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Purchase intention of pet foods enriched with *Saccharomyces Cerevisiae*: A behavioral analysis of pet owners

Intenção de compra de alimentos para pets enriquecidos com Saccharomyces Cerevisiae: Uma análise comportamental de tutores

Intención de compra de alimentos para mascotas enriquecidos con Saccharomyces Cerevisiae: Un análisis conductual de tutores

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ABSTRACT

Background: The growing concern with pet health and nutrition has driven the development of functional foods enriched with bioactive ingredients, such as *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*. Despite its recognized benefits, consumer acceptance, particularly among pet owners, remains contingent on behavioral and perceptual factors, which can be effectively examined through the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB).

Purpose: This study aims to examine pet owners' purchase intention toward pet food enriched with *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* and to analyze how attitudinal, social, and perceived behavioral control factors influence purchase intention and actual purchasing behavior.

Method: A quantitative approach was employed using a structured survey grounded in the TPB framework. Data were collected from a sample of 396 pet owners. The analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), allowing for the examination of relationships between latent constructs, including attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, purchase intention, and actual behavior.

Results: The findings revealed that subjective norms emerged as the strongest predictor of purchase intention, followed by attitudes and perceived behavioral control. Furthermore, purchase intention demonstrated a significant and positive effect on actual purchasing behavior. Pet owners who perceived greater social support and held favorable attitudes toward the functional benefits of *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* exhibited higher levels of intention to purchase enriched pet food products.

Conclusions: The study highlights the central role of social influence in shaping consumer decision-making in the context of functional pet foods. These results suggest that marketing strategies should prioritize educational and socially oriented communication efforts, reinforcing both the perceived benefits of the ingredient and the normative support surrounding its adoption.

Keywords: functional foods; management; marketing; social influence; pet foods.

RESUMO

Contextualização: A crescente preocupação com a saúde e a nutrição de animais de estimação tem impulsionado o desenvolvimento de alimentos funcionais enriquecidos com ingredientes bioativos, como *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*. Apesar de seus benefícios reconhecidos, a aceitação por parte dos consumidores, especialmente tutores de pets, depende de fatores comportamentais e perceptivos, os quais podem ser analisados à luz da Teoria do Comportamento Planejado (TPB).

Objetivo: Este estudo teve como objetivo avaliar a intenção de compra de tutores de animais de estimação em relação a alimentos enriquecidos com *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, bem como analisar a influência de atitudes, normas subjetivas e controle comportamental percebido sobre a intenção e o comportamento de compra.

Método: Adotou-se uma abordagem quantitativa, com coleta de dados por meio de um questionário estruturado baseado na TPB. A amostra foi composta por 396 tutores de pets. Para a análise dos dados, utilizou-se a Modelagem de Equações Estruturais por Mínimos Quadrados Parciais (PLS-SEM), permitindo a avaliação das relações entre construtos latentes.

Resultados: Os resultados indicaram que as normas subjetivas constituem o principal preditor da intenção de compra, seguidas pelas atitudes e pelo controle comportamental percebido. Ademais, a intenção de compra demonstrou exercer influência significativa e positiva sobre o comportamento real de compra. Observou-se que tutores que percebem maior apoio social e apresentam atitudes favoráveis em relação aos benefícios do ingrediente tendem a manifestar maior intenção de aquisição.

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Conclusões: O estudo evidencia o papel central da influência social na formação das decisões de consumo no contexto de alimentos funcionais para pets. Tais achados sugerem que estratégias de marketing devem priorizar ações educativas e comunicacionais que reforcem tanto os benefícios percebidos do ingrediente quanto o suporte social associado à sua adoção.

Palavras-chave: alimentos funcionais; gestão; marketing; influência social; alimentos para animais de estimação.

RESUMEN

Contextualización: La creciente preocupación por la salud y la nutrición de las mascotas ha impulsado el desarrollo de alimentos funcionales enriquecidos con ingredientes bioactivos, como *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*. A pesar de sus beneficios reconocidos, la aceptación por parte de los consumidores, especialmente los dueños de mascotas, depende de factores conductuales y perceptivos, los cuales pueden analizarse a partir de la Teoría del Comportamiento Planificado (TPB).

Objetivo: Este estudio tuvo como objetivo evaluar la intención de compra de los dueños de mascotas respecto a alimentos enriquecidos con *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, así como analizar la influencia de las actitudes, normas subjetivas y el control conductual percibido sobre la intención y el comportamiento de compra.

Método: Se adoptó un enfoque cuantitativo mediante la recolección de datos a través de un cuestionario estructurado basado en la TPB. La muestra estuvo compuesta por 396 dueños de mascotas. El análisis de los datos se realizó mediante Modelado de Ecuaciones Estructurales por Mínimos Cuadrados Parciales (PLS-SEM), permitiendo evaluar las relaciones entre los constructos latentes.

Resultados: Los resultados indicaron que las normas subjetivas son el principal predictor de la intención de compra, seguidas por las actitudes y el control conductual percibido. Además, la intención de compra mostró una influencia significativa y positiva sobre el comportamiento real de compra. Se observó que los individuos que perciben mayor apoyo social y presentan actitudes favorables hacia los beneficios del ingrediente tienden a mostrar una mayor intención de compra.

Conclusiones: El estudio destaca el papel central de la influencia social en la toma de decisiones de consumo en el contexto de alimentos funcionales para mascotas. Estos hallazgos sugieren que las estrategias de marketing deben priorizar acciones educativas y comunicacionales que refuercen tanto los beneficios percibidos del ingrediente como el apoyo social asociado a su adopción.

Palabras clave: alimentos funcionales; gestión; marketing; influencia social; alimentos para mascotas.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, dogs and cats have increasingly become significant presences in households, assuming roles as true family members (McConnell et al., 2019; Linne & Angilletta, 2023). This cultural shift has driven the growth of the pet sector on a global scale. According to the Alltech Agri-Food Outlook (2024), the pet market continues to expand, with Latin America and North America serving as significant growth regions.

In 2025, the global pet market reached approximately USD 181.91 billion and is projected to grow to USD 283.67 billion by 2033, with a compound annual growth rate of 5.9% between 2026 and 2033. The continuous expansion of this market has been associated with increasing pet ownership, the humanization of pets, and the growing demand for premium products and specialized nutrition. Additionally, the food segment has been identified as one of the fastest growing categories within the industry, driven by rising consumer concerns regarding pet health, balanced diets, ingredient quality, and functional nutritional benefits. These trends demonstrate the increasing relevance of innovation and health-oriented formulations in the global pet food industry (Grand View Research Inc., 2026).

In the Brazilian context, sales of food for dogs and cats align with this upward trend. According to the Brazilian Association of the Pet Products Industry (ABINPET, 2024), Brazil remains one of the leading markets in the global pet industry, consolidating its position among the largest pet care markets worldwide. In 2024, the Brazilian pet sector generated approximately R\$75.4 billion in revenue, representing a growth of 9.6% compared to previous year (2023). Among the market segments, pet food remained the most representative category, accounting for approximately R\$40.8 billion, equivalent to 54.1% of total sector revenue.

Given these data, it becomes evident that the pursuit of quality and innovation in the pet nutrition market is constantly evolving. Nutrition has transcended its traditional role of merely providing sustenance; there is now an increasing focus on understanding how each nutrient influences the functioning and development of pets (Swanson et al., 2013; Gizzarelli et al., 2021; Kazimierska et al., 2021; Prata, 2022). Within this scenario, functional ingredients have emerged, going beyond basic nutrition to contribute to strengthening the immune system, improving food palatability, and positively modulating intestinal microbiota (Maturana et al., 2023).

