


# Chapter 2

## Psychological Drivers and Strategic Interventions for Reducing Consumer Food Waste: A Literature-Based Perspective

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Food waste poses a major global challenge, with environmental, economic, and social consequences. Consumers, within household settings, have been identified as key contributors to food waste, shifting the focus toward the psychosocial drivers of individual behavior. This chapter examines the underlying mechanisms of consumer food waste, offering a structured literature review rather than new empirical data. The discussion explores cognitive determinants such as knowledge, attitudes, and intentions; the influence of non-rational factors including habits and emotions; and behavioral patterns across stages of household food management. Beyond identifying these drivers, the chapter reviews intervention strategies aimed at reducing food waste, from individual-level behavioral nudges to policy-level responses, with particular reference to recent OECD initiatives. By synthesizing current knowledge,*

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3373-2424-1.ch002

*the chapter provides a foundation for developing more effective, context-sensitive interventions and informs future research and policy design in the field of sustainable food consumption.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Food waste has become a pressing global concern with significant environmental, economic, and social consequences. Broadly defined as the disposal or misuse of food that remains fit for human consumption, food waste represents a major inefficiency in food systems worldwide. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that nearly one-third of all food produced is wasted, equating to approximately 1.3 billion tons annually. This loss contributes to greenhouse gas emissions, resource depletion, and food insecurity on a global scale (FAO, 2011; UNEP, 2021).

Although food waste occurs at various stages of the supply chain, a growing body of research has shown that consumers, particularly within household contexts, are among the largest contributors (Schanes et al., 2018; Stancu et al., 2016). This shift in focus has drawn attention to the behavioral, psychological, and social factors that drive food-related decision-making and waste practices at the individual level.

This chapter adopts a psychosocial perspective to examine the underlying mechanisms of consumer food waste behavior. Rather than presenting new empirical findings, it offers a structured and critical review of the recent literature to explore how cognitive processes, habits, routines, and emotional dynamics contribute to food waste. The discussion is organized into three key areas: (1) cognitive determinants of food waste behavior, such as attitudes, knowledge, and intentions; (2) the role of non-rational factors, including habits and emotions, in everyday food practices; and (3) patterns of behavior across the different stages of household food management, from planning to disposal.

In addition to identifying the drivers of consumer food waste, the chapter also reviews strategies proposed in the literature to mitigate the problem. These include interventions targeting individual behaviors, as well as broader policy responses, with particular attention to recent government-led initiatives reported by the OECD.

The objective of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive overview of the psychosocial determinants of consumer food waste, and to highlight evidence-based strategies for its reduction. Through this review, the chapter aims to inform future research, intervention design, and policy-making in the area of sustainable food consumption.

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