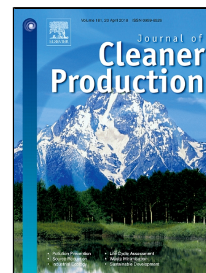


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Consumers' food cycle and household waste. When behaviors matter

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Highlights

- Household food waste warrants the analysis of the whole consumer's food cycle.
- The more upstream is the phase the stronger is the influence on household waste.
- The gap between purchasing and outcome leads to additional uncertainty.
- Individuals resort to heuristics and deviate from the standard economic model.
- Situational factors (food retail) influence food waste generation in homes.

Abstract: Recent studies have shown that consumers encounter various conflicting motivations that influence the prevention of household food waste. Food choices are rooted in deep-seated judgments, such as emotions, habits, and values, thus raising the cognitive dissonance between motivation and behavior (intention-behavior gap). The complexity of this subject increases when considering that food waste is driven by repetitive, multiple, and hidden individual choices and influenced by a composite set of situational factors. This study argues the presence of a critical distance between food choices and waste generation in homes and this factual interval (behavior-outcome gap) further affects consumer's decision-making when comparing available options. Employing data from a three-year survey of a national representative panel of Italian consumers, this study develops a system of regression models using path analysis methodology. The objective is to measure the relationships between the different phases of the food consumption cycle and rank their contribution to waste. The results suggest that the more upstream the phase, the stronger the influence on food waste generation in homes. Purchasing emerges as the most critical choice of the consumers' food waste cycle. This gap between behavior and outcome adds uncertainty to food decisions, which reverberates on behavioral beliefs and as a result, leads consumers to resort to heuristics. The findings allow for the identification of a set of behavioral patterns with implications on food waste generation. Furthermore, purchasing decisions are exposed to out-of-home contextual factors, suggesting that food retail can affect consumer behaviors relevant to household food waste.

Keywords

Consumer; attitude; behavior; food waste; purchasing; food retail.

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