Among these ingredients, yeast stands out for its multiple benefits. Yeast-based or yeast-derived products have gained increasing relevance in the pet market (Wilson et al., 2022; Davenport et al., 2023; Maturana et al., 2023; Cui et al., 2024). While there are hundreds of yeast species, the most used in the food industry is *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* (Maturana et al., 2023). This yeast is typically obtained through fermentation processes in ethanol production, brewing, and baking.

The use of *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* in animal nutrition has been associated with numerous benefits. Studies indicate that the inclusion of yeast in diets can enhance nutrient digestibility, promote intestinal microbiota balance, and strengthen the immune system in animals (Wilson et al., 2022; Davenport et al., 2023; Maturana et al., 2023; Cui et al., 2024). Additionally, the presence of mannan-oligosaccharides (MOS) and β -glucans in yeast cell walls contributes to pathogen adsorption and stimulation of the body's defense cells (Cui et al., 2024).

However, despite the growing relevance of functional ingredients in the pet food industry and the recognized nutritional and health benefits associated with yeast supplementation, particularly *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, there is still a limited number of studies investigating consumers' perceptions and purchase intentions toward pet foods enriched with this ingredient. Most existing studies have primarily focused on the physiological and nutritional effects of yeast in animal diets (Oliveira-Matheus et al., 2021; Ishii et al., 2025; Xu et al., 2025), emphasizing aspects such as intestinal health, immune modulation, nutrient digestibility, and overall animal performance, while consumer behavioral aspects remain underexplored. Therefore, a significant research gap persists regarding how consumers perceive the incorporation of *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* in pet food formulations and how these perceptions may influence purchase intention and consumption behavior.

Considering the growing demand for products that promote pet health and well-being, investigating the potential of *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* in pet food represents a relevant scientific and market opportunity, particularly due to the limited understanding of consumers' perceptions and purchase intentions toward functional ingredients in the pet food sector. From a market perspective, it is believed that many consumers, often referred to as "pet parents" or guardians, still have limited knowledge regarding the benefits associated with the incorporation *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* yeast in pet nutrition. This lack of awareness may negatively affect consumer acceptance, purchase intention, and the effective commercialization of these products, even when scientifically supported health benefits are presented. Thus, understanding the behavioral factors that influence consumers' intention to purchase pet food enriched with may contribute to advancing the literature on consumer behavior in the pet food sector and to support marketing strategies, product positioning, and communication practices.

In this context, the present study aims to examine pet owners' purchase intention toward pet food enriched with *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* and to analyze how attitudinal, social, and perceived behavioral control factors influence both purchase intention and actual purchasing behavior.

2 THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOR (TPB) AND THE *SACCHAROMYCES CEREVISAE*

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), proposed by Ajzen (1991), is widely used to understand and predict human behaviors across several fields, including consumer behavior. The theory emerged as an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), originally developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), with the purpose of overcoming some limitations associated with behaviors that are not entirely under an individual's volitional control. While the TRA assumes that behavior is primarily determined primarily by behavioral intention, which is influenced by attitudes and subjective norms, the TPD expands this framework by incorporating the construct of perceived behavioral control, allowing the model to better explain behaviors influenced by external constraints, resources, abilities, and opportunities. In this sense, TPB emphasizes that behavioral intention is influenced by three main components: attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Figure 1).

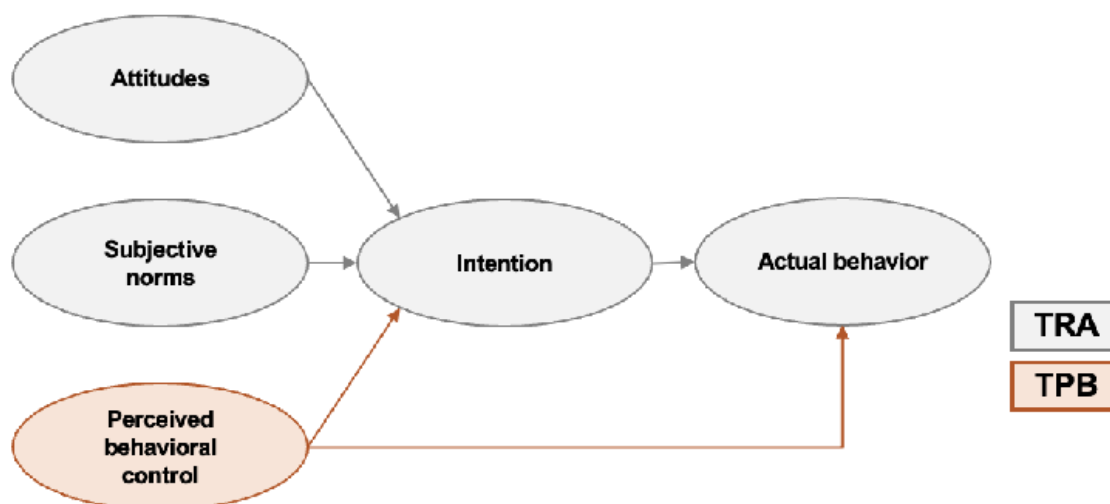


Figure 1. Theory of Reasoned Action and Theory of Planned Behavior.
Source: developed by the authors.

According to Esfandiar and Hadinejad (2025), the TPB remains one of the most influential theoretical frameworks for explaining and predicting human behavior, particularly in consumer research. Recent studies continue to validate its robustness across diverse contexts, including food consumption (Shetu, 2024; Sui et al., 2024; Fauzi et al., 2025), sustainability (Holdsworth et al., 2019; Pai et al., 2024; Qi et al., 2025), tourism (Ozel & Çoban, 2023; Araújo et al., 2025; Faustino-Dias et al., 2025), and health-related behaviours (Peters & Templin, 2010; McEachan et al., 2011; Nor et al., 2025), reinforcing its central proposition that behavioral intention is the most immediate antecedent of action (Ajzen, 1991). Despite the emergence of alternative models, TPB retains strong explanatory power due to its parsimonious yet comprehensive structure.

Contemporary applications of TPB emphasize its adaptability to complex consumption environments characterized by uncertainty, information asymmetry, and evolving consumer expectations. In such contexts, particularly those involving functional foods, consumers often rely on cognitive heuristics and external cues to form intentions, making TPB especially relevant (Baker et al., 2022; Ponte et al., 2025).

The pet food market represents a unique consumption domain where emotional attachment, responsibility, and perceived risk converge (Ai et al., 2025). Functional pet foods enriched with ingredients such as *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* are typically classified as credence goods, meaning their benefits cannot be directly verified by consumers at the time of purchase (Que et al., 2024).

Recent literature also highlights that TPB is particularly effective in explaining behaviors that involve a degree of planning and deliberation, as is the case with pet care decisions (Pedrinelli et al., 2024; Ai et al., 2025). Unlike impulse purchases, selecting pet food often involves evaluation of nutritional benefits, price considerations, and recommendations from trusted sources (Pedrinelli et al., 2024; Ai et al., 2025; Rombach & Dean, 2026).

Moreover, the model's three antecedents, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, have been consistently shown to interact in shaping intention formation (Pedrinelli et al., 2024). Ajzen (1991) argues that these constructs may vary in relative importance depending on the context, with social influence and perceived control becoming more prominent in situations of uncertainty or novelty.

Furthermore, the interaction among these dimensions reinforces the multidimensional nature of behavioral intention, particularly in contexts involving innovative or functional products, in which consumers tend to evaluate not only perceived benefits of the product itself but also social approval and their own ability to perform the behavior (Pedrinelli et al., 2024; Ai

et al., 2025; Rombach & Dean, 2026). According to Ajzen (1991), behavioral decisions are rarely influenced by a single factor, as attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control jointly contribute to intention formation.

Among these dimensions, attitudes play a central role in shaping consumer's evaluations of given behavior. In this perspective, attitudes refer to the positive or negative evaluations that consumers hold regarding a particular behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Studies show that when consumers perceive clear benefits in a product, such as health improvements for pets resulting from the addition of functional ingredients, their attitudes tend to be more favorable, thereby increasing purchase intention (Pedrinelli et al., 2024). In the context of functional pet food products, these evaluations may be directly influenced by consumers' perceptions regarding the nutritional and physiological benefits associated with specific ingredients.

