

Exploring Consumer Sentiment Toward Dairy Milk and Plant-Based Alternatives in the United States

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BACKGROUND

- Dairy contributes roughly \$780 billion annually to the U.S. economy (International Dairy Foods Association, 2025).
- Milk provides nutrients including calcium and vitamin D (Bailey et al., 2010; Haug et al., 2007).
- Consumer perceptions can inform communication and marketing.
- Emotional appraisal theory guided this study.

METHODS

Survey → Response cleaning → Analysis

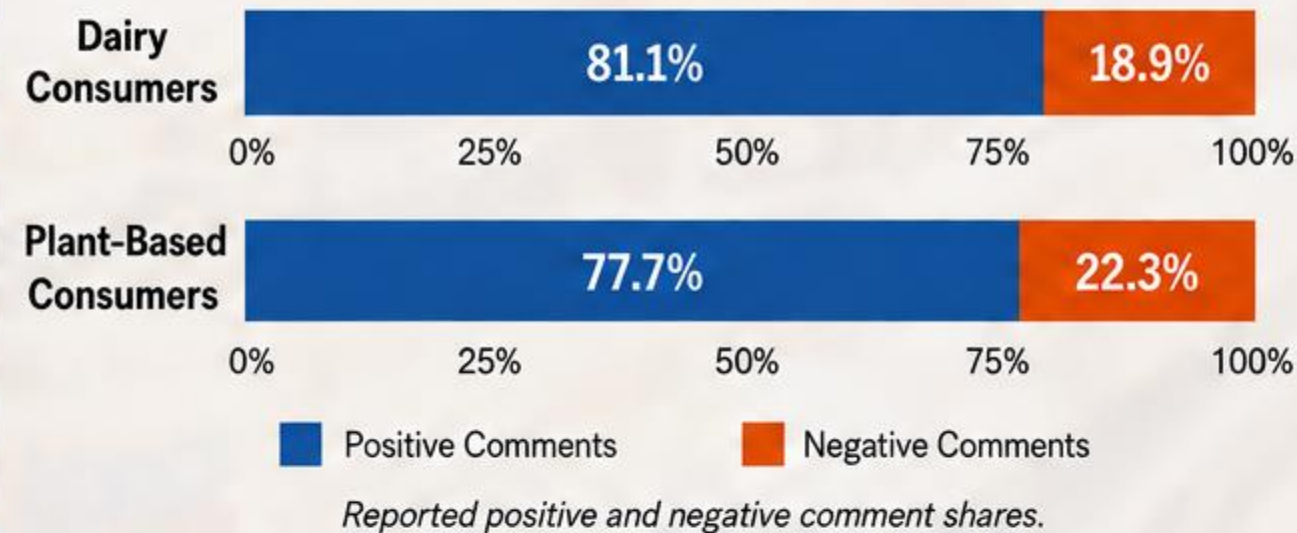
- Nationwide Qualtrics survey with an open-ended question about thoughts and experiences.
- Two samples: September 2025 and March 2026.
- Blank responses and survey-feedback comments excluded.
- Comments analyzed
602 dairy | 193 plant-based
- Sentiment: AFINN lexicon
- Emotions: NRC Emotion Lexicon
- Themes: Content analysis

RESEARCH QUESTION

What sentiments and emotions do U.S. consumers express about dairy milk and plant-based alternatives?

RESULTS

Positive sentiment predominated in both groups.



Dominant emotions

Trust • Joy • Anticipation

Anger, fear, disgust, and surprise were less common in both groups.



Positive themes

Taste • Health and nutrition • Availability • Familiarity • Social norms



Negative themes

Health-related risks • Animal welfare • Environmental consequences • Price

Health benefits appeared to be a major driver for dairy consumers.

IMPLICATIONS

- 01 Emphasize nutrition**
Prioritize health and nutritional benefits in dairy milk communication.
- 02 Address consumer concerns**
Consider messages addressing animal welfare, environmental impacts, and price, and evaluate their relevance for each audience.
- 03 Meet dietary needs**
Develop and communicate options for consumers with lactose intolerance, milk allergies, or other dietary requirements.



Dairy milk



Plant-based milk



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