

Constructing Guilt-Free Indulgence

Discourses of Plant-Based and Cultivated Meat Marketing

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Abstract This paper examines how plant-based and cultivated meat are constructed in the promotional web discourse of twelve alternative-protein companies. Using corpus-assisted discourse analysis, it explores how brands combine sensory pleasure with ethical responsibility. Both product categories promote guilt-free indulgence, but through different strategies: plant-based brands normalize novelty through taste, familiarity, and lifestyle, whereas cultivated-meat brands legitimize it through science, safety, and animal-welfare claims. The findings show how marketing makes ethical consumption pleasurable, desirable, and compatible with eating practices.

Keywords Corpus-assisted discourse analysis. Evaluation. Plant-based meat. Cultivated meat. Guilt-free indulgence.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Theoretical Background. – 3 Data and Methodology. – 4 Discourse Strands for Plant-Based Meat. – 5 Discourse strands for cultivated meat. – 6 Evaluative adjectives: taste-first and conscience-first patterns. – 7 Discussion. – 8 Conclusion.



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1 Introduction

Alternative proteins, sometimes referred to as ‘novel meats’, have become a highly visible component of contemporary food culture. Plant-based burgers, sausages, mince, chicken pieces, seafood substitutes, and, more recently, even cultivated meat prototypes, are no longer presented only as niche products for vegetarians or vegans. They are promoted as attractive options for meat lovers, flexitarians, younger consumers, restaurants, but also food-service operators, investors, regulators, and environmentally conscious families. The ever-growing consumption of these novel foods has been linked to health, environmental, ethical, technological, and economic factors (Lindberg et al. 2022; Broucke et al. 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic also intensified attention to meat supply chains and to the vulnerability of conventional animal agriculture, creating further space for alternative protein brands to present themselves as part of a new food future.

The linguistic question raised by this development is not simply how these products are named, but rather how they are made meaningful to the potential consumers. Plant-based meat and cultivated meat both have to solve a marketing problem. They must persuade consumers that a product which is new, unfamiliar, or technically complex can still satisfy ordinary desires for taste, convenience, fullness, tradition, and social pleasure. At the same time, they must connect the product with much broader ethical claims, such as a lower environmental impact, less harm to animals, improved health, greater food security, or safer production. This double task makes the promotion rather challenging and complex. The brands must make their products seem morally better than conventional meat, but not less enjoyable. They must ask consumers to change, while also promising that little or nothing needs to be sacrificed. This paper elaborates on this tension through the idea of ‘guilt-free indulgence’. This expression captures a recurring discursive pattern in the corpus of texts under analysis, through which meat alternatives are marketed as products that allow people to continue enjoying meat-like foods while avoiding, reducing, or symbolically managing the guilt associated with conventional meat consumption.

More specifically, the study addresses two research questions. First, what are the main similarities and differences between the framing of plant-based and cultivated meat? Second, how are discourses around ethics and indulgence combined in the marketing language of ‘novel meats’? These questions are explored through a corpus-assisted discourse analysis of promotional web texts coming from twelve leading international alternative-protein brands whose websites provide English-language content. Quantitative evidence is used to identify salient lexical patterns, while qualitative close

reading is used to interpret how these patterns work in context. The paper does not evaluate whether the brands' claims are scientifically true or whether consumers accept them. Its aim is discursive: to examine how language constructs products as desirable, responsible, familiar, innovative, and morally attractive.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 outlines the theoretical background, focusing on the concepts of alternative hedonism, ethical luxury, and evaluation in discourse. Section 3 describes the corpus and method. Sections 4 and 5 present the main discourse strands in the plant-based and cultivated subcorpora. Section 6 focuses on evaluative adjectives, because adjectives are central to the way these products are made appetizing, trustworthy, or morally attractive. Section 7 discusses the findings in relation to guilt-free indulgence and the research questions. The conclusion summarizes the contribution and suggests directions for future research, especially multimodal work on images, colors, typography, and webpage layout.

2 Theoretical Background

A central concept to frame the analysis carried out below is that of alternative hedonism. In consumer research, alternative hedonism describes a form of consumption in which pleasure and ethical concern are not treated as opposites. Caruana, Glozer and Eckhardt (2020, 143) argue that contemporary moral markets increasingly allow consumers to experience "morality and pleasure concurrently". This is important for alternative protein marketing because the consumer is rarely asked to give up pleasure in a heroic or ascetic way. Instead, the consumer is told that pleasure can be redesigned. A burger can remain juicy, a chicken piece can remain tender, and seafood can remain premium, while the social and environmental costs attached to conventional production are reduced or removed.