The yeast *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* is widely recognized for its functional properties, particularly its role in enhancing immune response and promoting intestinal health in companion animals (Wilson et al., 2022; Davenport et al., 2023; Maturana et al., 2023; Cui et al., 2024). These physiological benefits position the ingredient as a value-adding component in pet nutrition, especially within the growing segment of functional foods. From a consumer behavior perspective, such attributes contribute to the formation of positive beliefs regarding product efficacy, which are central to attitudinal development.

However, the translation of these scientifically established benefits into favorable consumer attitudes is not automatic. Prior research indicates that when consumers lack awareness or understanding of functional ingredients, they may exhibit ambivalence or even skepticism toward the product, particularly in contexts involving credence attributes (Baker et al., 2022).

Additionally, recent studies emphasize that informational interventions, including educational marketing and transparent communication, significantly enhance consumers' perceived value and trust in functional foods, thereby strengthening positive attitudes and subsequent behavioral intentions (Pedrinelli et al., 2024; Ai et al., 2025; Rombach & Dean, 2026). In this sense, knowledge dissemination acts as a catalyst that transforms latent product benefits into salient evaluative criteria in the consumer decision-making process. Thus, grounded in the theoretical assumptions of the TPB and supported by recent empirical evidence, it is proposed that:

- H₁: Attitudes toward the addition of *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* in pet food positively influence purchase intention.

As previously discussed, subjective norms are considered important predictors of purchase intention within the TPB framework, since individuals often consider the expectations, opinions, and recommendations of relevant social groups when making consumption decision (Vinassa et al., 2020; Prata, 2022; Pedrinelli et al., 2024; Faustino-Dias et al., 2025). For Ajzen (1991), subjective norms refer to an individual's perception of social approval or disapproval regarding a particular behavior. This social influence tends to become even more pronounced in contexts involving products associated with health, well-being, and functional benefits, where consumers may seek validation from experts, family members, friends, and communities before engaging in purchasing behavior. In the pet market, factors such as veterinarians' recommendations, opinions from family and friends, and trends within pet-owner communities can significantly influence consumers' purchasing decisions (Vinassa et al., 2020; Prata, 2022).

Research has shown that when pet owners perceive that important individuals within their social circles support or approve the use of food enriched with functional ingredients, they become more likely to adopt these products themselves (Pedrinelli et al., 2024). Consequently, subjective norms may function as an additional motivational factor driving the purchase of pet food containing *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, especially when positive perceptions regarding the ingredient are reinforced within consumers' social networks. Based on this rationale, H₂ is proposed.

- H₂: Subjective norms positively influence purchase intention.

In addition to attitudinal and social influences, the TPB also highlight the relevance of individuals' perceived capacity to perform a given behavior. In consumption contexts, even favorable attitudes and positive social support may not necessarily result in behavioral intention if consumers perceive barriers related to resources, access, or knowledge. Therefore, perceived behavioral control (PBC) emerges as another important determinant of purchase intention, particularly in markets involving innovative or specialized products such as functional pet foods.

Finally, Ajzen (1991) posits that PBC refers to an individual's perception of the ease or difficulty associated with performing a given behavior. This construct reflects not only the availability of resources but also the individual's perceived ability to mobilize such resources, aligning closely with the concept of self-efficacy originally proposed by Bandura (1978). In consumer contexts, PBC becomes particularly relevant.

As mentioned for Armitage and Conner (2001), factors such as product availability, affordability, and consumer knowledge play a central role in shaping perceived control. In the pet food market, structural aspects, such as distribution channels and product visibility, interact with individual-level factors, including familiarity with ingredients and confidence in

evaluating nutritional claims (Schleicher et al., 2019; Prata, 2022). This interaction suggests that PBC is not merely an internal perception but a reflection of how consumers interpret market conditions and their own capabilities within those conditions.

For instance, when pet owners perceive that foods enriched with *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* are readily available and economically accessible, their PBC tends to increase, thereby strengthening both their purchase intention and actual behavior (Armitage & Conner, 2001; Pedrinelli et al., 2024). Conversely, perceived barriers, such as higher prices or limited availability, may reduce the sense of control, even when attitudes and social influences are favorable. This highlights the importance of reducing structural and informational constraints to facilitate behavioral adoption.

Moreover, access to clear, reliable, and transparent information about product benefits plays a crucial role in enhancing perceived control. When consumers feel adequately informed, uncertainty is reduced, and decision-making becomes more manageable (Verbeke, 2005; Sabio & Spers, 2022). In this sense, informational clarity functions as a mechanism that transforms external complexity into perceived feasibility, reinforcing consumers' confidence in their ability to perform the intended behavior.

In line with the TPB, PBC is therefore expected to act as a key determinant of purchase intention and actual behavior, particularly in contexts involving functional and credence-based products. Considering this, it is proposed that:

- H3: Perceived behavioral control regarding the purchase of pet food containing *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* positively influences purchase intention.
- H4: Perceived behavioral control regarding the purchase of pet food containing *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* positively influences actual purchasing intention.

Taken together, these hypothesis reinforce the assumption that consumers' perceptions of capability, access, and knowledge may influence not Only their motivational disposition toward purchasing functional pet food products but also the effective execution of purchasing behavior itself.

Beyond intention formation, the TPB also posits that behavioral intention serves as the most immediate antecedent of actual behavior (Ajzen, 1991). This relationship has been supported in the literature, although its strength may vary depending on contextual and situational factors (Sheeran, 2002; Pedrinelli et al., 2024). In the pet food context, purchasing decisions tend to be relatively planned and recurrent, which strengthens the predictive power of intention over behavior.

However, the literature also highlights the existence of an intention–behavior gap, whereby favorable intentions do not always translate into actual behavior due to unforeseen barriers or competing priorities (Ajzen, 1991; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006). In the case of functional pet foods, such gaps may arise from price sensitivity, limited availability, or habitual purchasing patterns. Nevertheless, when perceived behavioral control is high and external constraints are minimized, the likelihood of intention being converted into action increases significantly (Sniehotta et al., 2005).

Furthermore, empirical evidence in consumer behavior suggests that when intention is supported by favorable attitudes and social endorsement, its effect on behavior becomes more robust and consistent (Paul et al., 2016; Pedrinelli et al., 2024). In the context of pet ownership, where emotional attachment and responsibility are salient (McConnell et al., 2019), this relationship may be even stronger, as decisions are often guided by long-term considerations of animal well-being. Therefore, considering the theoretical assumptions of TPB and empirical evidence in consumer behavior, it is proposed that:

- H5: Purchase intention for pet food containing *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* positively influences actual purchasing behavior.

To synthesize the theoretical relationships proposed in this study, a conceptual model was developed (Figure 2).

