributing to their overall sense of self.

Accordingly, in conjunction with theory that links identity and behaviour, the thesis hypothesizes the following:

H1: Consumers that self-identify as plant-based consumers are more likely to maintain their PBD
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2.2.2 Motivation

The reason an individual has decided to adopt a plant-based identity can be attributed to different reasons or motivations. Food choice motivations reflect differently the values constructing the chosen plant-based identity (Lindeman & Stark, 2000), and the link between motivations and identity is stronger among plant-based consumers than omnivores (Lindeman & Stark, 1999).

Swedes are traditionally and culturally omnivores, with an average of 91% of the population consuming meat (Statista, 2024). Plant-based consumers are usually born into meat eating families (Salehi et al., 2020, Beardsworth & Keil, 1991) and therefore their transition to a plant-based diet is rooted in motivations that align with their values and highlight the personal significance of the diet to the PBC's identity (Stiles, 1991).

Motivations for choosing a plant-based diet vary among PBCs as demonstrated by Table 1. After conducting an extensive review of existing literature on vegan and vegetarian motivations, Rosenfeld and Burrow categorized motivations into three categories: prosocial, personal and moral (2017).

Table 1: Research that has identified varying motivations among plant-based consumers for following their diet

Author(s)	Motivations identified	Year
Twigg J.	The study investigates religion as the primary motive for vegetarianism	1979
Rozin, Markwith & Stoess	The study looks at reasons for 'meat avoidance', it considers moral, ecology, health, appeal, personal, economic, taste and disgust factors as reasons to support meat avoidance	1997
Jabs, Devine & Sobal	The study postulates that vegetarians can be categorized into two types: ethical and health motivated	1998
Hamilton M.	This study finds that beyond health and ethical motivators, many follow a plant-based diet because they are <i>revulsed</i> by meat. However, they continue to classify revulsion under ethical motivation	2006
Fox & Ward	While this research found that health and the ethical treatment of animals were the main motivators for participants' vegetarianism, participants also reported environmental concerns	2008

Rosenfeld & Burrow	After reviewing extant literature on vegan and vegetarian motivations, the authors categorized motivations into three categories: prosocial, personal and moral	2017
Niki et al.	The study utilized evidence mapping and identified the commonly reported motivations were health, sensory features, taste, disgust, animal welfare, environmental concern, and weight loss.	2020

Prosocial motivation refers to the extent to which a consumer is plant-based because the diet benefits other entities beyond themselves, such as other humans, animals and the environment. Concern for animals is the most dominant reason.

Personal motivation refers to consumers choosing the diet to gain personal benefits or achieve self-focused goals. As the second most common motivation, a personal motivation is concern for their health and well-being (Ruby 2012). According to Hemler and B. Hu, healthy plant-based diets are not only more sustainable, but have also been associated with lower risk of chronic diseases (2019). Interestingly, non-vegetarians largely cite personal motivations as reasons why individuals may want to be plant-based consumers. In a random sample of Southern Australians, non-vegetarians were more likely to endorse health reasons as possible benefits of a vegetarian diet, such as consuming more vegetables and fruits, less saturated fat, and controlling one's weight (Lea & Worsley, 2003). Personal motivations could also include other factors such as religion. For example, in India, 32.8% of the population follows a vegetarian diet (K Shridhar et al., 2014), and approximately 11% is vegan (Statista, 2024), making it the country with the highest percentages of plant-based consumers. The vast majority of Jains say they are vegetarian (92%), with Hindus at about half (44%), compared with 8% of Muslims and 10% of Christians. (Pew research Centre, 2021). Within Jainism, hurting any living being, is against the philosophies of the religion (CK Chapple, 2006) and Hinduism preaches for vegetarianism by relating it to its central feature of Ahimsa, or non-violence (BAPS, 2014).

Finally, moral motivation stems from the extent to which beliefs about rightness and wrongness constitute a reason for being vegetarian (Rosenfeld and Burrow, 2017). Concerns about the morality of slaughtering animals is also a very prevalent motivation among plant-based consumers (Ruby, 2012, Fox & Ward, 2008). This is not to be confused with prosocial motivation related to animals, as that is rather about the concerns regarding the well-being of animals, and moral motivations encompass

beliefs that killing animals for food is wrong. Upholding perceptions of rightness and wrongness do not necessarily facilitate a desire to benefit oneself or others.

In this thesis for the purpose of nomenclature simplification, these categories are nomologically renamed into animal welfare and rights; health and wellbeing; and environmental sustainability and concerns.

At this point it is important to note literature that discusses motivations for a plant-based identity to be multitudinal, i.e. individuals have mixed motivations for being a plant-based consumer (Ruby, 2012, Rothgerber, 2014, Beardsworth and Keil, 1991a). Furthermore, a study found that up to 80% of plant-based consumers have mixed motivations for following their diets (Rothgerber, 2014), that is, a PBC can have personal, prosocial and moral motivations. Logically, this paper extends this finding to higher maintenance intention, as individuals with more reasons and motivations for following a particular diet, are more likely to adhere to it.

To test the same postulation, I hypothesize that the majority of PBCs have mixed motives, and accordingly that greater the mixed motivation, the higher the intention to maintain this diet.

H2a: Majority of the PBCs will have a mixed motivation for following a PBD

H2b: Higher the mixed motivation among a PBC, higher their intention to maintain PBD

2.2.3 Duration

Duration refers to how long a PBC has been following their PBD. A simple factor, yet complex in its nature as it may be subjective to an individual (Ruby, 2012). Some PBCs may have lapsed and returned to the diet, or some may have progressively excluded more animal products as time passed. Do the lapsed individuals consider the pre-lapse period in their duration, and do the latter individuals include periods wherein they consumed more animal-products than they do now? An individual's perception of how long they have been following their diet has interesting implications on other internal factors, namely their motivation (Hoffman et al., 2013 and Fox & Ward, 2008a), and their plant-based identity (Fox & Ward, 2008b). In their study about motivation and duration, Fox and Ward find that motivations get augmented with time, in that PBCs find, develop and replace their motivations for following a PBD as they progress with the diet (2008a). In another study of the interrelations between identity and the diet, they find that individuals foster self-images and are an on-going cue for reflection

and self-evaluation, which causes them to deepen their commitments to the diet over time (Fox & Ward, 2008b). Accordingly, this study hypothesizes the following;

H3: The longer a PBC has followed their PBD, the greater their intention to maintain their diet

2.3 Social

The social factors are social pressure from others, or subjective norms, and social expressiveness to others, or label. They are reviewed in this section.

2.3.1 Social Pressure from Others

Individuals act in accordance to their own, and others' expectations of them (Bem, 1967). While an identity enables an individual to differentiate oneself from others, it also helps express conformity to the values, beliefs and behaviours of the social group(s) to which one belongs. In the context of this thesis, the social group is fellow PBCs. Given the cultural significance of and social dynamics surrounding meat in Sweden, it is in interest of this thesis to understand how PBCs interact and express themselves given their plant-based identities, and if their belonging to this social group entails being subject to pressures that affect their identity.

Maintaining a PBD is intertwined with routine and mundane activities of daily life, as well as social relations, in such a way that the PBC has to negotiate and argue for their everyday eating and cooking practices. (Greenebaum 2012, Asher and Cherry, 2015, Jabs et al., 2000). The studies discuss that in a meat-dominant culture, such as that of Sweden, following a PBD challenges the traditional beliefs and practices and that PBCs face pressure not just from friends and family, but also through their exposure to online discourses around the topic of diets (Taylor S., 2013, Twine R., 2014).

In conceptualizing the theory of planned behaviour, Azjen suggests that people are motivated to act out behaviours in accordance with their beliefs about what is socially acceptable or desirable (1991) and such enactment is reliant on the extent of the social pressure they feel to perform the behaviour in concern. Social support for one's diet has been found by many studies to be a very important factor in maintenance of one's plant-based diet (Ruby, 2012, Jabset al., 1998a), and sometimes also the main factor (Hodson & Earle, 2018). Accordingly, if an individual lacks the social support for their dietary

decisions, and or feels a certain extent of social pressure to withdraw from their diet, they might consider not continuing to follow their diet.

H4: Greater the extent of perceived social pressure, lower the intention to maintain PBD

2.3.2 Social Expressiveness to Others

A label that expresses one's identity can be considered an apt embodiment of Goffmann's influential study discussing impressionism management. According to Goffmann, individuals in social settings orchestrate a 'performance' in order to control what impressions others have of them (1959). Accordingly, the relevant aspect of such a performance to this thesis is the information PBCs reveal about themselves. The process of lexicalization, which involves expressing aspects of one's identity specifically through noun forms, is called labeling, and signifies the centrality of those aspects to the individual's identity. This linguistic choice actively communicates the individual's affiliation with a particular social group, the plant-based community (Brinton and Traugott, 2005). A lexicalized label can be expressed as, for example, "I am a vegan " compared to a non-lexicalized expressal, for example, "I avoid animal-based products".

A more active expressal of their identity via a label to a greater number of people, ranging from close friends, to family to strangers, implies that the plant-based identity is more central to their self-concept. Accordingly, this thesis hypothesizes that greater social expressiveness of one's identity through a label corresponds to a higher intention to maintain their diet.

H5: Higher the social expressiveness of PBC label, higher the intention to maintain their PBD

2.4 External (Economic Uncertainty)

While factors like information availability, food policies, and nutritional knowledge could also be considered external influences on a PBCs diet maintenance, including them would require a more extensive survey, which risks a lower completion rate, as well as further in-depth research of each of the external factors. This would reduce the focus on economic uncertainty and other internal and social factors. Consequently, to narrow and specialize the scope of this paper, this study will concentrate solely on the external factor of economic uncertainty.

Through a culmination of macroeconomic events in the recent years, caused largely by the COVID-19 pandemic and the wars, the Swedish economy has been significantly weakened and pushed into a state of recession. Sweden is expected to continue to remain in the state of recession until 2025. (Government.se, 2022). This state of recession as well as high inflation has impacted consumers' sense of economic uncertainty and personal financial strength. Plant-based consumers (PBC), as a type of consumers, are also affected by the economic uncertainty discussed above. Given the context of dietary choices, food in November 2023 was 26.8% more expensive than in the same month in 2021 (Statistics Sweden, 2023). From November 2019 to November 2021, food prices rose by only 1.8 percent.

This state of recession as well as high inflation has impacted consumers' sense of economic uncertainty and personal financial strength. According to Binder, uncertainty refers to a high dispersion of an individual agent's subjective probability distribution over an outcome (2015). When considered in macroeconomic context, economic uncertainty is the lack of a defined outcome regarding future predictability of economic events (Çolak, Güney & Hacıhasanoğlu, 2020). Although economic uncertainty is hard to measure due to its abstract and multi-dimensional nature, it reflects strongly in the consumer confidence index, which measures a country's households' assessment of their personal finances and the Swedish economy, both now and in the coming 12 months (Statistics Sweden, 2024). Swedish households' confidence can be observed in Fig. 1, wherein post-pandemic values are in a largely declining state, indicating high levels of pessimistic consumer sentiment.