Recent work on veganism and dietary conflict also helps frame the present study. Nacchia (2023) shows, from a socio-cognitive discourse analysis of YouTube comments on vegan, vegetarian, reducetarian, and meat-eating groups, that eating practices are not only market choices but also social identities and moral positions. This is relevant because alternative protein brands speak to consumers in a field already shaped by moralization, intergroup tension, and anxiety about judgement. The point is supported by research on politicized diet as social identity (Chuck, Fernandes, Hyers 2016), dietarian identity (Rosenfeld, Burrow 2018), and the moralization of meat consumption (Feinberg et al. 2019). It also connects with work on bias and negative attitudes between meat eaters and meat avoiders (MacInnis, Hodson 2017; Bagci, Rosenfeld, Uslu 2022; Pabian et al. 2023). Finally, Piazza et al.'s (2015) account of the '4Ns' (i.e., the idea that meat consumption

is often rationalized as ‘natural’, ‘normal’, ‘necessary’, and ‘nice’) is especially useful for the present analysis. Novel meat marketing does not simply reject these four rationalizations. It often reworks them by presenting alternatives as equally nice, increasingly normal, nutritionally necessary or sufficient, and ethically more acceptable.

Another pivotal concept for this study is that of ethical luxury. Athwal et al. (2019) discuss sustainable luxury marketing as a field in which exclusivity, quality, status, and ethical responsibility can be combined. This idea is usually applied to sectors such as fashion, travel, cosmetics, and high-end lifestyle products. In food marketing, it is less often discussed, but it is nonetheless relevant. Many novel meat brands do not simply present themselves as substitutes for ordinary meat. They present themselves as upgraded, future-facing, first-rate, or technologically superior versions of meat. For example, Mosa Meat, one of the companies whose website was used to compile the corpus under analysis here, speaks of real beef that “oozes and sizzles with real fats and juices” while also being kinder to animals and the planet. These are not only claims about substitution, but they are claims about a better, more refined, more responsible form of pleasure. In this study, ‘guilt-free indulgence’ functions as an analytic label developed from recurrent patterns in the corpus, rather than as a predefined category imported from the literature. It captures the discursive association of sensory enjoyment with claims of reduced harm and ethical responsibility. Alternative hedonism and ethical luxury inform the interpretation of this pattern, without determining the individual discourse strands identified through the corpus-assisted procedure. The term thus connects the empirical findings to a broader interpretation of how promotional discourse reconciles pleasure and responsibility.

A third concept central to the linguistic analysis is evaluation. Hunston (2010) defines evaluation as the expression of attitude, stance, value, and judgement by means of language. In marketing discourse, evaluation is central because products must be positioned as good, desirable, useful, safe, innovative, or morally preferable, thus making ample use of different aspects of evaluation. It therefore goes without saying that evaluative adjectives such as ‘delicious’, ‘juicy’, ‘ethical’, ‘cruelty-free’, etc. are not neutral descriptors as they contribute to framing what consumers are clearly invited to notice. Moreover, they also attach affect to products. For instance, ‘a juicy burger’ activates appetite; ‘a cruelty-free meat product’ activates conscience; ‘a clean production environment’ activates reassurance. The present study, therefore, treats evaluative adjectives as powerful signals of broader discourse strategies that need a more critical evaluation.

The analysis also draws on corpus-assisted discourse studies, or CADS. CADS combines quantitative corpus tools with qualitative discourse analysis (Partington, Duguid, Taylor 2013; Baker et al.

2008; Baker, Gabrielatos, McEnery 2013). Corpus tools can reveal lexical patterns that are difficult to see through close reading alone, such as collocations, unusually frequent words, and contrasting keyness across subcorpora. (Critical) discourse analysis can then explain why these patterns matter socially and rhetorically (for an overview of Critical Discourse Studies, see Wodak, Meyer 2015). This combination is useful for studying marketing and corporate texts because promotional and business discourse is often strategic, conventionalized, and characterized by recurrent evaluative patterns (Bhatia 2004; Delin 2005; Crawford Camiciottoli 2018).

3 Data and Methodology

The corpus was built from the websites of twelve international alternative-protein brands whose websites provide English-language content. It was then divided into two subcorpora: one for plant-based meat and one for cultivated meat. The plant-based subcorpus includes Beyond Meat, Impossible Foods, THIS, Meati, Daring Foods, and Moving Mountains. The cultivated subcorpus, instead, includes Upside Foods, GOOD Meat, Vow Foods, BlueNalu, Mosa Meat, and Believer Meats. The text types retrieved from the websites of these companies include product descriptions, mission statements, FAQs, blog posts, food-service pages, press releases, and related brand materials. Tables 1 and 2 offer an overview of the corpus compiled.

Table 1 Corpus overview

Subcorpus	Companies	Sketch Engine tokens	Number of documents
Plant-based meat	6	91,210	33
Cultivated meat	6	60,696	34
Total	12	151,906	67

Table 2 Brands included in the corpus

Company	Origin	Subcorpus	Website
Beyond Meat	USA	Plant-based	https://www.beyondmeat.com
Impossible Foods	USA	Plant-based	https://impossiblefoods.com
THIS	UK	Plant-based	https://this.co
Meati	USA	Plant-based	https://meati.com
Daring Foods	USA	Plant-based	https://www.daring.com
Moving Mountains	UK	Plant-based	https://www.movingmountainsfoods.com
Upside Foods	USA	Cultivated	https://upsidefoods.com

Company	Origin	Subcorpus	Website
GOOD Meat (Eat Just)	USA	Cultivated	https://www.goodmeat.com
Vow Foods	Australia	Cultivated	https://www.vowfood.com
BlueNalu	USA	Cultivated	https://www.bluenalu.com
Mosa Meat	The Netherlands	Cultivated	https://mosameat.com
Believer Meats	USA	Cultivated	https://www.believermeats.com

As can be seen, the plant-based subcorpus contains six companies, 91,210 tokens and 33 documents; the cultivated-meat subcorpus contains six companies, 60,696 tokens and 34 documents. The total corpus comprises 151,906 tokens in 67 documents.