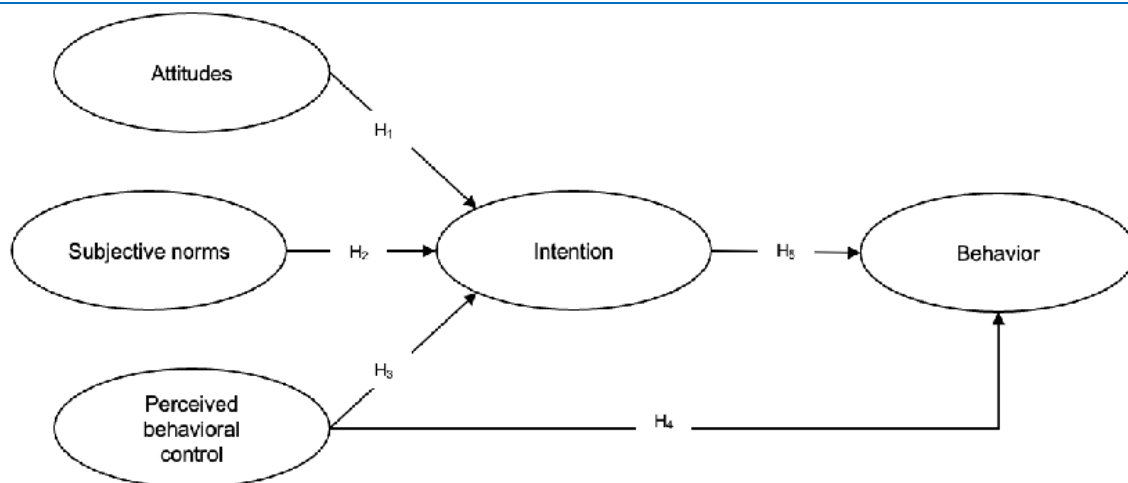


Figure 2. Conceptual model.
Source: developed by the authors.

The model integrates the core TPB constructs as direct antecedents of purchase intention, which, in turn, influences actual purchasing behavior regarding pet food enriched with *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*. Additionally, perceived behavioral control was also proposed as a direct predictor of actual purchasing behavior, considering that consumers' perceptions of access, knowledge, and capability may influence not only intention formation but also the effective execution of purchasing decisions.

Finally, purchase intention was hypothesized to positively influence actual purchasing behavior, reinforcing the TPB assumption that intention represents the most immediate antecedent of behavior. Thus, the conceptual model illustrates the set of theoretical relationships established to explain consumers' behavioral responses toward functional pet food products.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative approach to investigate the purchase intention of pet owners regarding foods enriched with the yeast *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*. The choice of the quantitative method allowed for the objective measurement of variables and the application of statistical techniques to analyze the proposed relationships (Creswell & Creswell, 2021).

Data collection was conducted through structured questionnaires developed based on the methodological guidelines proposed by Ajzen (1991) for the construction of scales aimed at measuring behavioral intention. In addition, the measurement scale originally employed by Pedrinelli et al. (2024) to assess the consumer's purchase intention toward pet foods containing added preservatives was applied to the context of this study, specifically focusing on the purchase intention of pet foods enriched with *Saccharomyces Cerevisiae*. The questionnaire was divided into two main sections. The first section aimed to gather the sociodemographic profile of the participants, including information such as age, gender, education level, income, and details about pet ownership. In cases where the participant had more than one pet, it was advised that for the responses, they consider only one. The second section consisted of measurement scales that evaluated the theoretical constructs of interest: attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, purchase intention, and actual behavior (Table 1).

The questions were presented on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5), as recommended by Likert (1932) to capture nuances in respondents' perceptions. This scale is widely used in consumer behavior research, allowing for the quantification of individuals' attitudes and intentions (Malhotra, 2019).

The data collection took place from June to September 2024, using the Google Forms platform to reach a broader and more diverse audience. The questionnaires were distributed through social media, emails, and specific groups of pet owners. It is important to note that the study was not submitted to the Ethics Committee, as it falls under Exception I of Resolution 510 (National Health Council, 2016).

The sample consisted of 396 dog and cat owners residing in Brazil. The inclusion criteria were being over 18 years old and being directly responsible for the care and feeding of the pet. A non-probabilistic convenience sampling was chosen, given the ease of access to participants through digital means and the exploratory nature of the study (Hair et al., 2009). Furthermore, the sample size was based on the recommendation by Hair et al. (2009), where ideally the sample should be 15 times the number of variables, with at least 285 participants recommended for this study.

For data analysis, the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique was used. This technique is suitable for research involving multiple latent variables and indicators, particularly in exploratory and predictive

contexts (Hair et al., 2021). According to the authors, PLS-SEM allows for the simultaneous assessment of relationships between observable and latent variables and does not require strict assumptions about data distribution.

Table 1

Constructs and measurement items

Constructs / Source	Code	Measurement item
Attitudes (Pedrinelli et al., 2024)	ATT1	I believe that buying food with yeast will be good for my pet.
	ATT2	I believe that buying food with yeast is necessary for my pet's health.
	ATT3	I believe that if my pet eats food with yeast in its composition, it will get sick.
	ATT4	I do not buy food with yeast for my pet because it is not healthy.
	ATT5	I trust pet food manufacturers.
	ATT6	I can trust products with yeast in their composition.
	ATT7	I believe the information stated on my pet's food label.
	ATT8	I consider myself a person concerned with my pet's nutrition.
Subjective norms (Pedrinelli et al., 2024)	SN1	I know people who would like me to buy food with yeast for my pet.
	SN2	My veterinarian believes I should buy food with yeast for my pet.
	SN3	My family members believe I should buy food with yeast for my pet.
	SN4	I feel that I should buy food with yeast for my pet.
Perceived behavioral control (Pedrinelli et al., 2024)	PBC1	I have the financial resources to buy food with yeast for my pet.
	PBC2	I can buy food with yeast for my pet.
	PBC3	I have the knowledge to buy food with yeast for my pet.
Intention (Ajzen, 1991)	INT1	I think about buying food with yeast for my pet.
	INT2	I will buy food with yeast for my pet.
Behavior (Ajzen, 1991)	BEH1	I frequently buy food with yeast for my pet.
	BEH2	I buy and have bought food with yeast for my pet.

Source: developed by the authors.

The analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 4 software, which is widely recognized for its efficiency in performing PLS-SEM analyses (Chua, 2024). Following the recommendations of Hair et al. (2021), the measurement model was evaluated using various criteria. First, the factor loadings of the indicators were assessed, with values above 0.70 being desirable. Hair et al. (2021) emphasize that factor loadings exceeding this value threshold indicate that the latent variable explains more than 50% of the variance of the indicator, thereby ensuring item reliability. Nevertheless, the authors also note that loadings between 0.60 and 0.69 may be considered acceptable in exploratory research contexts.

The reliability of the scales was assessed through Cronbach's Alpha, rho_A, and composite reliability, with expected values greater than 0.70 (Hair et al., 2021). These indices measure the internal consistency of the constructs, ensuring that the items within each scale are appropriately correlated. Convergent validity was verified through the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which should be greater than 0.50, indicating that the latent variable explains, on average, more than 50% of the variance of its indicators, confirming that the items converge to measure the same construct (Hair et al., 2021).

To ensure discriminant validity, the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the HTMT index were used. According to the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the square root of the AVE of each latent variable should be higher than the correlations with other latent variables, indicating that the constructs are distinct from each other (Hair et al., 2021). The HTMT index should present values lower than 0.90, reinforcing the distinction between constructs (Hair et al., 2021).

Multicollinearity among the indicators was assessed using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), with values below 3 being desirable. Values above this threshold may indicate multicollinearity issues that could distort coefficient estimates (Hair et al., 2021).

The homoscedasticity test was not performed because PLS-SEM is a variance-based approach considered robust to violations of distributional assumptions, including non-normality and heteroscedasticity. Furthermore, the bootstrapping procedure adopted in SmartPLS contributes to the robustness and stability of the parameter estimates, reducing the potential impact of heteroscedasticity on the results (Hair et al., 2021).

After validating the measurement model, the structural model was assessed using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples. Path coefficients, which indicate the strength and direction of the relationships between latent variables, were analyzed, along with their corresponding p-values to determine the statistical significance of these relationships. Additionally, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was examined to measure the amount of variance explained in the dependent variable by the independent variables, providing insights into the model's predictive power.

4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.1 General characteristics of the respondents (pet owners) and the pets (animals)

To understand the profile of the participants in this study (Table 2) and their pets (Table 3), an analysis of the general characteristics of the pet owners and their pets was conducted. The sample consisted of 396 pet owners. Regarding the gender of the participants, a predominance of females was observed, with 65% (256) of the responses coming from women,

while men represented 35% (140). This distribution suggests greater female involvement in pet care and decision-making related to pets.

