

ESA RN5 2023 Mini Midterm Meetings in multiple locations « The Sociology of Consumption: Bonding Beyond Boundaries » 28th August 2022

Preferred location: Paris

Title

Can an innovative, mobile sustainable food shopping app foster more equity in food literacy and ethical choices? Experimental insights from the pilot 'Goodness Groceries'.

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Abstract (337 words)

Within the currently rising concerns around sustainability of food systems, in the related economic areas of regenerative production modes, responsible supply chains and informed consumption, there often remains a *practice gap* between what people know they should do and what they actually do. This is preceded by a *knowledge gap*, which oftentimes corresponds, at least partially, to an *inequity gap*: the knowledge of what a sustainable product specifically is tends not to be entirely consensual, blurred with potentially contradicting injunctions between different claims of sustainability. Instead of trying to solve this puzzle with metrics, we propose an App that makes various components of sustainability transparent, thus *qualifying sustainability complexity*. Our aim is not to hierarchically determine 'the best' sustainable choice, but rather to relationally empower consumers to choose the product with the sustainability criteria that most fit their values and priorities.

'Goodness Groceries' is a transdisciplinary University of Luxembourg innovative and digital consumer study, piloting a mobile sustainable food shopping app in partnership with a supermarket chain. The App acts as a virtual shopping companion providing eco-responsible and ethical product information of selected staple food products, each time for up to four types: local organic, local conventional, imported organic and imported conventional. The information provided is based on self-assessments made by product suppliers. Each food item is granted criteria in the four main areas of Environment, Social Well-being, Economic Well-being and Good Governance, subdivided into relevant indicators (cf. SAFA guidelines, FAO 2014) – marked with easy-to-recognise icons. The user-friendly App is designed to scan alternatives of the same product via a QR code whilst shopping, and thus to analyse if such contextual information can foster more equity in food literacy and ethical choices – or not, and why.

After an experimental run from Autumn 2023 to Spring 2024, empirical results about the study and App in terms of structural obstacles for researchers, necessary supply chain adaptations for suppliers and scrutiny of consumers' shopping habits and App usage feedback will be discussed, based on interview and survey data with participants.

Key words

Food system transformation – Mobile sustainable food shopping app – Food literacy – Ethical choices – Consumer habits – Equity