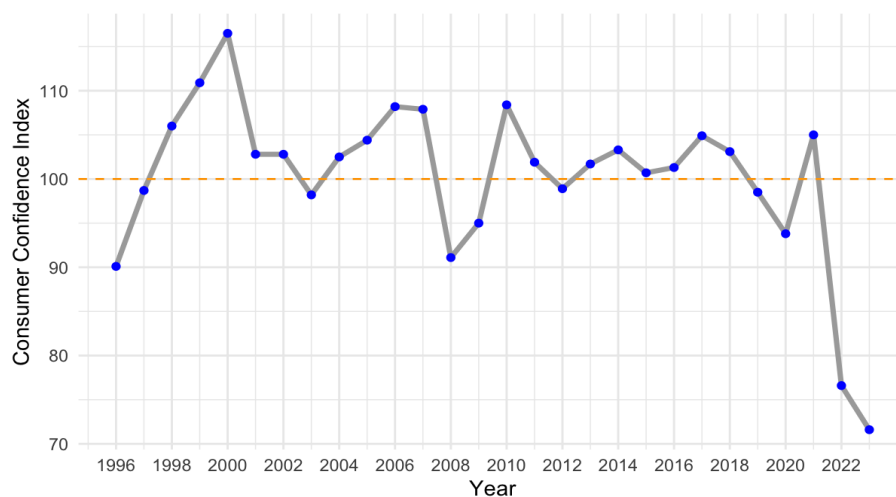


Fig. 5. Consumer Confidence Indicator. Data source: National Institute of Economic Research, 2024

Consumer confidence, especially in uncertain times, is a good predictor of consumption, wherein consumers increase 'precautionary savings' and reduce consumption (Dées and Brinca, 2011). This

when combined with increased costs of consumer goods, including food and other essentials, has implications on consumer behaviour that are of utmost interest to study, both from an academic and retail point of view.

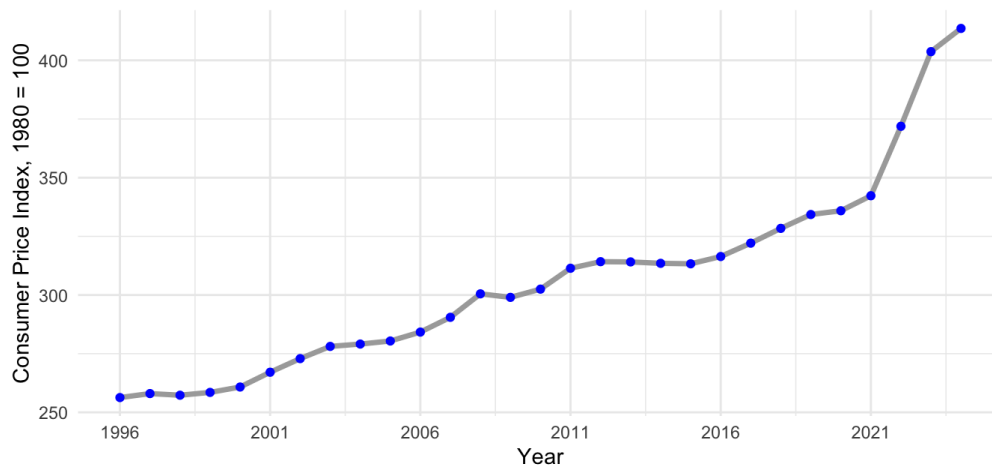


Fig. 6. Sweden's Consumer Price Index. Source: Statistics Sweden (SCB)

Perceived behaviour control, is the extent to which an individual is confident in their ability to perform a behaviour, which consequently strongly affects actual behaviour. In the context of this thesis, plant based consumers in Sweden, as a consumer group, are also constrained in their perceptions of control over their diet, given economic conditions. Combining the perceived behavioural control element of the Ajzen model with the factor of economic uncertainty, this study attempts to understand whether plant-based consumers are confident in their ability to continue to maintain their diet. The act of maintenance of ones diet is a behaviour which ensues in multiple forms, such as continuing to buy plant-based products despite their price, increasing their food budget, finding more affordable options/alternatives, or simply still feeling a sense of control over their dietary choices given potential economic restraints induced by the feelings of uncertainty. Economic uncertainty, as an external factor, is likely to subject PBCs to a lower perceived degree of control over their food choices, as it constrains their perceived purchasing power. Furthermore, plant-based foods are often perceived to be more expensive than the common omnivorous diets, when considering the novel meat substitutes and higher costs of fruits and vegetables (Pais D. et al., 2022). A study conducted among Finnish people, found that they perceived plant-based products to be more expensive than animal-based products, and that this was the most significant barrier to adopting the diet (Mäkinen & Vainio, 2014). Additionally, in a rudimentary analysis of plant-based substitutes compared to the animal-based products available at large Swedish grocery chains, the 'jämförpris' or unit price of the substitutes is almost always higher. The same can be said for plant-based products at food chains. For example, the cheeseburger at Mcdonalds, the cheapest non-vegetarian option, a cheeseburger retails at 15 SEK, compared to the

cheapest vegetarian, Veggie Cajun burger, retails at 84 SEK and the only vegan option, the McVegan retails at 30 SEK (McDonalds.com, 2024).

Consequently, all these factors may dampen a plant-based consumers' perceived behavioural control, or simply put, their confidence in their ability to purchase the plant based products they need to maintain their diet. In a systematic review of barriers in high income countries towards adopting plant-based diets, financial constraints were one of the central barriers to adopting a PBD (Rickerby and Green, 2024).

Accordingly, the thesis hypothesizes that the perceived control over economic uncertainty and intention to maintain the diet in the future are correlated positively.

H6: Greater the perceived control over diet given economic uncertainty, higher the intention to maintain PBD

3. Methodology

This section of the paper outlines the scientific methodology employed to investigate the research questions. A survey was conducted to examine plant-based consumers' identity and intention to maintain their identity in times of economic uncertainty.

3.1 Scientific Approach to the Research Design

This thesis adopts an objectivist ontology to comprehend the social reality of the plant-based identity. Its epistemological orientation, grounded in positivism, shapes the methodological approach employed in the research. This perspective rests on the assumption that reality exists objectively and externally, and phenomena within this reality can be apprehended through a deductive approach (Bell et al., 2022).

The theoretical framework outlined earlier informs my methodology for formulating hypotheses, collecting data, and accepting or rejecting these hypotheses. The project is directed towards

ascertaining objective truths concerning the investigated reality. To collect data to address my research questions, I employed a cross-sectional design. Specifically, a survey design was constructed to gather the behavioural intentions of plant-based consumers (see appendix). The survey's content was drawn upon insights from existing literature investigating behavioural intention by employing an adapted theory of planned behaviour model. Given that the goal of this thesis is to examine how various factors influence the intention to remain a plant-based consumer, I have opted for a positivist methodology. This approach focuses on identifying the causes that lead to certain outcomes, as noted by Creswell (2009) in Scotland (2012). By testing these relationships, I aim to draw broader conclusions and potentially make predictions, which is why I've chosen a deductive approach (Scotland, 2012).

3.1.1 Alternative approaches

Alternative methods to understand the plant-based consumer were considered, in particular, a qualitative approach that would involve in depth interviews with a smaller target group. However, this approach would require an interpretive analysis. The ontological position of interpretivism is realism which states that reality is subjective and an individual construct (Scotland, 2012). As the results of this thesis are aimed at generalization, it adopts a quantitative and scientifically objective approach (Bell et al., 2022).

3.2 Pilot Study

Before conducting the main study, a pre-test was administered to a small group of 9 plant-based consumers. The purpose was to assess the reliability and quality of the measures and the ease of use of the survey. The questions demonstrated sufficient validity, and were therefore maintained from that perspective. However, feedback from the participants, including suggestions was incorporated: a question related to religious beliefs (as a motivation) was excluded and perceived control given economic uncertainty questions were reduced from 9 to 7. Further, an incentive question was added towards the end which was not required to be validated in a pilot study. This process, overall, enabled a more polished survey to be released to the public.

3.3 Main Study

3.3.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire, consisting of a total of 37 questions divided into 5 different blocks, was constructed using Qualtrics to gather responses essential for this paper. Additionally, two control questions were included, bringing the total to 39 questions. Prior to accessing the first block of questions, respondents were provided with an introduction to the survey, which included details about the research purpose, the author's contact information, and an estimate of the time required to complete the entire questionnaire. For participants who voluntarily provided their email addresses, a lucky winner was selected to receive a variety of plant-based 'Froosh' juices. Upon choosing a winner and before analysis, these details were immediately deleted. All participants were informed about GDPR consent and were required to agree to the terms of personal data handling in order to participate in the analysis. Upon agreement, respondents were first introduced to the definition of a plant-based consumer adopted in this thesis, following which they were asked if they believe they are a plant-based consumer. Respondents who answered 'No' to the question "Do you consider yourself to be a plant-based consumer?" were redirected to the end of the survey. Their responses were not considered in the study.

3.3.2 Survey flow

The distributed survey was constructed on Qualtrics. All but demographic questions were made mandatory for the purposes of data quality.