Table 2

General characteristic of the respondents (pet owners)

Gender	n	%
Male	140	35
Female	256	65
Age group		
18 – 24 years	102	26
25 – 34 years	102	26
35 – 44 years	74	18
45 years or older	118	30
Education level		
Incomplete High school	2	1
Completed High school	34	9
Incomplete Higher education	96	24
Completed Higher education	50	13
Incomplete Postgraduate education	22	5
Completed Postgraduate education	192	48
Income range ⁽¹⁾		
Up to R\$5,000	88	22
From R\$5,001 to R\$12,000	124	31
More than R\$12,000	134	34
Prefer not to disclose	50	13
Type of residence		
Apartment	156	39
House	236	60
Studio	4	1

Source: developed by the authors.

Note: n = 396; ⁽¹⁾ The income categories correspond approximately to the following values in U.S dollars: up to USD 900, between USD 900 and USD 2,150, and above USD 2,150.

Concerning age groups, the distribution of pet owners was relatively balanced. Both the 18–24 age group and the 25–34 age group each represented 26% (102) of the total participants. Pet owners aged between 35 and 44 years accounted for 18% (74), while those aged 45 years or older constituted 30% (118) of the sample. In terms of education level, most pet owners have a high level of education. Participants with a completed postgraduate degree represented 48% (192) of the sample, followed by those with incomplete higher education (24%, 96) and completed higher education (13%, 50). Only 5% (22) had incomplete postgraduate education, while 9% (34) had completed high school, and 1% (2) had incomplete high school.

Regarding income, 34% (134) of pet owners reported a monthly income above R\$12,000, while 31% (124) had an income between R\$5,001 and R\$12,000. Those earning up to R\$5,000 represented 22% (88) of the sample. Additionally, 13% (50) of participants chose not to disclose their income. In terms of housing type, most pet owners live in houses (60%, 236), while 39% (156) live in apartments, and 1% (4) live in studios.

After understanding the profile of the pet owners, an analysis of the characteristics of their pets was conducted, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

General characteristics of the pets

Number of Pets in the Household	n	%
Only one	184	46
Two or three	154	39
Four or more	58	15
Type of Pet		
Dog	240	61
Cat	156	39
Breed		
Proven breed	148	37
Mixed breed (No defined breed)	248	63
Gender		
Female	202	51
Male	194	49
Access in the Household		
Outdoor area	40	10
Some rooms	52	13
All rooms	304	77

Type of Food		
Natural food (vegetables, eggs etc.)	24	6
Raw diet (bones, dehydrated meat, etc.)	10	3
Wet food (pouches or cans)	18	5
Dry food (kibble)	344	86

Source: developed by the authors.

Note: n = 396.

Regarding the breed of the pets, 63% (248) are mixed breed, while 37% (148) have a defined breed. For this study, breed information was confirmed based on the pet owner's response, considering the accuracy of the data provided. Regarding the distribution of gender, 51% (202) of the pets are female and 49% (194) are male.

Regarding the pets' access within the household, most of the pets (77%, 304) have access to all rooms of the house, indicating full integration into the family routine, as noted by Linne and Angilletta (2024). Additionally, 13% (52) of the animals have access to some rooms, while 10% (40) are kept in the outdoor area.

In terms of the type of food offered to the pets, the majority (86%, 344) consume dry food, reflecting the preference for this type of food among pet owners. Six percent (24) opt for natural food, including vegetables, eggs, and other items; 5% (18) provide wet food, such as pouches or cans; and 3% (10) follow a raw diet consisting of bones and dehydrated meat.

Finally, participants were asked about their knowledge of the benefits of yeast, whether they typically read their pets' food labels, and if they would be interested in purchasing food with yeast in the future. The results are presented in Figure 3.

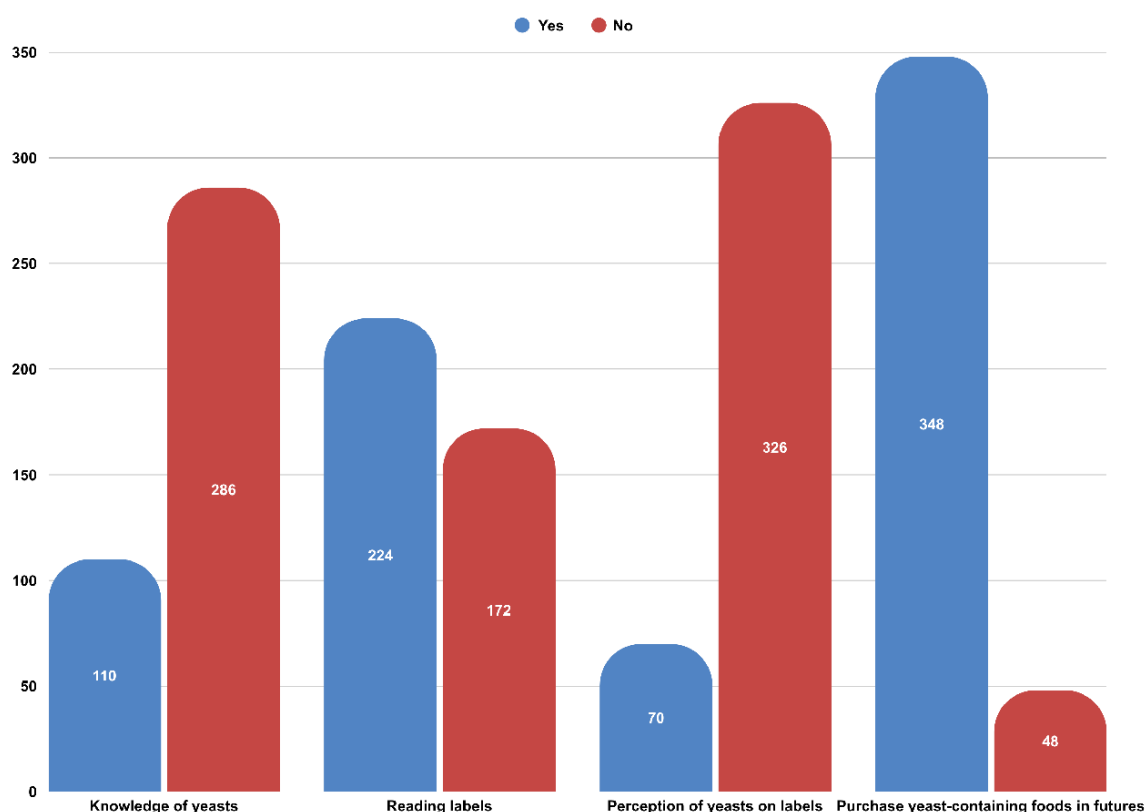


Figure 3. Behavior, knowledge, and perception of yeast in pet food.

Source: developed by the authors.

From Figure 3, it can be observed that a significant portion of the participants (286 pet owners) declared that they were unaware of the benefits of yeast in pet food, while 110 pet owners indicated familiarity with the topic. This lack of knowledge can be attributed to the insufficient availability of clear and accessible information on functional ingredients, such as yeast, which is widely acknowledged for its health benefits in animals (Schleicher et al., 2019).

According to Verbeke (2005), consumer education is crucial for the acceptance of new ingredients and for changing purchase behavior. Thus, the low level of knowledge about yeast among pet owners could be a barrier to its adoption, directly affecting the intention to purchase products containing this ingredient.

Regarding the behavior of reading labels, the figure shows that most pet owners (224) have the habit of reading the labels of their pets' food, while a smaller proportion (172 pet owners) indicated they do not follow this practice. Label reading is a common behavior among consumers who aim to improve the quality of their pet's food (Verbeke, 2005).