From a procedural point of view, the analysis followed a corpus-assisted procedure. First, the corpus was uploaded to Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al. 2014) and divided into the two subcorpora. Second, each subcorpus was compared against the other in order to identify distinctive keywords and key two-word expressions. The analysis used frequency and log-likelihood keyness scores to identify salient items. Third, keywords and key multi-word expressions were grouped manually into different discourse strands. A strand was considered as such when at least five words or two-word expressions pointed to the same broader framing. Potentially overlapping items were assigned according to their dominant contextual function as established through concordance analysis. For example, an item referring to an ingredient was classified under health and nutrition when it primarily foregrounded nutritional value, and under naturalness when it emphasized simplicity, purity, or proximity to nature. Where these functions were closely intertwined, as in the plant-based subcorpus, the corresponding strands were interpreted jointly. Concordance lines were thus examined closely so that classification reflected contextual use rather than decontextualized lexical meaning alone. Finally, evaluative adjectives (see Hunston 2010 for the notion of evaluation) referring to the products were extracted through the Sketch Engine wordlist feature and the ten most frequent items in each subcorpus were then examined qualitatively.

4 Discourse Strands for Plant-Based Meat

Generally speaking, the plant-based subcorpus is characterized by a discourse of normalization. Plant-based products are repeatedly positioned as familiar meat foods that happen to be made differently, in a better way. Therefore, the promotional challenge for these brands is mainly to reduce the distance between a plant-based product and the consumer's existing food routines. The product must not appear

strange, clinical, or morally austere. Instead, it is presented as a burger, sausage, hot dog, mince, cutlet, chicken piece, or beef product that fits existing meals and existing desires. From the analysis of the first fifty keywords for this subcorpus, five major discourse strands emerge, namely: i) brand identity and market familiarity; ii) meat equivalence; iii) nutritional ingredients and health rhetoric; iv) naturalness; v) trend and lifestyle alignment. Table 3 introduces the keywords and key two-word expressions that constitute these five strands. Each item is listed with its absolute frequency and, between round brackets, with its keyness score.

Table 3 Main plant-based discourse strands and selected salient items

Discourse strand	Selected key items with frequency and keyness score
Brand identity and market familiarity	beyond meat 210 (2,303.3); meati 180 (1,974.4); beyond burger 110 (1,207.0); THIS meat 57 (625.9); daring foods 49 (538.2); impossible beef 42 (461.5)
Meat equivalence	mince 52 (571.1); cutlet 48 (527.2); ground beef 41 (450.5); hot dog 39 (428.6); plant-based chicken 35 (384.7); burger patty 18 (198.3)
Health rhetoric and nutritional ingredients	pea protein 48 (527.2); soy protein 43 (472.4); nutrient-packed 26 (286.1); vitamin 18 (198.3); protein concentrate 18 (198.3); dietary fiber 16 (176.4)
Naturalness	plants 52 (571.1); natural 20 (220.3); natural flavors 17 (187.4); minimal processing 16 (198.3); earth-friendly 13 (143.5); simple ingredient 12 (132.9)
Trend and lifestyle alignment	Gen Z 22 (242.2); KFC 19 (428.6); Starbucks 17 (483.4); Pizza Hut 12 (461.5); balanced lifestyle 19 (198.3); positive choice 11 (121.9)

4.1 Brand Identity and Market Familiarity

The first plant-based strand concerns brand identity. Items such as “Beyond Meat”, “Beyond Burger”, “Impossible beef”, “Meati”, “THIS meat” and “Daring Foods” occur with very high frequency and high keyness. This suggests a pattern in which the brand name becomes almost equivalent to the product category. In ordinary food language, consumers might say burger, mince, chicken, or hot dog. In this corpus, branded forms such as ‘Beyond Burger’ or Impossible Beef simply join the brand name to a familiar meat noun. The result is a hybrid lexical form that hints at novelty through the premodifier, while preserving recognizability through the noun that represents a traditional food category. This strategy is relevant because plant-based meat to be appealing must be made easy to understand. Hence, the brand does not ask consumers to learn an entirely new cuisine. It offers a branded version of a food they already know. For

example, Beyond Meat describes a burger that “looks, cooks, and satisfies like beef” (from Beyond Meat product page). This simple sentence contains three verbs of equivalence, “looks, cooks and satisfies”, through which the product is not only visually similar, but it is also usable in the same way and expected to produce the same bodily satisfaction as normal meat. In “Daring Foods” web page, the same logic appears in the claim that “Daring Plant Chicken looks, cooks, and tastes uncannily chicken-y” (Daring food service page). The adverb “uncannily” acknowledges imitation while turning both imitation and register humor into a strong selling point.