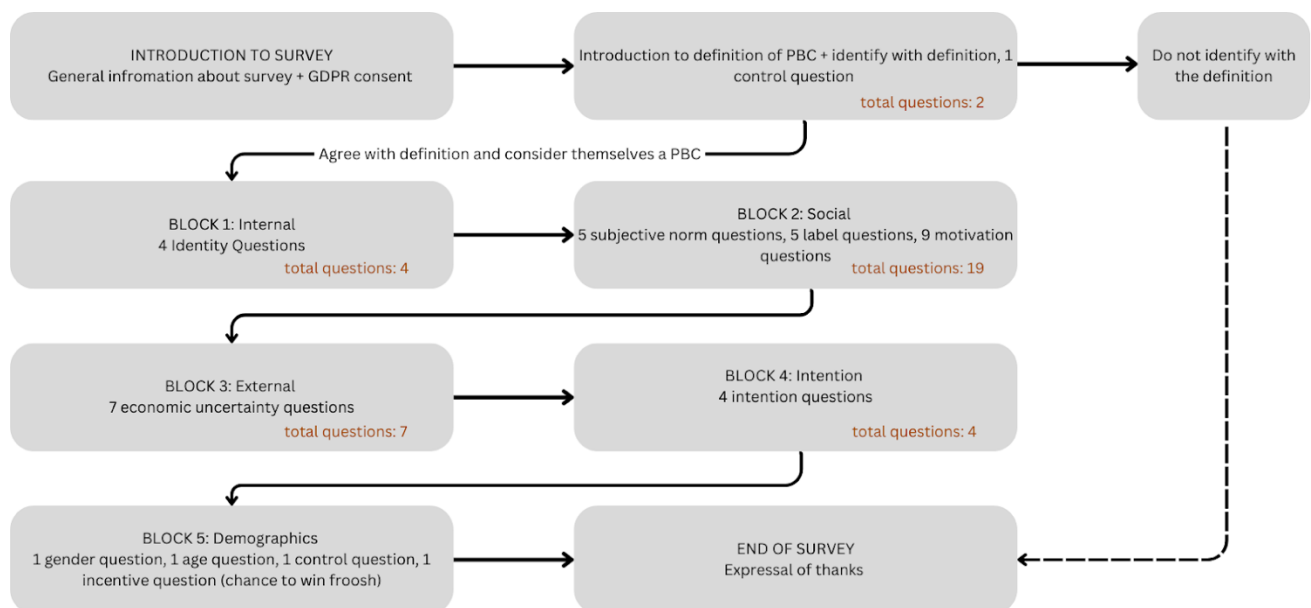


Fig. 7. Visualization of the Distributed Survey's flow

3.3.3 Variables & Indexing

The 7-point Likert-scale was used as the scale for all variables measured unless specified otherwise, consisting of values ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree).

The study consists of a total of 9 variables, with eight being independent variables and one being the dependent variable. The variables were tested for internal consistency before indexing using the cronbach's alpha.

3.3.3.1 Dependent variable

Intention to Maintain Diet

The measures used to assess intention to maintain diet have been adopted from a variety of studies, particularly Ritland & Rodriguez (2014) and Whitmarsh & O' Niell (2010). However, the original 4 point-scale was extended to a 7 point Likert scale to enable enhanced choice expression and to avoid a potential ceiling effect. The questions assessed the will and plan to maintain their diet in the foreseeable future. Internal consistency of the 4 questions was analyzed by calculating their Cronbach's alpha, a measure of internal consistency among measures, so as to qualify them for indexing. The value can range from 0 to 1, with 0.7 and above considered to be the acceptable indication for indexing (KS Taber, 2018). The four intention questions exhibited a cronbach's alpha of 0.91 and were therefore indexed into one variable.

3.3.2.2 Indexed independent variables

1. Internal Factors

Identity

Identity questions assessed the extent to which an individual identified with being a plant-based consumer, and the extent to which being a plant-based consumer was an important aspect of their identity. These measures are adapted from existing research that have validated them, particularly Rosenfeld and Burrow (2018) and Whitmarsh & O'Neill (2010). However, the 5-point scale was extended to a 7-point Likert scale for the same aforementioned reasons as in intention to maintain diet. Internal consistency of the five questions was indicated by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.84, and were therefore indexed into one variable.

Motivation stemming from concerns about animals

Animal motivation questions assessed the extent to which an individual chose to follow a PBD due to concerns regarding animal's rights, wellbeing and morality related to animals. The questions were adapted from Plante et al (2019) and Rozin et al. (1997). The range was scaled down from a 9-point to a 7-point Likert scale for the purpose of consistency with other questions. The Cronbach's alpha for the three questions formed a reliable scale of 0.92 and were therefore indexed.

Motivation stemming from concerns about the environment

Environmental motivation assessed the extent to which an individual chose to follow a plant-based diet due to concern about the environmental effects of eating animal-based foods. The questions were adapted from Plante et al (2019) and Rozin et al. (1997). The reliability of the 2 questions was indicated by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.84, and the measures were thus indexed.

Motivation stemming from concerns about one's health

Health motivation questions assessed the extent to which an individual chose to follow a PBD for the purpose of improving their health and well-being. The questions were adapted from Plante et al (2019) and Rozin et al. (1997). The internal consistency of the four questions was indicated by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81, and the questions were thus reliably indexed.

Mixed Motivation

Mixed motivation, used in conjunction with hypothesis 2A and 2B, is defined as having two or more of the aforementioned motivations as the reasons for following a plant-based diet. After the values for each motivation is indexed, if the value is 5 and above on the 7-point Likert scale (as until 4 it is neither agree nor disagree), that particular motivation is counted as a motivation. If an individual reports values 5 and above for two or more motivations, in this study, they are said to have mixed motivations to follow their PBD.

Duration

The duration question required respondents to indicate the length of time in their lifetime that they have been following a plant-based diet for. Respondents did this by choosing among five options: (a) Less than one year, (b) 1-2 years, (c) 3-5 years, (d) 6-10 years, and (e) More than 10 years.

2. Social Factors

Subjective Norms

Subjective norms measured the extent to which an individual experiences social pressure to withdraw from their PBD. In the thesis, the questions measured the support and encouragement individuals experienced from their social circles, and were reverse coded for the formation of the variable. The questions were adapted from validated research by Whitmarsh & O' Neill (2010). The internal consistency of the five questions was indicated by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.74, and were therefore reliably indexed.

Label

Label measured the level of social expressiveness or disclosure of one's own plant-based diet and identity. Each of the questions extended to one level beyond the previous one in terms of distance from core social relationships. The five questions encompassed family, friends, colleagues/classmates, clubs/groups and strangers. The questions were adopted from existing research by Rosenfeld & Burrow (2018).

The questions demonstrated an internal reliability by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92, and were thus indexed.

3. External Factor (Economic)

Economic Uncertainty

Economic Uncertainty questions measured the extent to which individuals felt they had control over their ability to maintain their diet given economic constraints. First the respondents were introduced to the concept of economic uncertainty as they might not be familiar with an academic term:

“First we will shed some light on economic uncertainty. Consequently, please express your agreement with the statements that follow.

“Economic uncertainty occurs when it is hard to foresee or predict future economic conditions, including job stability, cost of living, prices due to inflation, and government regulations. This is representative of current times. This unpredictability may cause you to have concerns about your personal finances or the health of Sweden's economy.”

The questions were developed in accordance with questionnaire formulation guidelines (Bell et al., 2022), and were validated in the pilot study. Data collected in the main survey maintained internal consistency. The seven questions have a Cronbach's alpha of 0.95, and were therefore reliably indexed.

3.3.2.3 Other variables

Demographic data was also collected, specifically age and gender. This was collected to better understand the dynamics of these variables with overall intention to maintain diet. Age data was collected through an open ended approach, wherein respondents entered their age. The gender question offered four options: (a) Female, (b) Male, (c) Other and (d) Prefer Not to Say.

3.4 Data Collection and statistical methods

3.4.1 Data collection and Quality

A self-completion survey was administered to respondents through a variety of channels. The first route was emails and reminder emails to SSE students with a link to the survey. Secondly, survey links were also distributed on five facebook groups, varying in size. Lastly, posters (see appendix) with QR codes and a short description of the survey were put up at bus stations across Stockholm. I selected this method to maximize outreach to plant-based consumers from diverse backgrounds, aiming to gather a representative sample that can be generalized to a broader population. The survey was open from collection from March 26, 2024 to April 26, 2024. The largest proportion of respondents were acquired through the posters, followed by facebook groups and then school emails. 303 responses were collected, and due to stringent data quality and generalizability guidelines, 217 were used in the analysis. According to Bell et al., (2022), this could be considered a convenience sample due the respondents' accessibility via email, facebook groups and posters. All attempts to garner truthful and honest responses were made, such as maintaining neutrality, allowing respondents to quit the survey whenever they wished to without prejudice and communicating the confidential nature of the survey in line with GDPR regulations.

3.4.2 GDPR

The data collected has been handled in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations (EUR-Lex, 2016), and all participants were informed of this as well as provided consent before participation in the survey. One optional question that was used as an incentive for participants to fill the survey collected 'personal' information in the form of online identifiers: emails. Participants were informed of the purpose of collecting this information, namely the opportunity to win a 12-pack Froosh assortment. They were also informed of how their emails would be processed, and the purpose, choosing a winner. Given all this information, they voluntarily filled in their emails if they wanted to

be considered for the contest. Upon choosing a winner, all email data was deleted, before exporting it to excel or R for any form of analysis and was not shared with anyone else.

3.4.3 Data Quality

A total of 303 responses were collected through the survey link, of which 38 were excluded as they indicated 'No' to the control question 'Do you consider yourself a plant-based consumer' after being presented the definition of a plant-based consumer used in this study. Furthermore, 46 responses were deleted as they failed to complete the survey questions or provided unsatisfactory responses, and 2 were deleted as they failed on the attention question. At the end, a dataset with 217 responses was utilized for the purpose of analysis.

3.4.4 Data Analysis

All data that was collected on Qualtrics was first imported into excel for the purpose of recoding. After variable names were recoded, the data was imported into the statistical analysis program R for analysis. The data was then cleaned further and analyzed using various statistical and descriptive tools, as well as for testing reliability and visualizing data into boxplots and scatterplot matrices.

3.4.5 Reliability and Validity

Internal validity relates to whether the findings or results of the research relate to and are caused by the phenomena under investigation and not other unaccounted for influences. The choice of language and selection of 'relevant data' are the greatest threat to 'validity' in quantitative research (G Winter, 2000). For this purpose, the questions and information the respondents are exposed to is neutral and not objective inducing. Furthermore, all questions have been adapted from and have therefore been validated by previous research.

External validity refers to the extent to which the results of a study can be generalized (Bryman and Bell, 2011, G Winter, 2000). To ensure external validity, data collection was performed in an extensive and diverse manner, and from different demographic groups within Sweden. Posters were plastered in different parts of Stockholm city, and the facebook groups spanned the entirety of Sweden. Emails sent to students encouraged them to send it to other plant-based consumers they may know, to ensure representativeness of the sample. However, it is possible that respondents who are unfamiliar with technology, or do not speak fluent English are excluded from the study, contributing to some extent to under-representativeness. However, the overall study's representativeness of plant-based consumers in Sweden is considered acceptable.

Reliability relates to the consistency of a measure (Heale and Twycross, 2015). A participant completing an instrument meant to measure motivation should have approximately the same responses each time the test is completed. Although it is not possible to give an exact calculation of reliability, an estimate of reliability can be achieved through different measures. One such measure is the Cronbach's alpha, and the alpha is calculated for every measure on the survey excluding demographic questions.