However, the awareness of yeast in food labels is low, with a minimal portion of pet owners reporting having noticed this ingredient (70). This suggests that, although pet owners read labels, many are not aware of the presence of yeast or do not understand its importance, as pointed out by Maturana et al. (2023).

On the other hand, when asked about their interest in purchasing food with yeast in the future, the response was significantly positive, with around 350 pet owners indicating they would consider making such a purchase. This data reflects a market potential for yeast-enriched products, provided that educational and marketing campaigns emphasize their benefits, supporting Kotler et al.'s (2023) conclusions about the importance of clearly communicating functional benefits to stimulate purchase intention.

4.2 Descriptive analysis

Initially, descriptive statistics were calculated for each of the statements used in the hypothesis testing and model construction (Table 4). Table 4 presents the indicators, statements, means, and standard deviations related to attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, purchase intention, and buying behavior concerning pet food with yeast in its composition.

Regarding the guardians' attitude toward yeast-based pet food, a relatively low mean was observed for statements ATT1 (3.34) and ATT2 (3.07), which reflect the belief that such food would be good or necessary for pets' health. This suggests a neutral or slightly positive attitude toward the use of yeast, supporting the notion that a lack of knowledge about the nutritional benefits may be influencing the acceptance of products containing this ingredient (Verbeke, 2005).

On the other hand, statements such as ATT3 (2.05) and ATT4 (1.94) exhibit low means, indicating that guardians disagree with the claims that yeast could harm or be unhealthy for their pets. These results suggest that although most guardians do not perceive yeast as harmful, they are still not fully convinced of its benefits.

The data regarding trust in products and manufacturers also yields important results. The mean of 3.25 for statements ATT5 and ATT6 suggests moderate trust in manufacturers and products containing yeast, while the mean of 3.70 for ATT7 indicates slightly higher trust in the information presented on the food labels. This aligns with previous research highlighting the importance of transparency and trust in brands for the formation of positive attitudes toward new food products (Sabio; Spers, 2022).

In analyzing subjective norms, it is evident that the social influence on the purchase of yeast-based food is relatively weak. The low means for statements SN1 (2.00), SN2 (2.05), and SN3 (1.84) indicate that guardians do not perceive significant social pressure from close individuals or animal health professionals to purchase these products. This result suggests that, in the context of purchasing pet food, social influences play a minor role, corroborating studies that indicate that, in the case of functional food purchases, individual perceptions of benefits tend to carry more weight than social norms (Paul et al., 2016).

Table 4

Indicators, statements, means ($\bar{x}$) and standard deviations (s)

Indicator	Statement	$\bar{x}$	s
ATT1	I believe that buying food with yeast will be good for my pet.	3.34	1.26
ATT2	I believe that buying food with yeast is necessary for my pet's health.	3.07	1.26
ATT3	I believe that if my pet eats food with yeast in its composition, it will get sick.	2.05	1.15
ATT4	I do not buy food with yeast for my pet because it is not healthy.	1.94	1.17
ATT5	I trust pet food manufacturers.	3.25	1.19
ATT6	I can trust products with yeast in their composition.	3.25	1.07
ATT7	I believe the information stated on my pet's food label.	3.70	1.14
ATT8	I consider myself a person concerned with my pet's nutrition.	4.14	1.11
SN1	I know people who would like me to buy food with yeast for my pet.	2.00	1.38
SN2	My veterinarian believes I should buy food with yeast for my pet.	2.05	1.24
SN3	My family members believe I should buy food with yeast for my pet.	1.84	1.20
SN4	I feel that I should buy food with yeast for my pet.	2.50	1.33
PBC1	I have the financial resources to buy food with yeast for my pet.	3.50	1.30
PBC2	I can buy food with yeast for my pet.	3.14	1.35
PBC3	I have the knowledge to buy food with yeast for my pet.	2.32	1.43
INT1	I think about buying food with yeast for my pet.	2.45	1.35
INT2	I will buy food with yeast for my pet.	2.43	1.26
BEH1	I frequently buy food with yeast for my pet.	2.00	1.31
BEH2	I buy and have bought food with yeast for my pet.	1.94	1.27

Source: developed by the authors.

Regarding perceived behavioral control, guardians seem to believe that they possess the financial resources to purchase yeast-based food (PBC1, 3.50), as well as the opportunity to purchase it (PBC2, 3.14). However, the lower mean for PBC3 (2.32) suggests that many guardians do not feel adequately informed about these products, which may be affecting their confidence in making a purchase. These data reflect the importance of informational campaigns to clarify the benefits of yeast, as suggested by Chinie et al. (2021) and Capitão et al. (2022).

As for purchase intention, the means for INT1 (2.45) and INT2 (2.43) indicate that, on average, guardians are undecided about purchasing yeast-based food in the future. This result is consistent with the reported buying behavior, with BEH1 (2.00) and BEH2 (1.94) showing low means, suggesting that few guardians have bought or frequently buy these products. These results reinforce the need for marketing strategies that increase the perceived value of these products for guardians, in accordance with the recommendations of Kotler et al. (2023), who advocate that clear communication about ingredient benefits can enhance purchase intention and effectiveness.

4.3 PLS-SEM analysis

After understanding the descriptive statistics of each statement, the PLS-SEM procedure was initiated. Initially, only indicators with factor loadings above 0.7 were considered acceptable, following the recommendations of Hair et al. (2021). However, given the exploratory nature of the study and considering the theoretical relevance of the indicators, items presenting factor loadings above 0.6 were subsequently retained in the model, as also suggested by Hair et al. (2021) for exploratory research contexts. Therefore, the indicators ATT3, ATT4, ATT5, ATT7, and ATT8 were excluded. Figure 4 presents the structural model obtained from the analysis, while Table 5 shows the factor loadings, as well as Cronbach's alpha, rho_a, composite reliability (CR), and AVE obtained.

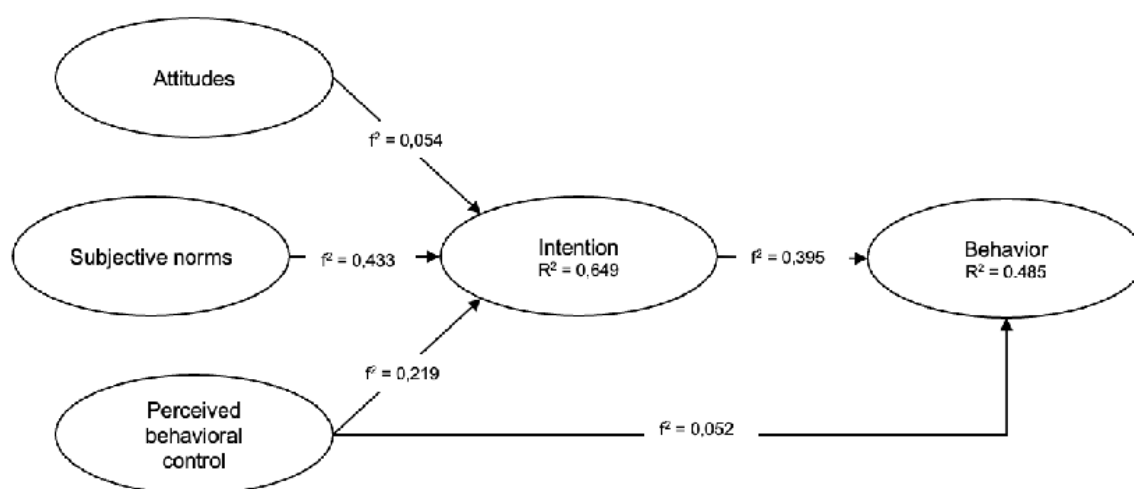


Figure 4. Structural model
Source: developed by the authors.

Table 5 provides evidence of the quality of the measurement model through factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, rho_c, and AVE (Average Variance Extracted). It is observed that the factor loadings range from 0.674 to 0.974, all above the recommended threshold (Hair et al., 2021). These loadings indicate that the indicators used are adequate to represent the latent variables.