The branded meat expressions also create what can be called lexical naturalization in that repetition, reflected in the high frequency values, makes the new expressions feel ordinary. The high keyness of Beyond Meat and Beyond Burger is not only a statistical finding, but it indexes a marketing practice. The more often these names appear beside familiar food nouns, the more the brand becomes a possible everyday category. A consumer does not encounter an abstract plant protein product. They are instead faced with a burger, beef, chicken, mince, or hot dog with a recognizable brand identity attached to it.

4.2 Meat Equivalence and Mimetic Naming

The second plant-based strand is meat equivalence and mimetic naming. Words and word combinations such as “ground beef”, “minced beef”, “cutlet”, “hot dog”, “burger patty”, “plant-based chicken”, and “plant mince” show that plant-based products are named through the vocabulary of conventional meat. This is a clear mimetic strategy that reduces cognitive distance by mapping the alternative product onto pre-existing culinary forms. Hence, a consumer does not have to imagine a new food practice, they can just imagine replacing one ingredient in a familiar recipe with a comparable, almost identical, one.

The corpus contains many examples of this substitution logic. Daring Foods presents its product as “a true 1:1 swap in any dish” (Daring food-service page). Moving Mountains writes that its products are “made from plants for people who love meat, plants and everything in between” (Moving Mountains product page). The wording here is inclusive and transitional as it does not construct a strict opposition between meat eaters and plant-based eaters, instead, it addresses consumers who may occupy several positions at once such as flexitarians. The same brand describes “Plant-based beef you wouldn’t believe isn’t meat” (Moving Mountains landing page), which, again, foregrounds perceptual equivalence rather than real difference.

This mimetic framing also makes indulgence easier to preserve. If the product is still a burger, hot dog, mince, or chicken piece, the consumer is not being asked to move from pleasure to discipline. They are just being asked to move from one version of pleasure to another. This is why sensory and format-based language often co-occurs. Plant-based chicken tenders are, for example, described as “crispy and crunchy on the outside, and juicy and savory on the inside” (Beyond Meat blog). Such phrasing does not moralize the product first, but it makes the food appetizing first and then allows ethical or environmental value to sit behind the sensory appeal.

4.3 Health Rhetoric and Nutritional Ingredients, and Naturalness

The third and fourth plant-based strands concern respectively health rhetoric and nutritional ingredients and naturalness, which are neighboring semantic domains, hence they are treated together here. As for health rhetoric and nutritional ingredients, the keyword list contains ingredient related combinations such as “soy protein, pea protein, vitamin, protein concentrate”, and “dietary fiber”. These terms help build a technical but familiar nutritional frame. Unlike the cultivated subcorpus, for which technical vocabulary points toward cell culture and production environments, the plant-based technical vocabulary tends to point toward ingredients that consumers may recognize from food labels. The brands present plant-based meat not only as tasty, but also as protein-rich, nutrient-dense, cholesterol-free, or fiber-rich.

This pattern is visible in claims such as “100% plant-based, high in protein (THIS landing page) and packed with 19g of protein” (Beyond Meat blog). Meati’s materials describe its product as an “excellent source of complete protein” and connect mycelium mushroom to “earth-friendly nutrition” (Meati sell page; Meati about page). Daring Foods says its plant chicken is made from a “short list of simple ingredients” (Daring FAQ). Hence, these examples show how health and naturalness are combined. “Protein” functions as a performance claim, “simple ingredients” and “plants” are purity claims and, together, they position the product as both functional and morally clean.

As for naturalness, it is especially important because processed plant-based meat can be vulnerable to criticism as artificial or industrial. The corpus responds to this risk through keywords and expressions such as “plants, natural, natural flavors, minimal processing, simple ingredient, and earth-friendly”. Beyond Meat says its ingredients are “simple and made from plants” (Beyond Meat FAQ). Daring Foods refers to simple ingredients and a soy protein

base. Meati links mycelium to nature and whole-cut nutrition. These lexical choices create what may be called naturalness as a moral quality. Plant-based meat is framed as closer to the earth, less harmful, and more transparent than conventional meat. At the same time, naturalness does not replace indulgence, but it supports it. The consumer is reassured that the product can be enjoyable without becoming morally suspicious. In this sense, plant-based marketing frequently presents health and naturalness as enabling pleasures rather than restricting them. The message is not that consumers should eat the product because it is virtuous despite being less pleasurable. It is closer to a promise that the product is pleasurable and also supports a better lifestyle. This is a central mechanism of guilt-free indulgence in the plant-based subcorpus.

4.4 Trend, Lifestyle, and Mainstream Culture

The fifth plant-based strand links meat alternatives to lifestyle and mainstream culture. Keywords such as “KFC”, “Pizza Hut”, “Starbucks”, “Gen Z”, “balanced lifestyle”, “positive choice”, and “visionary” show that plant-based meat is presented as socially current, accessible, and culturally embedded. The presence of major food-service brands, such as “Starbucks” or “Pizza Hut”, matters because it positions plant-based products as normal options in ordinary public eating. They are not hidden in a specialist shop; they appear in chains, delivery menus, restaurants, and fast-food environments.

