



Understanding the antecedents of consumers' attitudes towards doggy bags in restaurants: Concern about food waste, culture, norms and emotions[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Based on a qualitative study with 20 respondents in France and 20 respondents from the Czech Republic, this study aims to better understand how consumers' concern about food waste, culture, social norms and emotions contribute to consumers' attitudes and behaviors related to doggy bags. Results highlight a double paradox between conflicting norms and emotions: personal norms encourage not to waste while salient social norms encourage leaving leftovers; asking for a doggy bag generates immediate shame while leaving leftovers produces anticipated regret and guilt. Finally, the study sheds light on obstacles to overcome for the adoption of this social innovation.

1. Introduction

Underestimated for many years, considered a co-product of our society of abundance, food waste is now becoming a major issue in the definition of a sustainable food system (*The Food Loss and Waste Accounting and Reporting Standard*, 2016³). Consumers have become more health and environment conscious (i.e. Thøgersen, 2011; Klöckner, 2013), more concerned about where their food comes from (Dowd and Burke, 2013) and about food waste (Evans, 2012). In Europe and North America, food losses and waste, including all phases from production to consumption, represent 280–300 kg per person a year. The collection and analysis of data from across Europe generated an estimate of food waste in the EU-28 of 88 million tons; this equates to 173 kg of food waste per person (Stenmarck et al., 2016). If nothing is done, food waste is expected to rise to about 126 million tons by 2020 (Gustavsson et al., 2011). All actors in the food chain have a role to play in preventing and reducing food waste, from those who produce and process foods (farmers, food manufacturers and processors) to those who make foods available for consumption (hospitality sector, retailers) and ultimately consumers themselves (Parfitt et al., 2010).

The hospitality industry is responsible for a significant part of food waste. In France for example, 15% of all food waste is attributed to the hospitality and food services (Ministère de l'Écologie, du

Développement durable et de l'Énergie, 2012⁴). Both academics and professionals in the restaurant industry have pointed out the direct financial and environmental effects of food waste as well as its indirect effect on the restaurant's image (Betz et al., 2015; Namkung and Jang, 2013).

Indeed, the restaurant's image is affected by many factors since customers evaluate not only food but also various aspects of service experiences (Han and Kim, 2009). Service quality heightens customer's positive emotion and affects consumer behavioral intentions (Jang and Namkung, 2009; Fernandes and Cruz, 2016). Service employees can add value to the consumption experience by interacting with the customer (Walls et al., 2011). Attending to guests' leftovers contributes to a better service while reducing food waste. Thus, understanding consumers' attitude towards this service and above all, what are the antecedents of this attitude, is important in the restaurant industry. However, while this service is usual in many countries, it remains unknown in several European countries. Therefore, we wish to examine consumers' attitudes and their antecedents in countries where doggy bags are not common.

Consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions towards environmentally sustainable practices in restaurants is an under-explored area in the hospitality literature, despite the growing 'green' trend (Schubert et al., 2010) and additional research on green restaurant practices is

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³ http://www.wri.org/sites/default/files/FLW_Standard_V1_Full_Report.pdf.

⁴ http://www.developpement-durable.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/Rapport_final_gaspillage_alimentaire_nov2012.pdf.

needed (Namkung and Jang, 2013). More precisely, no research has examined the perceived barriers and potential benefits of the doggy bag service from the restaurant customers' perspective. In order to fill this gap, this study was designed to understand patrons' attitudes towards doggy bags in restaurants, the antecedents of these attitudes and, perceived barriers preventing the use of doggy bags. It is based on a qualitative study with 20 respondents in France and 20 respondents from the Czech Republic. These two countries were chosen because neither has a tradition of using doggy bags and they also have in common the cultural importance of food. Conversely, France differs from Czech Republic by the level of public policy against food waste. In France, fighting food waste has become a priority, which is not the case in Czech Republic, and there was in 2015 a first attempt to promote doggy bags.

No study has explored the attitudes related to the doggy bag in order to understand which antecedents contribute to restaurants patrons' attitudes and acceptance or reject of the doggy bag concept and practice. Thus, the first aim of the study is to explore the patrons' attitudes towards the "Doggy Bag" concept in order to understand how antecedents such as consumers' concern about food waste, culture, social norms and emotions contribute to consumers' attitudes and declared behaviors related to doggy bags. Finally, it sheds light on obstacles to overcome for the adoption of this social innovation and proposes future research avenues.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1. Culture and norms in restaurants

Culture and social norms in restaurants influence the way of eating (Rozin et al., 2003) and different practices such as tipping or using doggy bags (Melvin, 2014). Culture plays an important role in the relationship with food. For example, Rozin et al. (2003) show that part of the "French paradox" can be explained by the fact that the French eat less than Americans. In particular, French portion sizes are smaller in comparable restaurants, the French take longer to eat than Americans and the French focus more on the experience of eating while Americans focus more on the consequences of eating (Rozin, 2005).