Table 5

Factor loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, rho_A, rho_C and AVE

	ATT	PBC	BEH	INT	SN
Factor loadings	att1 (0.903)	pbc1 (0.674)	beh1 (0.973)	int1 (0.952)	sn1 (0.789)
	att2 (0.906)	pbc2 (0.817)	beh2 (0.975)	int2 (0.954)	sn2 (0.892)
	att6 (0.732)	pbc3 (0.850)			sn3 (0.855)
					sn4 (0.834)
Cronbach's Alpha	0.809	0.711	0.946	0.900	0.866
rho_A	0.858	0.779	0.946	0.900	0.883
rho_C	0.886	0.826	0.974	0.952	0.908
AVE	0.724	0.614	0.949	0.909	0.711

Source: developed by the authors.

Note: Attitudes (ATT), Behavior (BEH), Perceived behavioral control (PBC), Intention (INT) and Subjective norms (SN).

Moreover, Cronbach's alpha and rho_C for all variables exceed 0.7, ensuring internal consistency of the constructs. Particularly, the constructs BEH (0.946) and INT (0.952) show very high internal consistency, demonstrating that the items measuring behavior and intention are highly correlated. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all constructs is above 0.5, with highlights on BEH (0.949) and INT (0.909), confirming convergent validity (Hair et al., 2021). AVE values above 0.5 indicate that more than 50% of the variance of the indicators is explained by their corresponding latent variables. This implies that the constructs used to measure attitudes, perceived behavioral control, behavior, intention, and subjective norms are appropriate to capture their respective theoretical dimensions.

Next, the Fornell-Larcker and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) criteria were evaluated, and the results are presented in Table 6. As mentioned by Hair et al. (2021), for these criteria to be considered acceptable, the Fornell-Larcker criterion requires that the square root of the AVE of each latent variable be greater than the correlations with other latent variables, indicating that the constructs are distinct from one another, while HTMT should present values lower than 0.90, reinforcing the discrimination between the constructs.

Table 6

Fornell-Larcker and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT)

HETEROTRAIT-MONOTRAIT (HTMT)					
	ATT	BEH	PBC	INT	SN
ATT	0.851				
BEH	0.461	0.974			
PBC	0.443	0.586	0.784		
INT	0.659	0.733	0.664	0.953	
SN	0.650	0.727	0.452	0.811	0.843

FORNELL-LARCKER					
	ATT	BEH	PBC	INT	SN
ATT	0.851				
BEH	0.414	0.974			
PBC	0.362	0.531	0.784		
INT	0.575	0.677	0.589	0.953	
SN	0.582	0.662	0.431	0.734	0.843

Source: developed by the authors.

Note: Attitudes (ATT), Behavior (BEH), Perceived behavioral control (PBC), Intention (INT) and Subjective norms (SN).

As shown in Table 6, the Fornell-Larcker criterion indicates that the square root of the AVE for each construct is greater than the correlations between that construct and the others, confirming discriminant validity. For example, the square root of the AVE for the INT construct is 0.953, while its correlations with the other constructs, such as ATT (0.575) and SN (0.734), are significantly smaller. This result ensures that the constructs measure distinct concepts with little overlap, as proposed by Hair et al. (2021).

The HTMT index, which should be lower than 0.90 (Hair et al., 2021), confirms discriminant validity between the constructs. None of the HTMT values exceed the 0.90 threshold, with the highest value observed between SN and INT (0.811). This result suggests that although there are correlations between the variables, they are not strongly associated enough to compromise the conceptual distinction between the constructs. Thus, both the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT confirm that the latent variables in the model are sufficiently distinct, validating the theoretical framework and ensuring that each construct measures a unique phenomenon within the context of the research.

The hypothesis testing results and structural model validation presented in Table 7 confirm the theoretical framework underpinning the study, with all proposed hypotheses supported. The findings highlight significant predictors of purchase intention and behavior in the context of yeast-based feed for pets.

Table 7

Hypothesis Testing and Model Validation

Hypothesis	®	s	T-Test	f ²	VIF	Decision
H ₁ : Attitudes -> Intention	0.171	0.037	4.642	0.054	1.548	Supported ⁽¹⁾
H ₂ : Subjective norms -> Intention	0.501	0.039	12.878	0.433	1.652	Supported ⁽¹⁾
H ₃ : Perceived behavioral control -> Intention	0.311	0.043	7.177	0.219	1.257	Supported ⁽¹⁾
H ₄ : Perceived behavioral control -> Actual Behavior	0.203	0.049	4.146	0.052	1.530	Supported ⁽¹⁾
H ₅ : Intention -> Actual Behavior	0.558	0.050	11.048	0.395	1.530	Supported ⁽¹⁾

Source: developed by the authors.

Note: ⁽¹⁾ p < 0,001.

Hypothesis H₁ was supported, with a f² of 0.054 and a T-value of 4.642. This result aligns with the TPB (Ajzen, 1991), which emphasizes that attitudes are significant predictors of intention. Positive attitudes reflect an individual's evaluation of a behavior as favorable, and in this case, pet owners who perceive yeast-based feed as beneficial are more likely to form an intention to purchase it. The study validates the TPB premise by demonstrating that favorable perceptions of nutritional and environmental benefits can directly enhance purchase intentions.

This finding is consistent with the work of Arvola et al. (2008), who examined attitudes toward organic food and their role in predicting purchase intention. They found that moral and affective attitudes substantially shape consumer behavior in contexts involving health and sustainability. Similarly, Magnusson et al. (2001) reported that attitudes toward ecological and functional attributes of food significantly influence purchase intentions, particularly among consumers with higher

awareness of health and sustainability concerns. These parallels underscore the importance of attitudes as pivotal factors in decision-making for innovative products.

Additionally, the results align with those of Pedrinelli et al. (2024), who evaluated the purchase intention of food with preservatives for both individuals and their pets. In this context, the result suggests that pet owners who perceive benefits in yeast-based feed are more likely to consider purchasing these products. Further, Vermeir and Verbeke (2008) highlight the “attitude-behavior gap” that often occurs when consumers have positive attitudes but fail to act accordingly. In the current context, the clear linkage between attitudes and intention suggests that the product’s perceived benefits resonate well with pet owners, bridging this gap. These results highlight the importance of marketing strategies that effectively communicate product advantages, fostering positive attitudes that translate into actionable intentions.

Hypothesis H₂ revealed the strongest relationship in the model, with a f^2 of 0.433 and a T-value of 12.878. This finding reinforces the role of subjective norms as a key driver of intention, as posited by Ajzen (1991). Subjective norms reflect the perceived social pressure to engage in a specific behavior, and for pet owners, the endorsement of significant others, such as veterinarians or family members, can strongly influence purchase intentions.

This result aligns with Paul et al. (2016), who found that subjective norms significantly impact green product consumption, particularly when third-party recommendations are perceived as credible. In the pet food industry, where trust and expertise are paramount, veterinarians often play a decisive role in shaping consumer perceptions. Also, Pedrinelli et al. (2024) demonstrated that social endorsement from peers and experts amplifies the perceived value of functional pet food products, making subjective norms a critical variable in this context.

Moreover, Weiss (2014) highlight the increasing role of social influence in shaping consumer behavior, particularly in markets where trust and innovation intersect. Their research emphasizes that subjective norms are not merely passive influences but active determinants of perceived credibility and product legitimacy. For yeast-based feed, marketing strategies that leverage social proof, testimonials, and endorsements could further strengthen these normative influences, driving purchase intention among pet owners.