4. Results

In this section, I discuss the empirical findings of the study. Firstly, the descriptive statistics of the data collected are discussed, including demographics. This is followed by the results of the multiple regression analysis, hypothesis testing and multicollinearity and linearity checks.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

4.1.1 Sample demographics

Extensive demographic information was not collected in interest of keeping the survey concise in order to enable maximum completion of the survey by respondents. Of the data collected, a majority (63%) of the respondents were women. This is representative of the general plant-based consumer base, as it has been found that within Western cultures, women as plant-based consumers greatly outnumber men as PBCs (Ruby, 2012, Fraser et al., 2000, Amato & Partridge, 1989). Men make up 32% of the respondents, whilst 3.5% reported 'Other', belonging outside the traditional binary categories and 1.5% preferred not to disclose their gender identity. The mean age of the plant-based respondent was 29 and a half, with the overall ages ranging between 18 and 70. Additionally, the distribution of the respondents' duration of following a plant based diet is visualized in Fig. 8.

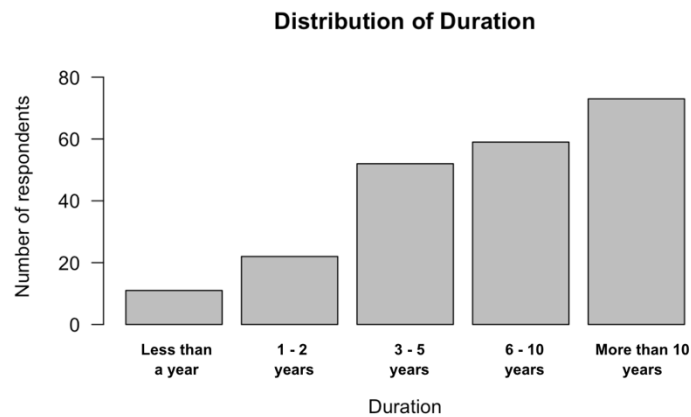


Fig. 8. Distribution of the duration the respondents have been following a PBD

4.1.2 Comparing the variables of the conceptual model

Identity and label share a very similar distribution of answers, with both having a negatively skewed distribution (mean value of 5.51 and 5.35 respectively) and standard errors of 1.21 and 1.35 respectively. Intention to maintain diet, represented the most negatively skewed variable (skewed to the right, i.e., towards ‘Strongly Agree’), with a mean value of 6.5 on a 7 point-scale. Economic uncertainty as a variable displays the greatest dispersion, with a standard deviation of 1.4, indicating a high variability of perceived control among PBCs ability to control their diets given economic constraints. Animal-based motivation and intention to maintain diet, as displayed in figure X, both had the greatest number of outliers (six each) in the dataset, however they represent only 2% of the dataset and therefore have a negligible impact on any statistical analysis.

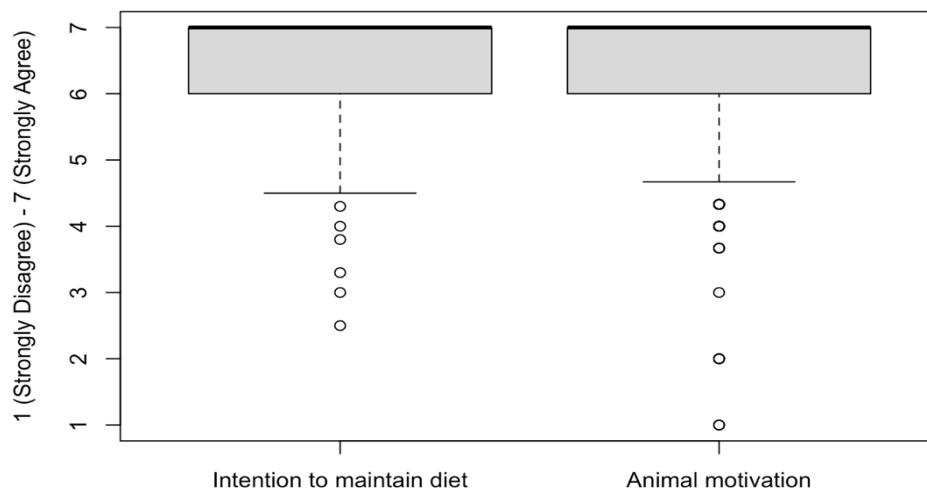


Fig. 9. Variables with the greatest outliers

It is to be noted that these two variables have a high central tendency and a median value of 7. It can be argued that a possible ceiling effect is at play (Ho, A. D., & Yu, C. C., 2015), however, steps to avoid this issue in the first place were implemented when choosing a 7 point-Likert scale that provides participants the freedom to choose between three varying degrees of agreement. Each of the independent variables, as well as the dependent variables dispersion, outliers, and medians have been visualized using boxplots and can be referred to and found in the appendix 4. Furthermore, their means and standard deviations can be found in a table in appendix 3.

4.2 Motivation for being a PBC

This study postulates that motivation among consumers for choosing to follow a plant-based diet may vary, but that most often, consumers display a mixed motivation, i.e., have multiple reasons for being a PBC. The results indicate an agreement with the above postulation, with 83% of the respondents indicating mixed motivations for their diet. The methodology for arriving at that figure is discussed in the further section. In this study, a mixed motivation is outlined as having more than one key motivation for choosing the diet, and the results accordingly display that 178 respondents had both animal and environment related motivations, 69 respondents had both animal and health related motivations and 71 respondents had both health and environment motivations. Upon extraction of unique respondents from the above (as many may have all three motivations), a total of 180 respondents had mixed motivations for following a PBD. Furthermore, regression tests are conducted to analyze if PBCs with a mixed motivation are more likely to follow their diet in the future, than those who do not have a mixed motivation.

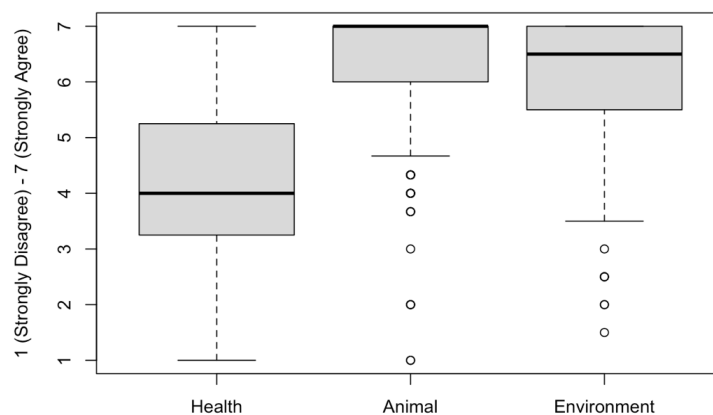


Fig. 10. Visualization of the distribution of responses for all three motivations

4.3 Regression Analysis and Hypotheses Testing

4.3.1 A Regression Analysis of the Independent Variables

In order to analyze potential relationships between the independent variables and dependent variable, intention to maintain diet, a Multiple Regression Analysis model was employed. The equation for the regression model is as followed:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Intention to Maintain Diet} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 (\text{Identity}) + \beta_2 (\text{Health Motivation}) + \beta_3 (\text{Environment Motivation}) \\ & + \beta_4 (\text{Animal Motivation}) + \beta_5 (\text{Duration}) + \beta_6 (\text{Subjective Norms}) \\ & + \beta_7 (\text{Label}) + \beta_8 (\text{Economic Uncertainty}) + \varepsilon \end{aligned}$$

The beta in the above equation is unstandardized, as all the variables, both independent and dependent, are measured on a 7 point Likert scale, allowing for a direct comparison. The regression analysis yields an adjusted R-square value of 0.40, an F statistic of 19 with a p-value of <2e-16, suggesting an overall significant model. The model also exhibits a residual standard error of 0.628.

Table 2. Summary of the regression analysis between intention to maintain diet (dependent variable) and independent variables

Intercept (n = 217) 3.78	Beta	Standard error	Significance < 0.001
Identity	0.02	0.05	0.66
Animal	0.07	0.05	0.13
Environment	0.11	0.5	0.01**
Health	-0.03	0.03	0.34
Duration	0.14	0.04	<0.001***
Subjective Norms	-0.09	0.04	0.02**
Label	0.07	0.04	0.11
Economic Uncertainty	0.22	0.03	<0.001***

Note: * significant at p<0.1; ** significant at p<0.05; *** significant at p<0.001

Animal/Environment/Health refer to different types of motivations for being a PBC

All variables showcase sub 0.05 standard errors, indicating that the sample coefficients are expected to vary very little from the population coefficients, if this study were to be replicated with other samples from the same population.

4.3.1.1 Internal Factors

As the table indicates, identity was not significant (p-value of 0.66). The independent variable's beta was 0.02, which suggests that its impact on intention to maintain identity is very small. Hence, there is no evidence for H1. As the table indicates, identity was not significant (p-value of 0.66). The independent variable's beta was 0.02, which suggests that its impact on intention to maintain identity is very small. Hence, there is no evidence for H1.

H1	Consumers that self-identify as plant-based consumers are more likely to maintain their PBD	NOT SUPPORTED
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To identify if consumers had a mixed motivation, a method coherent with the definition of mixed motivation, i.e., more than one type of motivation was employed to assess the hypothesis. First, a number of respondents with different types of dual combination of motivations were identified and. Further, the unique number of respondents per combination type were identified and summed, with the following results.

Table 3. Summary Of Combination And Total Calculations For Motivation Types

Combination Of Motivation	Number Of Respondents	Percentage
Total Respondents	217	100 %
Health – Animal	69	31.7 %
Health – Environment	71	32.7 %
Animal – Environment	178	82.0 %
All: Health – Animal – Environment	180	82.9 %

Approximately 83% of the PBCs were found to have a mixed motivation for following a PBD. Thus, there is empirical evidence for the H2a that a majority of consumers have mixed motivations for following a PBD.

H2A	Majority of the consumers have a mixed motivation for following their PBD	SUPPORTED
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As for motivation stemming from concerns about animals, the regression analysis in Table 2. displays a non-significant relationship (p-value 0.13), with a beta of 0.07. Therefore, this study does not find a plausible relationship between animal motivation and intention to maintain diet.

Motivation stemming from a concern about the environment has a significant relationship with intention to maintain diet (p-value < 0.01), with a beta of 0.11. Thus, concerns about the environmental impact of one's dietary choices among PBCs has a modest impact on the intention to maintain their diet.

Motivation for following a PBD that stems from health reasons has a statistically insignificant relationship with intention to maintain diet (p-value 0.34). Therefore, the beta of -0.03, implying an inverse relationship between health motivation and intention to maintain a PBD can not be reliably argued.

Two regression analyses are conducted to analyse the relationship between motivation and the intention to maintain diet. The first regression tests the relationship between mixed motivated PBCs and their intention to maintain their diet, and the second regression tests the intention to maintain diet among PBCs who only have one motivation for following their diet.

