


Chapter 2

Culture, Society, and Food Waste:

Understanding Cultural Norms and Social Behaviors Impacting Food Waste Generation and Developing Mitigation Strategies

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to identify the factors that contribute to food waste, with a particular focus on the role that culture and society play. The ultimate objective is to not only lessen the effects of food waste, but also to lessen its incidence. This study fits in with the rising recognition that a more sustainable and responsible approach to food consumption and waste management may be achieved via a knowledge of and an influence on cultural norms and social behaviors. The research makes a modest but important addition to the worldwide effort to reduce food waste by advocating for fundamental shifts in how we approach, manage, and value nutrition.

1. INTRODUCTION

Food waste is a critical global issue with far-reaching consequences, encompassing economic, environmental, and ethical dimensions (Chaboud & Daviron, 2017). Each year, a significant portion of the world's food supply is lost or discarded, constituting a grave concern on multiple fronts (Ouro-Salim et al., 2023). The ramifications of this wastage extend beyond the surface, contributing to a rise in

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greenhouse gas emissions, depletion of finite resources, and exacerbation of food insecurity in various regions worldwide. The urgency of addressing food waste is evident, and it necessitates multifaceted efforts across diverse sectors and disciplines.

In recent years, one aspect of this multifaceted issue has gained increasing prominence in the realm of research and intervention: the role of cultural norms and social behaviors in shaping food waste generation (Huang & Tseng, 2020), as we investigate into the intricate tapestry of human society, it becomes evident that these deeply ingrained norms and behaviors wield a substantial influence over how individuals, families, and communities perceive, handle, and ultimately dispose of food. These cultural norms and social behaviors are deeply ingrained, entrenched in the fabric of our daily lives, impacting the way we shop for groceries, prepare meals, share food, and, regrettably, discard it (Su & Hynie, 2011).

It is within this context that this research paper embarks on an exploration of the complex interplay between cultural norms and social behaviors and the phenomenon of food waste. The core mission of this research is to shine a light on the intricate dynamics that underlie the generation of food waste within different cultural and social contexts. The questions we seek to answer are manifold: Why does food waste occur in some settings and not in others? What are the underlying cultural norms and social behaviors that drive these differences? When and where do these norms manifest, and how do they influence our relationship with food and waste?

This study aspires to go beyond merely unravelling the enigmatic connection between culture, society, and food waste. It also endeavours to contribute to the development of targeted strategies that address these cultural and social drivers of food waste at their very roots. The ultimate goal is not just to reduce the consequences of food waste but to mitigate its occurrence at the source. This research aligns itself with a growing awareness that by understanding and influencing cultural norms and social behaviors, we can make substantial strides towards a more sustainable and responsible approach to food consumption and waste management. In doing so, this study endeavours to be a small yet significant contribution to the global fight against food waste, calling for meaningful change and transformation in the way we perceive, handle, and value the sustenance that nourishes us all.

2. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this research lies in its potential to uncover previously unexamined aspects of food waste. While much research has focused on technological and logistical solutions, less attention has been paid to the socio-cultural dimensions of the issue. Cultures around the world exhibit diverse attitudes and practices related to food, making it essential to investigate how cultural norms and social behaviors influence food waste generation.

The findings of this research will be valuable to a range of stakeholders, including policymakers, environmentalists, community organizers, and individuals. By gaining a deeper understanding of cultural and social factors, policymakers can tailor interventions to specific communities, thereby increasing the likelihood of successful food waste reduction. Environmentalists can collaborate with cultural influencers to promote sustainable practices, and community organizers can design culturally sensitive initiatives to engage local populations. Individuals can also benefit from insights into their own behaviors, enabling them to make informed decisions about food consumption and waste.

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