



Consumer Insights

Why some men still hesitate to choose plant-based

A close-up photograph of a man with a mustache, wearing a grey patterned shirt and a watch, holding a large burger with both hands and about to take a bite. The burger has a sesame seed bun and a dark patty. The background is softly blurred, showing indoor plants and warm lighting. There are decorative green shapes in the corners: a circle in the bottom left and a triangle in the top right.

**What consumer psychology tells us about
meat, masculinity and food choice.**

For some men, food choice is also identity

- Meat is more than food. In many Western food cultures, meat has long been linked to strength, status and masculinity. Choosing less meat can therefore feel like more than a dietary choice.

**“What we eat can
communicate
who we are”**

A 2024 scoping review of 39 studies found a consistent connection between masculinities, meat consumption and attitudes towards veganism.



A photograph of four men sitting around a wooden table in a restaurant, smiling and eating burgers. The man on the far left is Black, wearing a blue shirt. The man next to him is white with a beard, wearing a green t-shirt. The man next to him is Asian with a beard and a bun, wearing a white t-shirt. The man on the far right is white with a beard, wearing a blue and red plaid shirt. They are all holding and eating burgers. The table has plates of food, including fries and bowls. The background is a blurred restaurant interior with warm lighting and green plants. There are decorative colored shapes (yellow, purple, green, and teal) in the corners of the image.

If plant-based becomes part
of a consumer's identity,
the choice can feel bigger
than the product itself.

Meat still carries masculine meaning

Men who strongly identify as meat-eaters are more likely to:

- 1 see themselves as more masculine
- 2 feel more social pressure to eat meat
- 3 view plant-based diets as less masculine
- 4 be less willing to adopt a plant-based diet



The stronger the meat-eater identity, the higher the resistance to plant-based eating.

Same food. Different label. Different reaction.

In a study, participants evaluated identical food images. Only the label changed: regular meat versus plant-based meat.

REGULAR MEAT



- ✓ perceived as more masculine
- ✓ stronger sensory expectations
- ✓ higher product evaluation

PLANT-BASED MEAT



- ✓ perceived as less masculine
- ✓ greater psychological distance
- ✓ lower product evaluation

Perception can start before the first bite. Even when the food itself remains unchanged.

Sources: Salmen, A., Faber, N. S., Krings, V. C., & Dhont, K. (2025). Masculinity Perceptions and Hostile Sexism Shape Evaluations of Plant-Based Meat Alternatives. Social Psychological and Personality Science. Across two experiments, omnivores rated identical food images more negatively when labeled plant-based rather than regular meat. Experiment 1: N = 216 U.K. students. Experiment 2: N = 1,182 U.S. residents. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19485506251404095>



A masculine makeover does not solve the problem

Researchers tested whether pairing plant-based meals with highly masculine male role models could make men more positive about plant-based eating.



Bodybuilder

perceived as highly masculine

Entrepreneur

perceived as highly masculine

No male model shown

control condition

Result: Masculine framing did not significantly improve attitudes towards plant-based diets or willingness to adopt them.

Sell the eating experience, not the sacrifice

These findings suggest that plant-based may benefit from leading with taste, enjoyment and familiar food cues rather than identity-driven messaging.

When plant-based leads with:

- sustainable
- vegan
- meat-free
- conscious choice



What if we lead with:

- crispy
- juicy
- spicy
- loaded
- grilled
- high in protein



Lead with desire.
Support with
purpose.

Sustainability still matters, but it does not always need to lead the choice.

Four implications for QSRs and food brands

Make plant-based part of the menu, not a different world

01 Lead with craving

Show why consumers want to eat it first.

02 Build around familiar eating occasions

Lunch, burgers, snacking, sharing and comfort food.

03 Reduce identity signalling

Avoid making the choice feel like a statement.

04 Make it socially normal

Position it next to other great-tasting options.

The easier plant-based fits into familiar food culture, the lower the psychological barrier can become.

The challenge may not be the plant-based product itself

Men do not necessarily reject the product. They may reject what they think the choice says about them.

Put **taste, indulgence and eating experience first**, so choosing plant-based feels like choosing great food rather than choosing an identity.



Plant-based wins when consumers do not have to choose between enjoyment and identity.

Sources: Velzeboer, R. et al. (2024). Masculinity, Meat, and Veganism: A Scoping Review. American Journal of Men's Health. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15579883241247173>
- Fonseca, R. P., De Groeve, B., & Graça, J. (2025). Masculinizing plant-based diets as an appeal for dietary change among men. Food Quality and Preference. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodqual.2024.105341>
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Great plant-based
products should not
ask consumers to
become
someone else.

They should simply
give them another
great reason to eat.



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