Table 4. Summary of Regression Analysis with Intention to Maintain Diet (dependent variable) and Mixed Motivation (independent variable)

Intercept	Beta	Standard error	Significance
5.30			< 0.001
Mixed Motivation (n = 180)	0.23	0.07	0.0046 **

Note: * significant at $p < 0.1$; ** significant at $p < 0.05$; *** significant at $p < 0.001$

The regression analysis model is significant, with an F-statistic of 8.23 and a p-value of 0.00463. The model suggests that consumers with mixed motivations have a positive and significant relationship with the intention to maintain their diet (p-value 0.0046). The adjusted R-squared of the model is 0.04, which indicates that approximately 4% of the variance in intention can be explained by motivation among those with mixed motivations. This result is reasonable given that only one variable is used. Therefore, there is empirical evidence for H2b.

H2B	Higher the mixed motivation among the PBC, higher their intention to maintain a PBD	SUPPORTED
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Table 4. Summary of Regression Analysis with Intention to Maintain Diet (dependent variable) and Lack of Mixed Motivation (independent variable)

Intercept	Beta	Standard error	Significance
5.13			
Lack of mixed motivation (n = 37)	0.19	0.25	0.45

Note: * significant at $p < 0.1$; ** significant at $p < 0.05$; *** significant at $p < 0.001$

On the other hand, PBCs that do not have a mixed motivation have an insignificant relationship (p-value 0.45) with intention to maintain diet. Furthermore, the adjusted R-square of the model is -0.0116, which is impossible, as the range for adjusted R-square values is 0 and 1. This is explained by the fact that the model is not significant, with an F-statistic of 0.586 and p-value of 0.449.

Duration, as an independent variable, has a statistically significant (p-value < 0.001) relationship with the dependent variable, intention to maintain diet. With a beta of 0.14, the duration that a PBC has followed their PBD has a modest yet highly significant impact on the intention to maintain diet. Thus, H3 is empirically supported.

H3	The longer a PBC has followed their PBD, the greater their intention to maintain their PBD	SUPPORTED
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4.3.1.2 Social Factors

The regression analysis indicates that the first of the social factors, subjective norm, has a statistically significant relationship with intention to maintain diet (p-value 0.02). Furthermore, a beta of - 0.09 indicates an inversely proportional relationship between the variables, wherein an increase in subjective norms (increase in social pressure) has a negative impact on intention to maintain diet. Thus, the hypothesis that suggests an inverse relationship is empirically supported.

H4	Greater the extent of perceived social pressure experienced by the PBC, lower the intention to maintain PBD	SUPPORTED
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The second variable within social factors, label, displays a statistically insignificant relationship with PBCs intention to maintain their PBD (p-value 0.11). Accordingly, its beta of 0.07 cannot be reliably argued. Therefore, there is no evidence for H5.

H5	Higher the social expressiveness (labeling) of PBC label, greater the intention to maintain their PBD	NOT SUPPORTED
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4.3.1.3 Economic Uncertainty

The assessed external factor, economic uncertainty, demonstrates a statistically significant relationship with the dependent variable, intention to maintain diet (p-value < 0.001). Furthermore, this variable also showcases the greatest predictive power in the study's model, with a beta of 0.22. Therefore, there is strong empirical evidence for the correlating hypothesis. This implies that greater the confidence an individual has in their ability to maintain their PBD given economic uncertainty is positively correlated with their intention to maintain their diet. Therefore, if a PBC is affected by economic uncertainty but is confident they can continue to adjust their budget, increase their budget, or find affordable alternatives to their existing plant based food choices, they have a greater intention to maintain their PBD in the near future. However, if they have lowered confidence in their ability to adjust their budget, extend it, or find cheaper options given economic uncertainty, they are less likely to maintain their diet in the future.

H6	Greater the perceived control over diet given economic uncertainty, higher the intention to maintain PBD	SUPPORTED
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An overall summary of all the hypotheses can be found in the appendix.

4.4 Which gender is more likely to maintain their PBD?

In an exploratory data analysis, I attempted to better understand the underlying patterns in the data between demographics, namely gender, and the dependent variable, intention to maintain diet. A regression analysis with the same equation was run in isolation on two groups: females and males, in order to analyze if a gender was more likely to maintain their diet than others. Unfortunately, it was not possible to run a regression on the third gender group of respondents belonging to non-binary genders owing to a small sample size (N = 10).

Table 5. Regression Analysis on Gender Segmented Groups

Intercept	Beta	Standard error	Significance < 0.001
Females (n = 135)			
Identity	0.03	0.05	0.62
Animal	0.02	0.07	0.71
Environment	0.12	0.06	0.05**
Health	-0.05	0.04	0.19
Duration	0.08	0.05	<0.073
Subjective Norms	-0.02	0.05	0.60
Label	0.02	0.05	0.56
Economic Uncertainty	0.22	0.04	<0.001***
Males (n = 70)			
Identity	-0.03	0.08	0.69
Animal	0.11	0.07	0.13
Environment	0.04	0.08	0.64
Health	0.02	0.07	0.73
Duration	0.21	0.07	0.004**
Subjective Norms	-0.19	0.07	0.010*
Label	0.16	0.08	0.06
Economic Uncertainty	0.29	0.06	<0.001***

Note: * significant at $p < 0.1$; ** significant at $p < 0.05$; *** significant at $p < 0.001$

Animal/Environment/Health refer to different types of motivations for being a PBC

A regression analysis on the female group yields an adjusted R-square of 0.34, an F-statistic of 9.72 and an overall significance (p-value <0.001). The model showcases two significant independent variables: environment motivation and economic uncertainty. Environment motivation (p-value <0.05) has a similar effect as the main regression model, with a beta of 0.12. Economic uncertainty (p-value < 0.001) also has a similar impact as the main regression model, with a beta of 0.22.

The same analysis on the male group yields an adjusted R-square of 0.48, an F-statistic 9.07 and an overall significance (p-value < 0.001). The model showcases three significant independent variables: duration, subjective norms and economic uncertainty, each with a more pronounced effect for this group compared to the main regression model. Duration (p-value 0.004) has a beta of 0.21, subjective norms (p-value 0.01) has a beta of -0.19 and economic uncertainty (p-value <0.001) has a beta of 0.29.

It is interesting to note that there is a systematic variation in the two groups, in that if all independent variables are set to zero, women have an overall higher intention to maintain diet (intercept 4.16) compared to men (intercept 3.37).

4.5 Regression Analysis of the Postulated Conceptual Model

A regression analysis on the overall conceptual model was conducted to analyze the relationship between the independent variable, intention to maintain diet, and the three factors, internal, social and external (economic). The equation is as follows:

$$\text{Intention to maintain diet} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (\text{Internal}) + \beta_2 (\text{Social}) + \beta_3 (\text{Economic Uncertainty}) + \varepsilon$$

The regression yields an adjusted R-square of 0.36, an F-statistic of 41.3 and an overall significance (p-value <0.001). The model also holds a residual standard error of 0.649.

Table 6. Summary of the Regression Analysis between intention to maintain diet and the conceptual model's three factors: internal, social and external (economic)

Intercept	Beta	Standard error	Significance
3.82			< 0.001
Internal factors	0.30	0.29	< 0.001***
Social factors	-0.04	0.05	0.49
External (economic) factors	0.24	0.03	< 0.001***

Note: * significant at p<0.1; ** significant at p<0.05; *** significant at p<0.001

When the entire conceptual model is tested, internal factors and external factors are found to be statistically significant, in their relationship with the dependent variable, both with a p-value very close to zero (< 0.001). However, social factors are found to have an insignificant relationship with the dependent variable, with a p-value of 0.49.

4.6 Validating the Multiple Regression Model with Robustness checks

R-square, a measure traditionally used to assess the fit of the data to a regression model, increases as independent variables are added to the model. In this study, the measure of adjusted R-square, also known as the goodness-of-fit measure, is used. It is a more robust fit measure, as it punishes the fitness metric if added variables increase variability of the data, or don't contribute to the explanatory power of the model itself, therefore adjusting the traditional R-square for added independent variables.

Furthermore, multicollinearity checks are run on the data before a regression analysis, in order to ensure that all assumptions for a regression analysis are met. To test for multicollinearity, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) is used to test each independent variable of the model (UPenn, 2018). The VIF threshold is calculated by:

$$VIF_i = \frac{1}{(1 - R_i^2)}$$

Accordingly, substituting the traditional R-square of 0.422 of the model into the equation, the threshold VIF calculated is 1.73. VIF tests on independent variables reveal that of the 8 independent variables, 7 are under the threshold and 1 is above the threshold.

Table 7. Variance Inflation Factors of Independent Variables

Independent variable	Identity	Animal	Environment	Health	Duration	Subjective Norms	Label	Economic Uncertainty
Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)	1.99	1.61	1.71	1.42	1.18	1.08	1.70	1.25

Note: Animal/Environment/Health refer to different types of motivations for being a PBC

One of the independent variables, identity, is above the threshold of 1.73. This may have an inflating effect on the standard error of the variable in the regression, which in turn affects the reliability of the corresponding beta. However, this threshold cross is not severe, and it's therefore cautiously considered when evaluating the results of the analysis.

To test for linearity of the data's independent variables before running the multiple regression model, matrix plots are graphed using R. Individual scatter plots show the relationships between a number of different variables simultaneously, and thus, they provide a display format that is similar to the traditional correlation matrix. The advantage of the scatter plot is that it includes all the data points (Newbold, 2013).

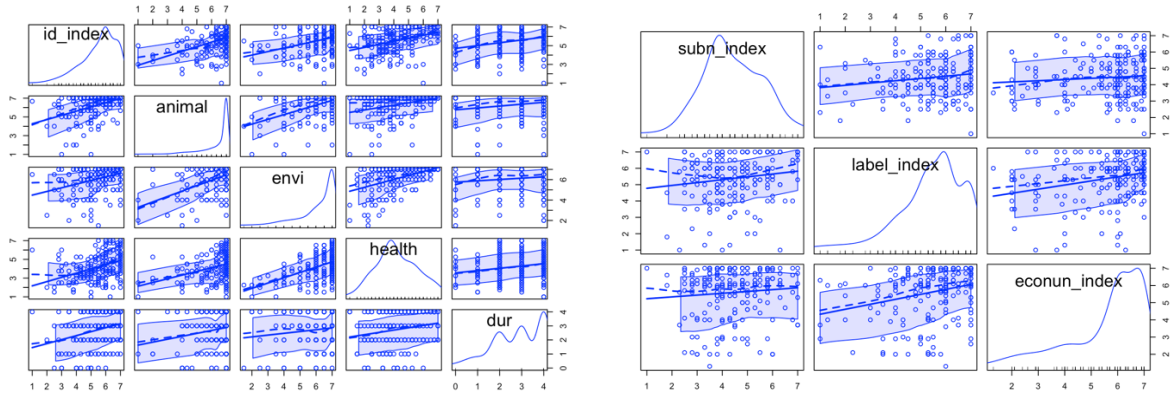


Fig. 11. Scatterplot Matrix of Independent Variables

As the plots show, nearly all independent variables display linear relationships, with approx. 3 curvilinear relationships, sufficiently low to have a relatively negligible impact on the overall linearity. Accordingly, the data was considered fit for a multiple regression.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Discussion of the results

As a great number of people try plant-based foods and adopt the plant-based diet, a greater number of people find the diet unviable for a long-term (Asher K. et al., 2014, Menzies & Sheeshka, 2012), or face barriers stemming from novel external forces, such as macroeconomic recessions and food inflation. Global internet and social media trends are taking the diet by storm, changing the definition and perception of what it means to be a PBC on a daily basis (D. Ramachandran et al., 2018, HC Loh et al., 2021, Lundahl, 2017). Furthermore, the diet is associated with activist and stereotyped stances, leading to PBCs avoiding telling others about their dietary pattern (Romo & Donovan-Kicken, 2012), or leaving the dietary lifestyle altogether due higher risk of social rejection (Markowski and Roxburgh, 2019). All of these factors invariably affect PBCs, raising important questions about how and why PBCs are affected, as well as the extent to which factors affect them.