However, culture affects not only food consumption but also practices and behaviors. The case of tipping is a case of practice which varies among cultures (i.e. in the United States, tipping is necessary for servers to earn a decent wage since the federal minimum wage is very low⁵) but also according to food servers' appearance (Guéguen and Jacob, 2014) or behavior (Seiter and Weger, 2010). The doggy bag is another example of practice which varies a lot among cultures. Unknown in some countries, it is usual in the U.S. where researchers do not explore its potential acceptance by consumers but the way food servers handle customers' leftovers. For example, Seiter and Weger (2014) show that the principle of reciprocity leads restaurants' customers to give higher tips to food servers if they box customers' leftovers.

Besides culture, social norms influence customers' behaviors in restaurants. Since a restaurant is a public space, customers often act in the way they think other customers act or expect them to act. An important question is whether and how social norms in restaurants may evolve. According to Azar (2004), a social norm will erode if people do not derive benefits in addition to conforming to the social norm. His study on the evolution of the tipping custom in the United States shows that at least some people derive benefits from tipping, including the desire to feel generous and kind, to impress others and, to show gratitude and reward the worker for good service (Azar, 2004). Besides, this study highlights the importance of emotions in the restaurant

experience. According to Azar, tipping is associated with positive feelings and emotions such as being fair, feeling empathy with workers and prevents from feeling "cheap". Hence, tipping is "a pattern of behavior enforced in part by internal sanctions, including shame, guilt and loss of self-esteem, as opposed to purely external sanctions, such as material rewards and punishment" (Gintis, 2003).

The role of emotions is intuitive given the hedonic nature of restaurants. Jang and Namkung (2009) showed that positive emotion (joy, excitement, peacefulness, and refreshment) mediates the relationships between atmospherics and service, and post-dining behavioral intentions. Han et al. (2009) confirmed that multiple components of consumption emotions (excitement, comfort, annoyance, and romance) significantly affect customer satisfaction, and satisfaction mediates the effect of emotion factors on revisit intention. However, if different types of emotions were included in these studies, emotions related to sustainability and food waste were not.

2.2. Consumers and food waste: concern, norms and guilt

Most studies dealing with food waste show that consumers feel bad about wasting food (Evans, 2012; Watson and Meah, 2013) and are concerned when they throw food away. Le Borgne et al. (2016) define a consumer's concern for food waste as attaching importance to food waste and its consequences and as being emotionally affected by the experience of food waste or the general issue of food waste. No research has examined yet consumers' concern about food waste in restaurants. However, restaurant green practices influence customers' perceived quality and restaurant brand equity (Namkung and Jang, 2013).

Social norms and guilt are important in increasing consumers' ethical intentions and pro-social behavior (Steenhaut and Van Kenhove, 2006; Hibbert et al., 2007) and more precisely, according to Quested et al. (2013), guilt plays an important role in reducing food waste. However, existing studies regarding food waste at home only have considered the feeling of guilt after food is wasted. Anticipated guilt, defined as "guilt that arises from contemplating a potential violation of one's own standards" (Cotte et al., 2005), seems particularly relevant in the context of restaurants. Close to anticipated guilt, anticipated regret can be defined as "a counterfactual emotion that is experienced in the present situation when imagining the results of a future outcome" (Bui, 2009). In restaurants, the role of anticipated regret in consumers' intentions to select eco-friendly restaurants has been highlighted (Kim et al., 2013). In the context of hotels, invoking social norms and increasing anticipated guilt are a way of encouraging consumers to engage in sustainable behaviors (hotels' linen-reuse programs, Goldstein et al., 2007; or reusing of towels, Theotokis and Manganari, 2015). However, to our knowledge, no study has focused yet on the potential impact of social norms and emotions related to food waste in a restaurant context.

To conclude, past research provides evidence regarding on the one hand the importance of culture, social norms and emotions in restaurants and, on the other hand, the influence of social norms and emotions on attitudes and behaviors related to food waste. However, no research has explored the attitudes and behaviors related to the doggy bag concept in order to understand if and how consumers' concern about waste, culture, social norms and emotions contribute to restaurants patrons' attitudes and behaviors related to doggy bags. This study, therefore, proposes to explore the potential relationships between these variables in order to try to understand customers' acceptance or reject of the doggy bag concept and practice by uncovering perceived barriers and potential benefits.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Rationale for focusing on France and Czech Republic

France and the Czech Republic were chosen because they have both

⁵ <https://www.dol.gov/whd/state/tipped.htm>, we thank one reviewer for this information.

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