Beyond Meat’s material explicitly connects the product with large brands and with everyday lifestyle. One press-text example refers to consumers continuing to eat what they love “without compromising on taste, a balanced lifestyle or the environment” (Beyond Meat newsroom). The expression tells us as consumers that taste, lifestyle, and environment are placed side by side as compatible goals. Another Beyond Meat mission text states that “positive choices we make every day can have an impact”. This turns consumption into small-scale ethical agency where the consumer does not need to become an activist and choosing a product can be framed as a positive daily act.

The “Gen Z” references also help frame plant-based meat as future-facing and value-driven. Young consumers are often represented in marketing as more open to innovation, environmental concern, and flexible eating. In the corpus, the generational frame gives plant-based meat cultural momentum. It becomes not only a product but a sign of being modern, aware, and open to change. However, because the product remains tied to burgers, chicken, pizza, and fast-food chains, this modernity is not presented as radical disruption. It is more of a mainstream lifestyle adjustment.

5 Discourse Strands for Cultivated Meat

The cultivated meat subcorpus is generally characterized by a different problem. Unlike plant-based meat, cultivated meat is not primarily a plant-based imitation of meat. It is promoted as real meat produced through a new technological process. Its marketing, therefore, has to legitimize novelty, explain production, manage possible anxiety, and, in general, construct trust. This explains why the most salient strands concern i) technique and science, ii) safety and cleanliness, iii) ethics and animal welfare, iv) corporate or technological brand identity (Table 4).

Table 4 Main cultivated meat discourse strands and selected salient items

Discourse strand	Selected items with frequency and keyness score
Technique and science	cultivated 451 (7,431.5); cell 423 (104.4); cell-cultured 50 (824.8); feed 42 (693.0); bioreactor 22 (363.5); cultivator 22 (363.5); bioprocessing 19 (312.3)
Safety, control, and cleanliness	safety 61 (2.692); approval 42 (692.973); regulation 29 (8.578); controlled 25 (412.889); clean 11 (1.647); inspection 9 (149.28); sterile 6 (99.853)
Ethics and animal welfare	slaughter 37 (610.6); ethical 29 (478.8); conventionally grown 27 (445.8); conventionally farmed 11 (182.2); slaughter-free 10 (165.8); cruelty-free 9 (149.3)
Corporate/tech brand identity	BlueNalu 90 (1,483.8); Mosa 56 (923.6); Upside 51 (495.3); Vow 23 (379.9); Vowzer 7 (116.3)

5.1 Technique and Science

The most striking cultivated strand is the prominence of technical language. Words such as “cultivated”, “cell”, “cell-cultured”, “cell-based”, “bioreactor”, “cultivator”, “feed”, “processor”, “technology”, and “bioprocessing” foreground how the product is made. This is clearly a process-first lexicon and it differs from the plant-based subcorpus, where product names often reproduce conventional meat categories. Cultivated meat companies also use familiar food terms, but they repeatedly return to the production process because this process is the basis of the product’s novelty and legitimacy. Examples from the corpus show how companies simplify the science for non-specialist readers. Believer explains that “cultivated meat is grown directly from animal cells in a controlled environment” (Believer our meat page). GOOD Meat says, “We feed cells in a clean, sterile environment” (GOOD Meat process page). The technical explanation is also made accessible through familiar comparisons. For example, GOOD Meat’s FAQ describes production as taking place in a “safe

and controlled environment that looks like a beer brewery” (GOOD Meat FAQ). The brewery analogy is important because it translates biotechnology into a known food-production setting, hence making the process industrial but not alien.

The process vocabulary also creates a sort of discursive shift from agriculture to cultivation. Traditional meat is associated with farms, livestock, feedlots, slaughterhouses, and animal bodies. Cultivated meat replaces this field with cells, media, vessels, cell banks, bioreactors, and controlled environments. The word “cultivated” itself is central to this shift. It keeps a connection to growth and care, but it detaches meat production from raising and killing whole animals. In this sense, “cultivated” represents a strategic lexical substitution. It softens the laboratory frame while still signaling a certain innovation. Therefore, this scientific strand is not purely descriptive, but it also functions as reassurance. By explaining the process, companies claim transparency and by naming the equipment and stages, they suggest expertise. When they describe cells as fed, selected, grown, and harvested, they turn a potentially strange process into a manageable sequence. The reader is invited to trust not only the final product but the system that produces it.

5.2 Safety, Control, and Cleanliness

The second cultivated-meat strand is safety, control, and cleanliness. Words such as “approval”, “inspection”, “regulation”, “controlled”, “sterile”, “clean”, “cleaner”, and “safety” create a discourse of institutional and hygienic reassurance. This strand responds to a very likely consumer concern: if meat is produced through a new cellular process, is it safe? The marketing answer is to emphasize oversight, scientific testing, and clean production.

