

CHORIZO: Changing practices and Habits through Open, Responsible, and social Innovation towards ZerO food waste

SOCIAL NORMS INFLUENCING FOOD WASTE RELATED BEHAVIOURS

The CHORIZO project wants to improve the understanding of the social norms that affect food waste behaviours. To significantly accelerate progress towards zero food waste, CHORIZO aims to use this knowledge to increase the effectiveness of decision-making and engagement of food chain actors, in changing social norms towards zero food waste.

Social norms are rules and expectations about behaviours that are socially enforced.

In this newsletter, we give the floor to our expert partners from The University of Bologna (UNIBO) and The Norwegian Research Centre (NORCE) in the field of social norms and behavioural theories. They share their insights about social norms and their influence on decision making that could influence food waste.



UNIBO TEAM



NORCE TEAM

What are social norms? Are there different types of social norms?

Social norms are defined as rules or guides for action as perceived by individuals that aspire – or already belong – to the norm's target group (i.e., the in-group of those who the norm applies to).

Social norms shape individual behaviour and operate through expectations about actions. They can have a prescriptive (should), a proscriptive (shouldn't) or a permissible (can, action is acceptable but not obligatory) character, and may additionally specify a context to which the social norm applies (e.g., one should wear black to a funeral). Following social norms reflects (and signals to others) the target group affinity.

Generally, there are two types of social norms:

Injunctive social norms are rules/guidelines for actions as expected by others. These rules for actions are perceived by individuals who belong to or want to belong to the target group of the norm. For example, most people find it evident that people expect from each other not to dump garbage in the streets.



Descriptive social norms refer to prevalent behaviours that are observed to happen in a certain situation. For example, on festival fields, many visitors leave their garbage behind after the event. This visible behaviour is then imitated by more and more people.



Why are we interested in social norms in CHORIZO projects?

Even though a great deal of recent studies on food waste research has focused on behavioural drivers, the influence of social norms has been scarcely investigated. Social norms represent a crucial

element in understanding food waste generation as it results from a complex set of behaviours, not always bounded to rationality or individual free will. Starting from this gap in the literature, the CHORIZO project has the aim to improve the understanding of how social norms influence food waste generation. Investigating the mechanisms and the characteristics of social norms' influences will allow us to uncover the normative mechanisms behind successful FLW interventions and understand why certain behaviours are (not) shared by groups of individuals. Indeed, social norms play a crucial role on shaping collective behaviours, making them a powerful tool for food waste prevention and reduction strategies. Social norms shape individual behaviour and operate through expectations about actions. They can have a prescriptive (should), a proscriptive (shouldn't) or a permissible (can, action is acceptable but not obligatory) character, and may additionally specify a context to which the social norm applies (e.g., one should wear black to a funeral). Following social norms reflects (and signals to others) the target group affinity.

What makes social norms different to just raising the awareness of citizens?

Exploiting social norms in FLW interventions differs from purely awareness building activities because external and internalized expectations regarding socially acceptable behaviours constitute a much more powerful lever for behavioural change. While awareness campaigns disseminate information (affecting individual beliefs), social norms utilize the human need of belonging to a social group. Therefore, behavioural interventions can use social norms to their advantage. This process requires careful attention to social roles and normative dynamics.

How can social norms then help us to behave more sustainably?

In the context of FLW interventions, a personalized, evidence-based approach is more effective than a one-size-fits-all model. Segmenting the population based on social roles and motivations for food waste can enhance intervention effectiveness. It is pivotal to consider also conflicts between and within social roles that might arise or get exacerbated from interventions and therefore decrease their efficacy. For instance, the expectation that parents provide enough and healthy food to their kids, against the social pressure not to force children to finish their plate if they can't.

Promoting sustainable behaviours through behavioural interventions can be based on three types of approaches: creating, exploiting, or actively modifying social norms.

- The creation of social norms can showcase sustainable practices as widely accepted and valued, utilizing role models and success stories to establish new standards (e.g., showcasing that caring for the planet means avoiding food waste).
- Exploiting existing norms involves emphasizing aspects of already existing expectations (e.g., reinforcing the already existing association between being a good housewife/househusband and managing well the household budget).
- Finally, actively modifying social norms encourages individuals to align their behaviours with sustainable practices (e.g., breaking the link between affording to waste food and high social status/wealth).

By strategically combining these approaches, a cultural shift can be generated, where adherence to environmentally friendly practices is not only accepted but also actively encouraged, fostering lasting changes in individuals' daily habits.

How does CHORIZO aim to increase insights into the role of social norms in food waste behaviours?

In this project, we aim to unravel the intricate actions of agents involved in the food supply chain. To this end, we make use of a unique modelling framework to display the effects of interactions among food supply chain actors and the influence of social norms towards zero food loss and waste (FLW).

Real-life cases and past research informed a theoretical framework conceptualizing and representing the decisions and actions of individuals along the food supply chain in relation to social norms. This framework enables us to develop and validate computational models exploring how people's behaviours, social norms, and beliefs affect the food they waste. These models have the ambition to simulate how people produce food waste, taking into account social roles and norms, networks of influence and contextual factors. The computational models will help in defining ways to intervene and foster sustainable behaviours towards better, smarter ways of reducing food waste.

How will these insights be made available to research and practitioners?

To increase the effectiveness of decision-making and engagement of food chain actors in changing social norms towards zero food waste, CHORIZO will of course share the gained understanding of how our needs, norms, beliefs and values affect food waste generation.

Not only will we prepare sector-specific guidelines for an interesting read, but also set-up a capacity building program for actors in the field to support knowledge sharing and application in practice. The training will exploit modelling outputs to develop tailored training adapted to local needs.

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