In this study, economic uncertainty emerged as the most significant predictor of the intention to maintain a PBD, with greater perceived control over diet during economic uncertainty associated with a higher intention to maintain a PBD. The results indicate that economic uncertainty has led to price sensitivity among the PBCs, and that there are gender-based differences in the magnitude of price-

sensitivity, which are discussed in detail in the further section. According to Gordon and Goldfarb, price sensitivity is countercyclical – it rises when the macroeconomy weakens (2013). This sensitivity to prices is a natural response to their stretched budgets given economic crises and minimize financial risk during uncertain times. Furthermore, the finding that perceived control over diet during economic uncertainty is associated with a higher intention to maintain a PBD suggests that individuals who feel empowered to make choices about their diet, even in challenging economic times, are more likely to stick to their plant-based eating habits. This points to managerial implications for practitioners regarding plant-based foods, further discussed in the next section.

Previous studies show that consumers weigh whether a behavior fits their self-image and contributes positively to it. If it does, they're more likely to sustain that behavior over time. (Gardner & Lally, 2018; Gardner & Rebar, 2019; Rhodes & Rebar, 2017). Despite its theoretical significance, the results of this thesis suggest that identity may not significantly predict the intention to maintain a plant-based diet (PBD). While identity does shape behavior, its impact on sustaining a plant-based diet is minimal. Similarly, the influence of labels, categorized as social factors, was also found to be insignificant in maintaining a PBD, suggesting that how individuals communicate their plant-based identity does not affect their commitment to the diet. However, the high correlation of identity and label indicate that they are very closely linked. Given that label is an expression of one's identity, it would be interesting to see the effects of label if tested as part of internal factors especially because labeling is central to an individual's self-concept (Goffman, 1959; Brinton and Traugott, 2005).

Subjective norms (social factors) strongly impact the intention to continue a plant-based diet (PBD), suggesting when individuals perceive greater societal pressure to conform to the predominant animal-based diet, they may be less likely to maintain their plant-based dietary habits. This is in line with the expectations instilled by existing research, and confirms that similar effects are applicable on Swedish PBCs as well. Research on social norms and dietary behaviors also consistently shows that social influences, including perceived norms and social support, can significantly impact individuals' dietary choices and behaviors (e.g., Robinson et al., 2013, Salehi et al, 2020). Moreover, studies specifically focusing on plant-based diets have highlighted the role of social factors, such as social support, social norms, and social pressures, in influencing individuals' decisions to adopt and maintain plant-based dietary habits (e.g., Povey et al., 2001; Ruby et al., 2013).

Logically, duration also had a positive impact on intention to remain a plant-based consumer in the future. A PBC following their diet for 1 year and a PBC following their diet 30 years would have vastly

different types of vegetarian identities; the latter individual's identity may be more stable, more complex, and more intertwined with self-concept, for example, because they have had more opportunities to negotiate between vegetarian dietary rules and social conventions and to reflect on challenging experiences (Rosenfeld & Burrow, 2017). The incorporation of plant-based principles in a PBC's lifestyle happens gradually, and the more time one has had to build and integrate these principles, the lower their inclination to question their dietary choices and be influenced by external factors.

Motivations for adopting a plant-based diet vary widely (Rosenfeld and Burrow, 2017, Ruby, 2012), and among Swedish consumers, environmental concerns appear to be the only significant motivator for maintaining a plant-based diet. It is possible that like other PBCs, Swedish consumers choose to begin following the diet for the most common motivators, like animal welfare, but over time discover other motivators to maintain the diet, dropping animal welfare or ethical considerations and adding new motivations, such as environmental concern for following the diet (Hamilton, 2006). It is also worth noting that 83% of the consumers' had a mixed motivation, and consumers with a mixed motivation were more likely to maintain their diet in the future. This implies that although only consumers with environmental motivation might be inclined to follow their diet, others whose motivations are dominated by animal welfare and health, are likely to have some environmental motivation. Overarchingly, individuals with varied motivations for a plant-based diet are more likely to adhere to it over time, perhaps because they have to negotiate and refute more than one reason to lapse from their dietary choices.

5.1.1 Additional Analysis

Additional analysis was undertaken to better understand the nuances of the data collected and the Swedish PBCs. The studied sample reflects general PBC populations, comprising a greater number of women than men, as women are more likely to follow a PBD (Ruby, 2012, Fraser et al., 2000, Amato & Partridge, 1989). Prior research in on gender has shown that men and women view plant-based diets through different lenses (Ruby, 2012, Modlinska et al., 2020).

Economic uncertainty had the strongest impact, among all factors, on both men and women's intention to maintain their diet. Duration, i.e., how long an individual reports being a PBC had a stronger influence on men's intention to maintain their diet in the foreseeable future. Additionally, there may be differences in how men and women perceive and respond to economic uncertainty due to socialization and cultural factors. Research has shown that gender socialization can influence

individuals' attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making processes, including those related to finances and consumption patterns (Eagly & Wood, 2012).

One potential explanation might lie in motivation, as no particular type of motivation stood out as significant for men, while environmental concerns are significant for women, consistent with the primary model. This may postulate that men are more individualistic in their reasoning for their diet, actively seeking rational reasons beyond animal welfare, ethics and health, compared to women. Rational reasons could entail taste, athletic performance and recovery, or for example, culinary exploration based preference for newer, innovative meat replacements. These are merely speculative examples, as rational reasoning could vary heavily based on the PBC based on the individualistic goal they might be trying to attain. On the other hand, women are significantly motivated by environmental concerns to maintain their diet. This is explicated by countless research evidence that compared to men, women tend to report stronger environmental attitudes and concerns (eg. Zelezny L.C. et al., 2000, M Somma et al., 2002, Jackson, 1993). It has also been shown that women, compared to men, are more inclined to view their diets to be grounded in reasons beyond themselves (i.e. prosocial reasons such as the environment) (Rosenfeld, 2019).

In general, meat consumption is linked to gender stereotypes of masculinity (Rozin et al., 2012), explaining men's lower willingness to adopt plant-based diets (Scholz and Lenhart, 2023). The results reveal that subjective norms have far greater importance for the male PBCs in Sweden, than for their female counterparts, indicating that men are more likely to be affected by social pressures and have a lower intention to maintain their diet in the near future. Previous research has shown that this could be attributed to the fact that men face more prejudice from omnivores than women (Modlinska et al., 2020). Another aspect of this gender based differential reaction could be a result of lack of knowledge among men about the nutritional values of the PBD (Kiefer et al, 2005), therefore falling prey to prejudices and arguments against a plant-based diet from omnivores, and internally justifying lapsing from the diet as the reasonable decision after all. Additionally, men are less happy (Aslanifar, 2014) and have higher depression scores than women following a PBD (Hibbeln J.R. et al, 2018), further explaining their tendency to leave the diet due to social pressure compared to women.

The hypothesis that men appear that to have logical and rational tendencies also provides an explanation for the relationship between their reported duration and intention to maintain their diet. Men who adopt a plant-based diet and follow it for a greater number of years, most likely do so on the basis of a logical evaluation of benefits and costs over time. As the time passes, they acquire increased

nutritional knowledge, form habits in regard to foods, recipes and restaurants and food-related activities, and gain effectiveness in planning and maintaining their diet. Verplanken and Orbell discuss that when actions, such as food choices, are repeated in stable environments over time, they adopt automaticity, i.e., become habitual (2022). For men, this combination of rational decision making and automaticity in decision making regarding dietary choices acts as a sort of dual-enforcer of adherence. As they regularize a PBD, they see benefits in their health, athletic performance or simply begin to grow a liking towards the taste. However, it is important to acknowledge that this is merely a hypothesis, and an empirical understanding of the factors underlying duration, lacking in this study, would enable better conclusions related to gendered differences in duration as an influencer of dietary adherence. These practical benefits, gained through experience with the diet, are greater for men than for women. This is because even prior to following a PBD, women generally have greater nutritional awareness of it compared to men (Kiefer et al, 2005), and are driven by motivations beyond themselves (Rosenfeld, 2019).

Furthermore, economic uncertainty has a stronger impact on men than on women. This suggests that men are more sensitive to price changes and are more likely to adjust their consumption habits when they feel less control over their diet or experience economic uncertainty. These findings are interesting, especially because prior studies have indicated females tend to be more price-sensitive (Hampson & McGoldrick, 2013). However, this finding is in line with the above discussion regarding men being more logical and rational about their dietary choices. Merely believing in the notion that the expense associated with plant-based diets is increasing, if rationally processed, may imply that adhering to a plant-based diet is no longer economically viable. Women, on the other hand, have a greater inclination to follow the diet, emphasized in the baseline intention to maintain diet (intercept = 4.16, compared to men, whose intercept = 3.34. Both on a scale of 7). Therefore, as women are inherently more inclined to maintain their diet, they are affected by economic uncertainty less than men. Similar observations are applicable to social factors, namely social pressure.

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5.2 Managerial Implications

Understanding why plant-based consumers behave the way they do, and what compels them to maintain their diets, is increasingly important for organizations, particularly retail companies focused on plant-based food. With retailers investing heavily in R&D and expanding their plant-based product-lines, hoping to capitalize on the phenomenal growth of the industry, it is important they understand existing PBCs and anticipate their needs amidst economic uncertainties, social dynamics, and identity-oriented influences. Furthermore, building on foundational insights that enable the maintenance of diet among existing PBCs, retailers have the possibility to cultivate long-term relationships with their consumers belonging to the plant-based spectrum.