GOOD Meat’s process page states that because there is no slaughter, there is “no risk of fecal contamination or pathogens like *E. coli*” (GOOD Meat process page). This declaration clearly works through contrast. Conventional meat is associated with contamination risks, cultivated meat, instead, is associated with a cleaner process. Believer’s regulatory discussion similarly refers to products being “safe, sanitary, and properly labeled” (Believer blog). The three adjectives link safety to legal and institutional order. They do not simply say that the product tastes good, but they say that the product has been, or will be, checked, categorized, and approved.

Safety discourse is especially prominent in cultivated meat because the product’s novelty creates a need for explanation. Plant-based meat may be questioned for taste or processing, but consumers already understand plants as a safe food. On the contrary, cultivated meat asks consumers to accept animal cells grown outside

an animal's body. For this reason, safety and cleanliness become a pivotal part of the product's moral appeal. The product is not only kinder to animals, but it is also framed as more controlled, more transparent, and less exposed to some risks of conventional production. This is one of the reasons why cultivated meat discourse often sounds more institutional than plant-based discourse. It has to speak not only to casual consumers but also to regulators, investors, chefs, policymakers, and food-service professionals. Words like "approval", "pre-market consultation", "inspection", "framework", and "regulation" belong to a public legitimacy frame. The reader is thus encouraged to see cultivated meat as emerging from scientific governance rather than from mere novelty or experimentation.

5.3 Ethics and Animal Welfare

The third cultivated strand revolves around ethics. While plant-based discourse often uses softer ethical cues through plants, naturalness, and positive choice, cultivated meat discourse more directly names the ethical problem of conventional meat. The keyword list includes "slaughter", "slaughter-free", "cruelty-free", "ethical", "cruelty", "conventionally grown", and "conventionally farmed". These terms create a moral contrast between old and new systems of meat production.

GOOD Meat describes itself as "real meat, made without tearing down a forest or taking a life" (GOOD Meat about page). Believer states that "No animals are raised, harmed, or killed in the process" (Believer our meat page). These examples show how cultivated meat claims ethical superiority while keeping the category of meat. The product is not a vegetable alternative to meat, but it is real meat without the morally troubling parts of conventional meat production. This is a stronger form of guilt-free indulgence than the plant-based one because it addresses the guilt directly: taking life, slaughtering animals, and damaging the planet are explicitly named or implied.

The corpus also contains consumer-oriented phrases such as "buying cruelty-free meat and enjoy slaughter-free meat" (Believer blog). These expressions are significant because cruelty-free and slaughter-free directly modify meat. This particular expression is rhetorically powerful. It joins a term associated with animal bodies and appetite to terms associated with ethical relief. The phrase "cruelty-free meat" is almost paradoxical in conventional terms, because meat usually implies animal death. In cultivated marketing, the paradox is turned into the product's main promise.

Mosa Meat offers another version of this ethical frame. Its landing page speaks of "the world's kindest beef burger and of Feel-good indulgence" (Mosa Meat landing page). Its mission page states: "just

replace beef with beef” (Mosa Meat mission page). The message is that the behavior does not need to change dramatically: consumers can keep eating beef, but the process and moral meaning of beef can be redesigned. This is a clear way to express alternative hedonism, as pleasure is preserved, while the ethical conditions of that pleasure are just reimagined.

5.4 Corporate and Technological Brand Identity

The fourth cultivated strand concerns corporate and technological brand identity. Names such as “BlueNalu”, “Mosa”, “Vow”, and “Upside” do not sound like conventional meat products. They are abstract, future-oriented, and often closer to the language of start-ups, laboratories, or innovation platforms. This differs from plant-based brand expressions such as ‘Beyond Burger’ or “Impossible Beef”, which combine a brand name with a familiar meat category. Cultivated brands more often present themselves as agents of a more radical transformation.

BlueNalu’s landing page begins with “Indulge in a blue future” and describes the company as “reimagining the future of food” (BlueNalu landing page). It also uses the heading “Seafood without compromise” and promises “delicious seafood without taking fish out of the sea” (BlueNalu landing page). The language is clearly visionary and the product they produce and sell becomes a way of protecting ocean life while continuing to enjoy high-value seafood. BlueNalu’s phrase “Toro you can trust” (BlueNalu our seafood page) condenses this promise into a memorable slogan: the indulgence of toro (a premium type of tuna fish) is paired with the assurance of trust.

Vow uses a more playful and provocative voice. It says it creates meats that consumers choose selfishly and ends a sequence of production claims with “NO GUILT-TRIP” (Vow landing page). This is an unusually explicit articulation of guilt-free indulgence. The consumer is not asked to apologize for appetite; on the contrary, appetite is accepted as a starting point. The brand then claims that technology can redirect selfish desire toward better outcomes. Vow’s career text similarly describes food as “good for your tastebuds, your health and your planet and as both nutritious and delicious” (Vow team page). The three-part formulation tastebuds, health, planet is a compact but very effective version of the broader discourse.