Hypothesis H₃ was supported, with a f^2 of 0.219 and a T-value of 7.177, confirming that perceived behavioral control (PBC) positively influences purchase intention. PBC encompasses an individual's confidence in their ability to perform a behavior, influenced by factors such as access to resources, knowledge, and affordability. Ajzen (1991) identified PBC as a critical predictor of intention, particularly in scenarios where external barriers could impede consumer action.

This relationship is supported by Vermeir and Verbeke (2008), who demonstrated that PBC significantly influences sustainable food consumption, particularly when consumers perceive fewer barriers to accessing such products. Similarly, Paul et al. (2016) reported that reducing barriers, such as price and availability, can enhance consumer confidence, thereby increasing the likelihood of purchase. These findings suggest that for yeast-based feed, improving availability, affordability, and consumer knowledge could substantially boost purchase intentions.

Further, Bandura’s (1978) concept of self-efficacy provides a complementary perspective on PBC. Self-efficacy reflects an individual's belief in their capacity to achieve specific outcomes, which strongly correlates with PBC in consumer contexts. Pet owners who feel informed and capable of making responsible choices for their pets are more likely to intend to purchase innovative products like yeast-based feed. Thus, targeted educational campaigns and transparent communication about product benefits can enhance perceived control, driving intentions and eventual behavior.

Regarding H₄, the results indicate that PBC positively influences actual purchasing behavior related to pet food containing *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* (f^2 of 0.052 and a T-value of 4.146), thereby supporting the proposed hypothesis. The positive coefficient suggests that consumers who perceive greater control over the purchasing process, including having financial resources, product accessibility, and sufficient knowledge regarding its benefits, are more likely to effectively engage in purchasing behavior. These findings are consistent with the assumptions of the TPB, which proposes that PBC may directly influence behavior, particularly in situations where individuals’ actions depend on available resources and perceived capability (Ajzen, 1991).

The findings also reinforce the notion that behavioral execution is not determined exclusively by motivational factors or intention formation, but also by consumers’ perceptions regarding the feasibility of performing the behavior. In the context of functional pet foods, barriers related to product availability, economic accessibility, and informational uncertainty may directly affect consumers’ ability to transform intention into effective purchasing behavior. Therefore, individuals who perceive fewer obstacles and greater control over the purchasing process tend to demonstrate a higher probability of engaging in actual consumption behavior.

Furthermore, the relatively lower magnitude of the relationship compared to intention-based effects suggests that perceived behavioral control may operate as a complementary mechanism influencing behavior alongside other attitudinal and social determinants. This interpretation aligns with previous studies indicating that PBC becomes particularly relevant in contexts involving innovative, specialized, or credence-based products, in which consumers often rely on their perceived knowledge, confidence, and access conditions before engaging in purchasing behavior (Verbeke, 2005; Pedrinelli et al., 2024). Consequently, the results highlight the importance of reducing informational and accessibility barriers in order to

strengthen consumers' perceptions of control and facilitate the adoption of pet food enriched with *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*.

The strongest relationship in the model was observed for H₅, with a f^2 of 0.395 and a T-value of 11.048, confirming that purchase intention directly predicts purchase behavior. This finding aligns with Ajzen's (1991) assertion that intention is the most proximal antecedent of behavior, as it represents the motivational factors influencing an individual's willingness to act. For yeast-based feed, pet owners with high purchase intention are significantly more likely to follow through with actual purchases.

This result is corroborated by Sheeran (2002), who found strong intention-behavior correlations, particularly in contexts where behavior is volitional and accessible. Sheeran also highlighted that the strength of this relationship increases when intentions are specific and action-oriented, which appears to be the case for yeast-based feed. Moreover, Sniehotta et al. (2005) argue that translating intention into behavior often depends on implementation intentions, such as specific plans or reminders, which could further enhance this relationship in practical applications.

Fishbein and Ajzen (2011) stress the importance of reducing barriers that might disrupt the intention-behavior link. For instance, ensuring the widespread availability of yeast-based feed, along with clear labeling and marketing, can facilitate smoother transitions from intention to behavior. These findings highlight the need for a consumer-centric approach that not only fosters strong intentions but also minimizes potential obstacles to actual purchase behavior.

The structural model's validity was confirmed through the coefficient of determination (R^2) and variance inflation factor (VIF) analysis. The R^2 for purchase intention (64.9%) and behavior (48.5%) indicate strong explanatory power, demonstrating the model's robustness. Moreover, VIF values below 3 (highest: 1.652) confirm the absence of multicollinearity, ensuring the accuracy of path coefficient estimates (Hair et al., 2021). These results reinforce the model's credibility and its applicability in understanding consumer behavior in the context of innovative and sustainable products.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This research aimed to examine pet owners' purchase intention toward pet food enriched with *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* and to analyze how attitudinal, social, and perceived behavioral control factors influence both purchase intention and actual purchasing behavior. The study used the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as the theoretical framework, investigating the factors influencing purchase intention and actual behavior.

The results indicate that subjective norms were the most influential factor in purchase intention, suggesting that the influence of third parties, such as veterinarians and family members, is crucial for pet owners when making decisions. Attitudes toward yeast-enriched pet food also showed significant influence, though to a lesser extent, highlighting that pet owners' perceptions regarding the benefits of functional products for pets still require further clarification and dissemination. Perceived behavioral control was found to be relevant, indicating that trust in one's knowledge about the product, as well as perceptions of accessibility and availability, directly influence purchase intention. Finally, intention proved to be a robust predictor of actual purchasing behavior, aligning with the assumptions of TPB and reinforcing the importance of motivational and cognitive factors in shaping consumers' effective behavior toward functional pet food products.

Among the contributions of this research, it is believed that, for the academic field, the study advances the literature on consumer behavior in the pet food sector by applying the TPB in the context of functional pet food enriched with the *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, a topic that remains underexplored in the literature. Furthermore, the study contributes theoretically by extending the application of the TPB to an emerging consumption context involving functional and credence-based products, reinforcing the relevance of attitudinal, social, and control-related determinants in explaining both purchase intention and actual purchasing behavior. In addition, the findings help bridge the gap between animal nutrition research and consumer behavior studies, integrating nutritional innovation with the behavioral decision-making perspectives. Additionally, use of *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* as a functional ingredient in pet food represents an innovative approach, and the results provide insights into how pet owners perceive such products.

From a managerial perspective, the findings may support the development of more effective marketing and communication strategies focused on increasing consumers' awareness regarding the nutritional and physiological benefits associated with yeast supplementation in pet food. The results suggest that companies operating in the pet food industry should prioritize educational campaigns, transparent communication, and informational marketing strategies aimed at reducing consumers' uncertainty and strengthening perceptions of product quality and safety. Moreover, considering the strong influence of subjective norms identified in the study, partnerships with veterinarians, pet nutrition specialists, and digital influencers within pet-owner communities may represent strategic mechanisms for increasing product acceptance and market adoption.

From a social perspective, the study also contributes to discussions regarding responsible pet care and the growing humanization of pets, since consumers increasingly seek products capable of improving animals' quality of life, health, and well-being. By promoting greater understanding of functional pet food products, the research may contribute to more

informed consumption decisions and encourage the adoption of nutritionally enhanced products that potentially support animal health and preventive care practices.

Despite its contributions, the study presents some limitations that should be acknowledged. The study focused exclusively on pet food enriched with *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other functional ingredients or pet food categories. The sample characteristics and contextual factors associated with the investigated population should also be considered when interpreting the results.

In this context, future research is suggested to explore the impact of educational campaigns on knowledge and acceptance of yeast-enriched products, as well as to conduct comparative analysis involving different pet species and consumer profiles. Future studies may also benefit of investigating moderating and mediating variables, such as brand loyalty, perceived product quality, food neophobia, and environmental concern, in order to enrich the understanding of pet owners' purchase behavior regarding functional pet food. Finally, comparative cross-cultural studies and analyses involving different international markets may help identify cultural and social differences in consumers' acceptance of functional ingredients in pet nutrition.

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