

Mediators of the relation of social norms with personal norms in the context of purchasing low carbon food

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The purchase of food represents a considerable part of private consumption. Nowadays food production and its distribution substantially contribute to CO₂ emissions. Previous research on food consumption has displayed that most consumers perceive their individual choice of food as environmentally relevant behavior (Weiß 2006). Furthermore opportunities for pro-environmental behavior are available through an easily accessible supply with local, seasonal and organic food. Therefore it seems promising to support the consumption of low carbon food meaning that in comparison with conventional products its production, processing and retailing cause less CO₂ emissions.

Up to now there is insufficient empirical evidence about motivations to buy low carbon food. Thus the aim of this study is to analyze different socio-psychological determinants explaining the consumption of local, seasonal and organic food.

In particular the presentation aims to enrich the ongoing discussion about the relation between social and personal norms. Recent research on the integration of two dominant behavioral models in environmental research – Ajzen's theory of planned behavior (TPB) and Schwartz's norm-activation model (NAM) - in one theoretical framework has renewed interest in this question (Teisl et al. 2009).

It has been pointed out that individuals gradually adopt and integrate social norms in their personal belief system through the process of internalization (Fuhrer 1995). However up to now it has remained unclear how social norms are being internalized and therefore affect personal norms. Feelings of guilt have already been identified as mediator between social and personal norms (Bamberg et al. 2007), yet other mediators seem probable. Triandis (1977) for instance

pointed out that social norms are more effective if they are comprehensible and clear to the subject.

Results from a recent survey (N=220) from urban, suburban and rural regions in and near the city of Graz (Austria) will be presented. Preliminary results from structural equation modeling indicate that the individual ability to assess the norms of relevant reference groups as well as the similarity between the opinion of the subject and its close social network mediate the relation between social norms and personal norms.

In a further step we aim to analyze the effect of social and personal norms on behavioral intentions and self-reported behavior regarding the purchase of low carbon food. Furthermore results from qualitative interviews and focus groups (N=30) are being used to unveil subjective interpretations and argumentations for or against low carbon consumption. These insights should help to identify ways how to promote its market penetration.

References

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