Upside Foods also joins sensory and moral language, but with a more corporate-friendly tone. It claims to make “the chicken chickens dream about and says there is no need to raise and slaughter billions of animals” (Upside landing page). The phrase is noteworthy because it gives chickens an imagined preference. It makes the ethical contrast vivid, almost humorous, while remaining easy to understand. Hence,

across these brands, cultivated meat is framed not only as food but as a platform for redesigning meat systems.

6 Evaluative Adjectives: Taste-First and Conscience-First Patterns

In order to study how these products are evaluated, a more focused analysis was carried out on adjectives that express evaluation. This analysis seems to support the broader contrast between plant-based normalization and cultivated legitimization. In both subcorpora, adjectives help attach value to meat and meat products. However, the adjective families differ. Plant-based meat relies more heavily on sensory-hedonic adjectives that activate appetite. Cultivated meat uses more ethical and assurance adjectives that activate conscience and trust, although sensory adjectives remain present. Tables 5 and 6 summarize the ten most frequent evaluative adjectives in the two subcorpora.

Table 5 Top 10 evaluative adjectives referring to plant-based meat

Rank	Evaluative adjective	Raw frequency	Normalized per 10,000
1	spicy	23	1.00
2	new	19	0.82
3	delicious	16	0.69
4	juicy	9	0.39
5	tasty	6	0.26
6	meaty	6	0.26
7	innovative	5	0.22
8	savory	4	0.17
9	nutritious	3	0.13
10	best	3	0.13

Table 6 Top 10 evaluative adjectives referring to cultivated meat

Rank	Evaluative adjective	Raw frequency	Normalized per 10,000
1	good	96	5.98
2	ethical	13	0.81
3	delicious	11	0.69
4	cruelty-free	9	0.56
5	sustainable	8	0.50
6	slaughter-free	7	0.44
7	better	5	0.31

Rank	Evaluative adjective	Raw frequency	Normalized per 10,000
8	best	5	0.31
9	new	4	0.25
10	savory	2	0.12

In the plant-based subcorpus, the most frequent adjectives include “spicy”, “delicious”, “juicy”, “tasty”, “meaty”, and “savory”. These adjectives are strongly sensory. They describe taste, texture, flavor intensity, and meat-like satisfaction. Beyond Meat’s blog, for instance, describes the Beyond Burger Jalapeno as “tasty, juicy, plant-based meat, with a slow-burning spicy kick” (Beyond Meat blog). The same brand states that a burger has “all the juicy, meaty deliciousness of a traditional burger” (Beyond Meat blog). Another example invites consumers who “crave a tasty new burger” (Beyond Meat blog). These phrases show the appetite-first structure of plant-based discourse. The product is made morally acceptable partly because it remains sensorially exciting.

The adjective “new” also appears frequently in the plant-based list, but it does not replace the sensory core. On the contrary, novelty supports appetite. New products are presented as “new flavors, new formats, new restaurant offerings”, or “new ways” to enjoy familiar dishes. Similarly, “innovative” appears, but it is not as central as “delicious” or “juicy”. “Nutritious” is present but relatively low. This suggests that plant-based products in this corpus are not marketed primarily as medical or dietary objects. They are marketed as pleasurable foods with health and sustainability benefits attached.

In the cultivated subcorpus, “good” is the most frequent evaluative adjective. It should be interpreted carefully because it may include generic positivity as well as uses connected to the GOOD Meat brand name. More revealing are adjectives such as “ethical”, “cruelty-free”, “sustainable”, “slaughter-free”, and “better”. These items directly construct cultivated meat as a responsible choice. Believer uses phrases such as “access to healthy, delicious meat, buying cruelty-free meat, and enjoy slaughter-free meat” (Believer careers page, Believer blog). Here, taste is present, but ethical assurance is more prominent than in the plant-based adjective list.

The cultivated-meat list also contains “delicious” and “savory”, which shows that cultivated marketing cannot ignore appetite. In other words, the product still has to be desirable as food. However, in many examples, sensory adjectives are embedded within an assurance frame. BlueNalu says its seafood has the “same sensory qualities and nutritional value” as traditional seafood, while also being safe, consistent, and supportive of ocean health (BlueNalu our seafood page). Upside describes cultivated meat as “flavorful, tasty, tempting” and then immediately links it to a controlled environment

and the absence of slaughter (Upside landing page). The pattern is therefore conscience-first, but not pleasure-free.

What emerges from this analysis of the construction of evaluation through adjectives is central to the paper's argument. Plant-based discourse seems to describe taste in order to make ethical substitution feel easy. Cultivated discourse, instead, defines conscience in order to make technological novelty feel safe and desirable. Both product categories sell enjoyment, but they support enjoyment with different adjective families. Plant-based meat says, in effect, that this tastes like what you already love, and it is better for you as well as for the planet. Cultivated meat says, in effect, this is real meat made in a safer and kinder way, and it can still be delicious.

