The role of emotions in tackling food waste: An extended theory of planned behaviour

Mario Amato, Fabio Verneau, Roberta Riverso and Francesco La Barbera

University of Naples Federico II - Department of Political Science, Napoli 80138, Italy

Abstract

It is widely accepted that food waste is a global problem which concerns the whole supply chain although, in western developed countries, food waste is particularly relevant in the final stages of the supply chain. It has been highlighted that households waste even more than the food industry and food distribution jointly. In recent years, scholars have therefore multiplied their efforts to understand the psychological factors which affect consumers' food waste. Many studies explored the antecedents of food waste in the framework of theory of planned behaviour (TPB), showing the importance of the three TPB's major factors—attitude (ATT), subjective norms (SN), and perceived behavioural control (PBC). Scholars also made efforts to add explaining variables to the original TPB, with mixed results. A lack of research has been devoted to the role of emotions in forming individuals' intention to reduce food waste. In the current study, we analyzed two classes of emotions possibly relevant in relation to food waste, namely social emotions and "empty fridge anxiety". Importantly, the Waste Framework Directive adopted in the European Union indicates prevention as the most efficient option, whereas re-use is intended as a second-best. Hence, the current study focuses on two behaviours which implement these solutions and may be predicted by intention to reduce food waste: (1) reducing servings and (2) using leftovers. We sought to assess whether an extended TPB model could predict intention to reduce food waste and these two specific behaviours as well, therefore we administered an online questionnaire to a sample of 400 Italians during September, 2020. Results show that, compared to the traditional TPB model, the extended version including emotions has more predictive power. In addition, social emotions help explain leftovers utilization, whereas the empty fridge anxiety is inversely correlated to the reduction of servings. The results obtained, which assign an important role to emotions in predicting the two studied behaviours, offer new possibilities for differentiation in cluster analysis and tailoring of communication strategies.

Keywords: Servings, leftovers, social emotions, extended TPB.