

Exploring the Role of COVID-19 Pandemic in the Case of Domestic Food Waste Through the Theory of Planned Behaviour

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Abstract

According to the recent Food Waste Index Report, 930 million tonnes of food are wasted globally, one-third of the food produced for human consumption. Despite the fact this is a global problem, scholars suggested that among all the supply chain, in developed countries most of the thrown away food occurs at household level where consumers waste more than the food service industry or stakeholders that are situated way earlier in the chain. The Covid-19 pandemic has rapidly and dramatically disrupted household behaviours in almost all areas and, among these, eating behaviours and daily food patterns have also been radically altered. Both food acquisition patterns and at home meal preparation have undergone significant changes compared to pre-COVID levels, changes that have potential and mixed effects in terms of food waste. The main aim of this study is to examine the possible moderator effect of COVID-19 concerns on two different behaviours linked with food waste reduction, namely using leftovers and reducing portion size, using the framework of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). So far, the behavioural measures used in the scientific literature referred generally to not wasting food, therefore in this paper two tangible and well-defined actions have been chosen, adhering strictly to the Theory. Data were collected via an online survey developed with the Qualtrics survey software using a snowball sampling procedure. A sample of $n = 201$ (59,7% female) individuals from Italy, mean (SD) age = 33.09 (12.06), completed the questionnaire. First results confirm the TPB relations for both behavioural measures and, in particular, it can be seen that the COVID-19 concern act as a moderator when the behavioural measure to contrast food waste considered is the reduction of portion size ($p < .05$). These results show that, since COVID-19 is changing the behaviours of individuals, identifying a specific role of COVID-19 on waste behaviour can help to better target policy choices and communication campaigns.

Keywords: TPB, food waste, moderation effect, COVID-19

References

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