Economic uncertainty exists among PBCs, and within this study, has the biggest influence over their intention to maintain diet. This implies that PBCs are price sensitive and carefully plan their budgets, actively look for affordable options, reduce the proportion of plant-based food in their diet if they perceive it to be more expensive, and are losing confidence in their ability to afford plant-based foods. Control over their economic ability to continue to purchase plant-based options is an integral element to their maintenance of a plant-based diet, imploring retail companies to think about the significance of empowering PBCs with a sense of control in their purchase decisions. Nomologically, this price sensitivity in such times of economic turbulence can be addressed in two ways: decreased prices for the products or a communication of value provided by the product. Perceived value is negatively affected by price, and positively by benefits, which can take multiple forms; social, functional, emotional and conditional (Gardner, 1971).

However, it is rarely that straightforward, and retailers are also affected by economic turbulence and an intertwined slew of forces that affect their pricing strategies. To strategically address this issue, a path might be a balanced pricing strategy for the product portfolio. The ‘hedonic’ plant-based products, which consumers buy impulsively or for the purposes of pleasure, can be priced at maintenance levels or priced higher. Complementarily, products of a functional or utilitarian nature need to experience price decreases, or at least a maintained level of prices. Research shows that consumers' price sensitivity is affected less for hedonic goods and services compared to utilitarian goods (Al-Mamun, 2014, Wakefield and Inman, 2003). The brand portfolio can accordingly be organized similarly to the Riezebos product portfolio model (Riezebos, 2003), following which pricing strategies can be

implemented in accordance with the allotted category's strategic and consumption values. The idea is not to follow theoretical models, but to strategically price and balance the brand's portfolio.

The plant-based foods and diet has gained grand traction on the internet and social media, often contributing to its perception as a lifestyle and a trend (Martinelli & De Canio, 2021, Grand View Research, 2019). Accordingly, there exist status consumers, who purchase these products to conform to trends or buy goods with symbolic value. These consumers are not affected by price sensitivity, and are even willing to pay higher prices for the same products (Goldsmith et al., 2010). Identifying these consumers and attracting them is helpful to maximizing revenue and profits.

Another important aspect practitioners must consider is that price promotions and deep price cuts may theoretically be a tempting approach to maintain confidence among consumers, but have opposite effects on the long term sales of products and brand equity. Frequent and deep price promotions actually make consumers more price sensitive (Han et al., 2001), become less effective over time and make consumers less responsive to discounts (Anderson & Fox, 2019). Therefore, deep discounts and frequent promotions increase retailers' own costs, induce price volatility and make consumers more price sensitive.

Price conscious consumers, when intending to purchase a product, weigh down positively on brand consciousness and credibility (Walia et al., 2020 and Erdem 2002). This has positive implications for incumbents in the plant-based market, or retailers with credible brand equity in the food industry. This implies other players, or incumbents can accentuate this effect by focusing advertisement efforts and activities towards building and reinforcing positive brand image and associations with the product categories.

Retail companies, apart from addressing price sensitive consumers in current economically turbulent times, must also be prepared to compete with plant-based private label offerings of retailers. Retailers are increasingly launching their own private label - alt-milks and beverages, plant-based proteins, meat-substitutes, plant-based condiments and snacks - that are strategically priced. Price sensitive consumers are more likely to purchase private label products. However, consumers are willing to pay higher for non-private labels if they perceive a quality gap between the two products (JBEM. Steenkamp et al., 2010). Retail companies must therefore focus on communicating quality levels as well proclaiming complex and difficult to replicate manufacturing processes. One example is Lay's sustained market position and competitive advantage vis-à-vis private label alternatives, through its

emphasis 'hand-selecting potatoes', a meticulous and hard-to-match manufacturing practice. Its marketing campaigns focus on its expertise in crafting potato chips, quality, as well its partnerships and relationships with farmers.

Subjective norms and social influences must be considered by marketers in depth, as they have an important influence on a PBCs intention to maintain their diet. Pressure or prejudiced reactions to dietary choices from friends, family, colleagues and even strangers has the potential to cause a PBC to make the decision to leave their PBD. Attempts by retailers and retail companies at stimulating societal acceptance and normalization in daily consumption may be created to alleviate such effects. For instance, marketing of plant-based products as something that can be consumed by all, and not just plant-based consumers, may encourage normalization. Promoting plant-based foods as ingredients in conventionally omnivorous recipes, supported by their health and environmental benefits, can help cultivate inclusive attitudes and perceptions. Such promotions may disseminate awareness among diverse consumer groups, challenging the notion that plant-based foods are exclusively for the consumption of PBCs, and instilling acceptance of the diet and its corresponding consumer group. Additionally, retailers have the opportunity to integrate plant-based foods with conventional food categories, instead of separating them into their own category and aisle.

The affinity of long-term PBCs to maintain their diet, is a logical yet easily neglectable segment insight. Retail companies should consider that its long time consumers are a valuable segment as they stabilize demand. These long-time PBCs are also more likely to be market mavens, indispensable diffusers of market information (Goldsmith and Flynn, 2003). They are defined as individuals who have extensive information about many kinds of products, places to shop, and other facets of markets, and initiate discussions with consumers and respond to requests from consumers for market information. The definition of the market maven includes both general marketplace knowledge or expertise and influence (LF. Feick and LL. Price, 1987). As opinion leaders (Clark and Goldsmith, 2005) and sources of word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing (Walsh G. et al., 2004), they represent a coveted segment for retailers. Marketing *towards* market mavens is most beneficial as a facilitator of further WOM if quality is emphasized (Goodey and East, 2008), as market mavens tend to be greatly quality conscious.

Another implication for retail companies is that longtime PBCs may be sought if the goal for the company is a stable revenue stream, high average basket values as well as repeat purchases. Brand growth, if founded on non-volatile and non-trend conforming PBCs can be achieved in two ways,

namely, market penetration and product development. According to Keller and Lehmann (2009), there are three key routes to brand growth: namely market penetration, market development and product development. Market development entails the acquisition of newer customers and segments, and is therefore not applicable to a strategy that wishes to capitalize on existing consumers. Market penetration as a means to growth, however, can be achieved by marketing activities that convince customers of appropriateness and advantages of using the brand in existing or new situations or simply remind consumers to stock up. Product development is an inter-business approach that entails extending the brand to other categories and product lines. Product development could be undertaken by co-creating value with these longtime customers, through feedback loops and focus sessions, which in return would enable the company to build and reinforce relationships with them. By including insights from these veteran consumers, companies can increase the relevance of their products, and enhance the success of their product development initiatives.

In Sweden, environmental motivation appears to be the only important motivation-type driving PBCs' intention to maintain their diets. This implies that retail companies should prioritize environmental messaging in their branding and marketing activities. Further, investments in R&D to develop methodologies to reduce the carbon footprint of products may prove fruitful in keeping existing PBCs satisfied, which may then have an indirect effect on inducing an intention to maintain their diet. Women tend to have the discussed environmental motivation as an intention to maintain their diets, but the same is not applicable to men. As explored in the discussion section, this can be attributed to the idea that men may be more individualistic in their dietary choices, looking for rational and logical reasons to maintain their diet. Marketing aimed at men may, particularly using motivation as means, may consider an approach divergent from traditional marketing. An example is Oatly, whose infamously, no-nonsense approach to marketing and communications, entailing blunt, fact-based brand messaging has earned it a reputable and stable position in the market. Women, on the other hand, may actively seek out sustainable food options, such as locally sourced produce, organic products, or items with minimal packaging. This implies that marketing may need to focus on delivering a sustainability message, and including facts like the CO₂ emissions of the product may instill trust on the basis of transparency, and be effective in enabling product choice.

Overall, retailers and retail companies need to increasingly consider the dynamics of economic uncertainty, social and internal factors that are influencers of its plant-based consumer base's diet predictability in the near future. These have intricate implications for the retailer's and retail companies' pricing strategies, marketing activities, segmentation practices, R&D functions, and risk-

mitigation strategies. Consumer insights derived from the thesis can enable retailers to adapt their strategies to the prevailing dynamic forces in the increasingly relevant and rapidly growing plant-based foods market.

5.3 Limitations of this study

This study takes a novel approach to understanding the phenomenon of dietary adherence among plant-based consumers, specifically in Sweden. I introduce the external variable of economic uncertainty, whilst incorporating internal and social factors to develop a holistic understanding of Swedish PBCs. However, this study has a few drawbacks that are important to acknowledge to enable a critical evaluation of its results, and may enable readers to consider potential areas for future research.

First, insights into Swedish PBC's motivations could have been more comprehensive if respondents were given the opportunity to include other motivations, if any, with a text entry option in the self-administered questionnaire. I received an email, as well as few comments on the facebook posts of my surveys regarding taste-related and lifestyle oriented motivations for choosing a PBD. These respondents took the time and went beyond to express their experiences, however the survey could have enabled this through an open ended question as well. Secondly, external factors could include more variables beyond economic uncertainty that were not included due to the scope of this study. This could include factors such as availability of plant-based options, information availability, nutritional awareness and food policies and regulation. Social factors also have the potential to include specific cultural influences. Lastly, the reasoning and understanding of duration as a significant influencer for men could have been more nuanced if underlying factors of duration were also investigated.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

The study of plant-based consumers is a 'blossoming field', as said by Matthew B. Ruby, who has been combining various disciplines to understand the diet, the consumers and the dynamics interpolating the 'omnivore's dilemma' for almost two decades now. There is still much to learn and investigate within the field, particularly as adoption of green(er) diets is far more favorable, and to some extent imperative, given the pivotal role it can play in enhancing progress towards the sustainability goals (Aiking H., 2014).

Accordingly, suggested avenues for future research span vast topics and elements in this field, but a few that I can point to in direct relation to this study concern cultural drivers, interactions among drivers and barriers to adoption of these diets, external factors and policy effects. It would be interesting for future research to take an anthropologist approach to the diet to further understand the specific cultural drivers, compared to simply social pressure or the lack thereof, in adopting and maintaining plant-based diets. This study attempted to understand the effects of three factors on the intention to maintain a PBD. It would be interesting for future research to study the interactions and relationships among these three factors, such as the influence of differing motivations on subjective norms, or the relationship between duration and labelling. Future research could also consider studying sub-elements of duration, self reporting of diets, and the subjective nature of the factor. Lastly, Future research could also consider integrating more elements within the external factors, such as availability of plant-based options, information availability, nutritional awareness and food policies and regulation.

