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The Food Waste Problem: Reasons of Wastage and Actions to Prevent. An Italian Case Study

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Abstract

The phenomenon of food waste has been a challenging, global focus over the years, due to its consequences on economic and environmental sustainability. Measures to reduce it have been continuously established even if the food waste problem is yet to be solved and one of the largest driving forces is the consumer. Food is lost and/or wasted throughout the food chain from primary production to final household consumption (Bräutigam et al., 2014). The economic conditions of the countries exert influence on where food is lost in the stages of the supply chain. In particular, medium- and high- income countries, experience food losses at the later stages of the supply chain resulting from consumer behaviour, and that people can simply afford to waste food (Grethe et al., 2011).

What is more, from literature review it seems that age is a factor that affects food waste, with young people wasting more than older people (Hamilton et al., 2005; Cox & Downing, 2007; Thyberg & Tonjes, 2016).

This paper is part of a research project, launched in 2017, which involves the analysis of a large sample of Millennials from different European countries, in order to investigate the existence of different waste behaviours according to geographical areas (and, therefore, of the prevalent cultures and habits), as well as to identify managerial and economic policy implications appropriate to the different contexts of reference.

The aim is to understand Italian consumer behaviour in relation to food waste. In detail the paper investigates the major reasons for food waste and how much in their daily life consumers are committed to carry out actions to reduce food waste, considering age as a discriminating factor.

Data have been obtained through the administration of a questionnaire using Computer Assisted Web Interviewing methodology. The questionnaire was divided into 2 sections aimed at: analyzing the socio-demographic data and the eating habits and interests of the interviewees; studying waste behaviours, both in terms of attitude awareness of one's actions and consequences. The search for sample members was done through an indirect

procedure that allowed to obtain an auto selection of the sample composed of 904 respondents.

A five-point Likert scale has been used to evaluate the items of the questionnaire. The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) has been performed using F-tests (Markowski & Markowski, 1990) in order to analyze differences and similarities of behaviour among consumers of different ages.

The results reveal that, even if it seems that young consumer do not seem so likely to waste food as described in the literature, they throw away most products that are gone bad, leftovers preserved and no longer consumed, open and unfinished products and advanced food in the dish after the meal. Among the major reason for food waste there are the rhythms of life that are too frantic, the fact that consumers cook too much and the inadequate portions in supermarkets. Interesting implications derive from these results such as promoting young people's awareness of the issue of waste, revising the packaging, enriching the labels with information and articulating the formats to make them more suited to the consumption.

Keywords : Food waste, Millennials, European Countries