7 Discussion

As emerging from the analysis, the main similarity between plant-based and cultivated meat discourse is that both promise no-compromise enjoyment. Neither subcorpus frames ethical consumption as abstinence. Instead, both treat pleasure as necessary for ethical change. Consumers are repeatedly told that they can continue to enjoy familiar foods while reducing harm, improving health, supporting sustainability, or participating in the future of food. This is why guilt-free indulgence is an appropriate label for the broader discourse.

The main difference lies in the way guilt-free indulgence is built. Plant-based meat normalizes itself by mirroring meat. Its discourse is chiefly grounded in brands that become product categories, familiar formats such as burger and hot dog, sensory adjectives like “juicy” and “tasty”, and lifestyle references to mainstream chains and younger consumers. Its ethics are often ambient rather than confrontational. Words and multi-word expressions such as “plants, natural, earth-friendly, positive choice”, and “balanced lifestyle” imply responsibility without always placing slaughter or animal suffering at the center. The moral appeal is softened through everyday consumer language.

Cultivated meat legitimizes itself by explaining and governing novelty. Its discourse is grounded in cells, bioreactors, controlled environments, regulatory approval, food safety, and explicit animal-welfare contrast. It is more likely to name “slaughter”, “cruelty”, and “conventionally farmed meat” as problems. It is also more likely to speak in a voice that addresses institutions as well as consumers. This makes sense because cultivated meat is more technically unfamiliar and, in many markets, still emerging through regulatory and investment processes. Its marketing must therefore reassure consumers that the product is real, safe, controlled, and ethically superior.

Resorting to the concept of ethical luxury helps explain why these novel foods are often framed as upgrades rather than mere alternatives. Plant-based brands may use everyday formats, but they also claim better nutrition, cleaner ingredients, and alignment with modern lifestyles. Cultivated brands may use institutional language, but they also claim premium sensory value, especially in seafood and beef examples. For instance, think of BlueNalu's emphasis on "premium bluefin tuna toro, Mosa's Feel good indulgence", and Vow's "NO GUILT-TRIP", which all show that guilt-free indulgence can become a form of ethical luxury. The product is not only less bad, but it is better, smarter, more future-oriented, and sometimes more exclusive. These discourses also manage the construction of a consumer identity. The implied consumer is not necessarily vegan or fully committed to avoiding meat. In fact, many examples explicitly address meat lovers. Plant-based brands speak to people who enjoy burgers, chicken, and fast food. Cultivated brands speak to people who love meat but are troubled by the consequences of conventional production. This is important because the corpus does not primarily construct ethical consumption as conversion, but it constructs it as form of continuity that leads to an improvement. Hence, consumers can remain meat lovers while changing the material basis or production process of meat.

There is also a temporal dimension that surfaces. Plant-based meat is often framed as already mainstream: it appears in menus, chains, recipes, and familiar retail contexts. Cultivated meat is often framed as the future arriving, as it is associated with regulatory pathways, scaling, first approvals, scientific milestones, and future food systems. This difference helps understand and explain the tone of each subcorpus. Plant-based language is more immediate and consumer-facing. By contrast, cultivated-meat language is more anticipatory and institutional. However, both point toward a future in which ethical responsibility is supposed to become easier, tastier, and more convenient.

Therefore, the concept of guilt-free indulgence should not indicate that guilt disappears entirely. Rather, guilt remains as the background condition that gives the marketing its force. References to slaughter, forests, contamination, antibiotics, land use, ocean depletion, and animal welfare remind consumers why meat consumption is morally charged. The brands then offer a way to continue consuming meat-like or meat-identical products without carrying the same burden. In this sense, the discourse does not reject guilt, but it separates relief from guilt.

8 Conclusion

The analysis presented in this paper shows that both product categories combine pleasure and responsibility, but they do so through different linguistic strategies. Plant-based meat promotes the familiar as virtuous and tasty. It uses brand saturation, meat-format naming, sensory adjectives, nutritional claims, naturalness, and mainstream lifestyle references to make plant-based substitution appear easy and enjoyable. Cultivated meat promotes the new as safe and kinder. It uses technical vocabulary, regulatory and cleanliness discourse, explicit animal-welfare contrasts, and future-oriented corporate branding to make cellular production appear trustworthy and desirable.

The adjective analysis sharpens this contrast. Plant-based meat is more taste-first: spicy, delicious, juicy, tasty, meaty, and savory are central to its appeal. Cultivated meat is more conscience-first: ethical, cruelty-free, sustainable, slaughter-free, safe, and controlled are central, even though taste remains present. These patterns show that ‘guilt-free indulgence’ is not a single discourse but a flexible structure. It can be built through sensory familiarity supported by nature and health, or through ethical reassurance supported by science and safety.

The study also suggests several directions for future research. A multimodal analysis of brand webpages, for example, would show whether images, color palettes, typography, video, and layout reinforce the lexical patterns identified here. Comparative research could examine differences across national markets, especially where regulation and cultural attitudes toward meat vary. Diachronic work could also track whether cultivated meat discourse becomes more taste led as products become more commercially available. For now, the corpus shows that alternative protein marketing does not ask consumers to choose between morality and pleasure. It asks them to believe that the future of meat can be both pleasurable and morally improved.

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