5.5 Conclusion

This study aimed to understand the drivers of dietary adherence among plant-based consumers (PBCs) in Sweden, with a focus on three different types of factors that influence the adherence. These factors are internal, social and external factors, together comprising elements aimed at deriving a holistic and nuanced understanding of PBCs experiences and future intentions with their diet. Economic uncertainty emerged as a significant influencer of intention to maintain a plant-based diet, with consumers valuing having control over their food choices and affordability. Conversely, subjective norms show a negative correlation with the intention to maintain a plant-based diet, particularly among male consumers who may succumb to societal pressures and abandon their plant-based diet. Lastly, this study finds no evidence that resonating with a plant-based identity has any relationship with an intention to maintain the diet, however there is evidence to suggest that individuals with longer adherence to a plant-based diet are more inclined to continue it in the foreseeable future. Within academia and research, this study furthers the knowledge on plant-based consumers and their behaviours and by including a novel element of economic uncertainty. Additionally, the study offers vital insights for retail practitioners in informing their understanding of the dynamics within the market, offering considerations regarding pricing strategies, private label, marketing communication, segmentation, as well as shedding some light on their role in society to stimulate societal acceptance and normalization of the diet. Lastly, potential areas for future research are considered, as this domain

of research stands to benefit from all novel insights that enable greater awareness and adoption of healthier, ethical, and most importantly more sustainable dietary practices.

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7. Appendix

Appendix 1. AI Disclosure:

AI has been utilized for this thesis as a supporting tool for certain processes. The only AI tool used was ChatGPT 3.5. The tool was utilized for the following processes:

1. Discuss initial ideas
2. Find logical inconsistencies, if any
3. Discuss concepts after pasting content from academic papers to enhance comprehension and ensure proper applicability of the concepts and models
4. Condense information into smaller bits, or 'summarize'.

Usage enabled an improved understanding of concepts and enhanced efficiency in the information review aspects of the thesis writing process. Furthermore, discussing logical inconsistencies contributed to my critical perspective to of paper, an important element of a cohesive and robust thesis.

Appendix 2. Survey:

BLOCK 0 - INTRODUCTION

1. Do you consider yourself a plant-based consumer?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Yes• No
2. How long have you been a plant-based consumer?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less than a year• 1-2 years• 3-5 years• 6-10 years• More than 10 years

BLOCK 1 – Internal

Self identifying as plant-based (adapted from L. Whitmarsh, S O'Neill, 2010, + centrality aspects, also adapted from research by Rosenfeld and Burrow, 2018)

3. I identify with being a plant-based consumer	Likert scale (1-strongly disagree, 7-strongly agree)
4. My plant-based diet is an important part of how I would describe myself	
5. I actively engage in plant-based behaviors (e.g. choosing plant-based meals, avoiding animal products, cooking using only plant based ingredients)	
6. I consider myself a plant-based consumer	

7.	A big part of my lifestyle revolves around my plant-based diet	
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Motivation (adapted from Plante et al., 2019 and Rozin et al., 1997)

“I resist (avoid) eating animal based foods because....”		
8.	it increases pain and suffering for animals	Likert scale (1-strongly disagree, 7-strongly agree)
9.	it requires killing of animals	
10.	it violates animals’ rights	
11.	A diet containing animal based foods is not as healthy as a plant based diet	
12.	Eating a plant based diet is better for my physical and mental wellbeing	
13.	Eating animal based foods is bad for my physical appearance	
14.	Even a diet containing small amounts of animal based foods is unhealthy	
15.	It is wasteful of resources to consume animal based products compared to plant based resources	
16.	Animal based products are bad for the environment	

BLOCK 2 – Social

Subjective Norms (adapted from L. Whitmarsh, S O’Neill, 2010)

17.	People close to me think I should continue to maintain my plant-based diet	Likert scale (1-strongly disagree, 7-strongly agree)
18.	People close to me encourage me to maintain my plant-based diet	
19.	People close to me follow a plant-based diet	
20.	People close to me influence my decision to be a plant-based consumer	
21.	It is important to me that my friends and family think positively of my food choices	

Label (adapted from Rosenfeld & Burrow, 2018)

Do you disclose your plant-based consumer identity publicly? Please express agreement with the following statements:	
22. I tell my friends about my plant-based consumer identity	Likert scale (1-strongly disagree, 7-strongly agree)
23. I tell my family about my plant-based consumer identity	
24. I would tell my co-workers/classmates about my plant-based consumer identity	
25. I would tell my people from clubs/groups I belong to about my plant-based consumer identity	
26. I would tell strangers about my plant-based consumer identity	

BLOCK 3 – External

Perceived Behavior Control given economic uncertainty (*questions developed in accordance to questionnaire formulation guidelines, validated in pilot study*)

“Economic uncertainty occurs when it's hard to foresee future economic conditions, including job stability, prices, and government regulations, such as in the current times. This unpredictability may cause you concerns about your personal finances or the health of Sweden’s economy.”	
27. I am confident I can still afford plant-based products if their prices go up due to economic uncertainty.	Likert scale (1-strongly disagree, 7-strongly agree)
28. I believe I have enough resources to keep buying the plant-based products I like, even if prices increase due to economic uncertainty	
29. I am confident I can find affordable alternatives if the cost of my favorite plant-based products goes up because of economic uncertainty	
30. I feel in control of my ability to adjust my budget for plant-based products during economic uncertainty	
31. I am confident I can still choose plant-based options in my diet, even if economic uncertainty affects food prices	
32. I believe I know how to find cost-effective plant-based options during times of economic uncertainty.	
33. I am certain that external factors, like economic uncertainty, won't stop me from buying and eating plant-based products	
34. I feel in control of my decisions about buying and eating plant-based products, even when there is economic uncertainty	

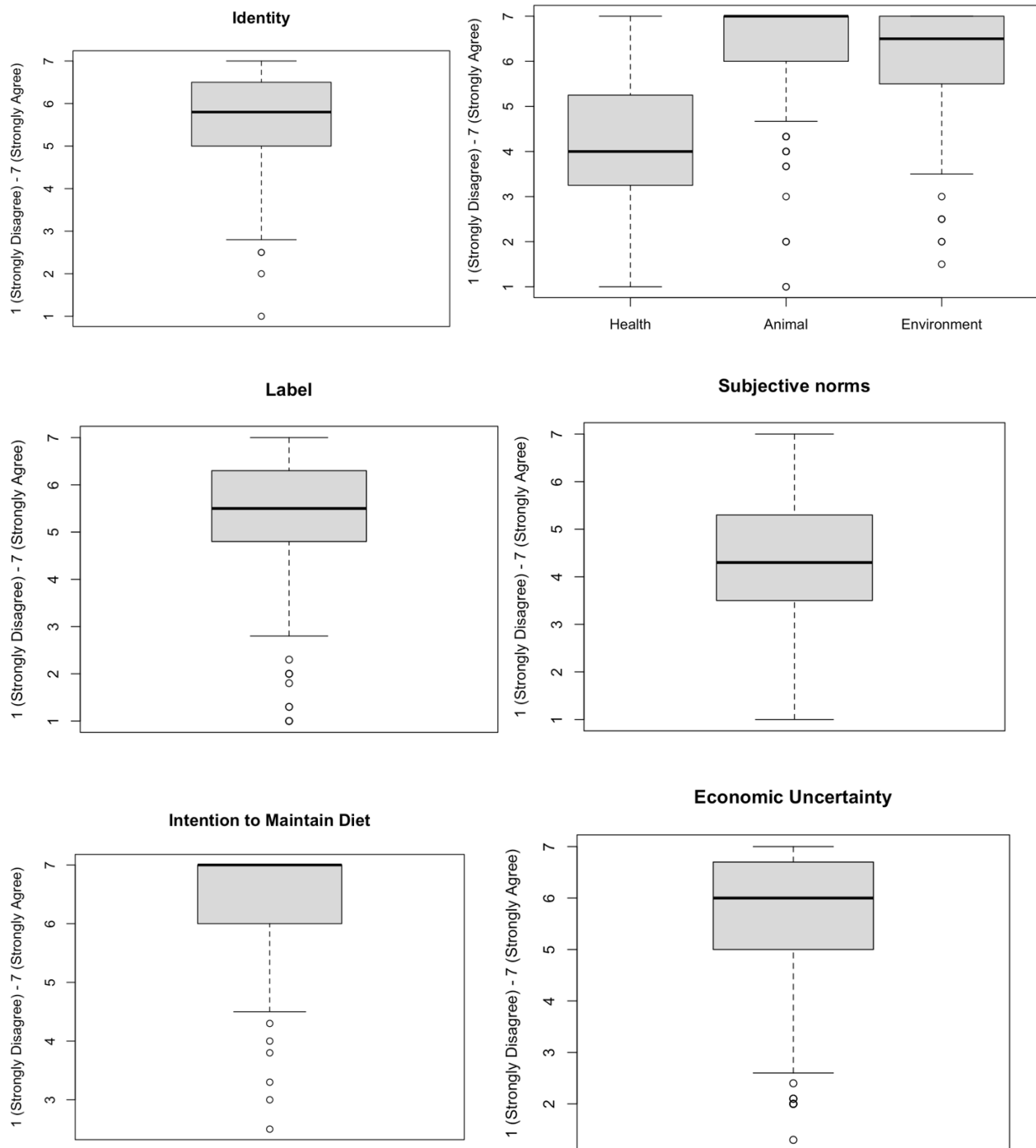
BLOCK 5 - Demographics & Attention

35. Which gender do you identify with?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Female• Male• Other• Prefer not to respond
36. How old are you?	(text entry)
37. What consumer group was this survey about?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Luxury fashion consumers• Plant-based consumers• Hi-tech electronics consumers
If you would like to have a chance to win the Froosh assortment of juices, write in your gmail! After choosing a winner randomly, your emails will be deleted.	(text entry)

Appendix 3. Mean and Standard Deviation of all variables

Factor Type	Description (indexed vars)	Mean	SD
Internal factor	Identity	5.54	1.21
Internal factor	Animal Motivation	6.30	1.15
Internal factor	Environment Motivation	6.10	1.18
Internal factor	Health Motivation	4.23	1.43
Social	Subjective Norms	4.43	1.20
Social	Label	5.38	1.34
External	Economic Uncertainty	5.59	1.43
Intention	Intention to maintain diet	6.51	0.81

Appendix 4. Box plots of all variables



Appendix 5. Summary of Hypothesis testing

<i>H_n</i>	Hypothesis	Evidence
H1	Consumers that self-identify as plant-based consumers are more likely to maintain their PBD	Not Supported
H2a	Majority of the consumers have a mixed motivation for following their PBD	Supported
H2b	Higher the mixed motivation among the PBC, higher their intention to maintain a PBD	Supported
H3	The longer a PBC has followed their PBD, the greater their intention to maintain their PBD	Supported
H4	Greater the extent of perceived social pressure experienced by the PBC, lower the intention to maintain PBD	Supported
H5	Higher the social expressiveness (labeling) of PBC label, greater the intention to maintain their PBD	Not Supported
H6	Greater the perceived control over diet given economic uncertainty, higher the intention to maintain PBD	Supported

Appendix 6. Poster used to gather responses

