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From Willingness to Action: The Role of Motivation, Opportunity, and Ability in Household Food Waste

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Abstract

Effective household food waste prevention requires understanding why willingness to avoid waste does not always translate into behaviour. The Motivation–Opportunity–Ability (MOA) framework may help identify distinct consumer profiles and inform more targeted interventions. Preliminary data were obtained from the EATWISE project through a MOA-based questionnaire assessing multiple subconstructs of Motivation, Opportunity, and Ability, alongside sociodemographic characteristics, food waste related emotions, contextual factors, and self-reported food waste. Among 362 respondents, 286 participants with >50% responsibility for both household food purchasing and cooking were included. Construct-level MOA scores were z-standardized and used in Latent Profile Analysis. Three consumer profiles emerged: “motivated, able, and enabled” (45%), “opportunity constrained” (35%); and “less motivated, less able” (20%). Profiles differed more clearly in food waste related emotions and contextual factors than in sociodemographic factors, which were not significantly different after correction for multiple testing. Self-reported food waste differed significantly across profiles, with the lowest levels among motivated, able, and enabled consumers and the highest among opportunity constrained consumers. In structural analysis, opportunity showed the strongest independent inverse association with food waste, followed by ability, whereas motivation was not independently associated with food waste. The model explained 14% of the variance in the food waste composite. These preliminary findings suggest that willingness alone may be insufficient to prevent food waste. Interventions should move beyond demographic targeting and generic awareness campaigns toward approaches addressing practical skills and, particularly, contextual and structural opportunity constraints.

Keywords: household food waste, questionnaires, motivation-opportunity-ability framework

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