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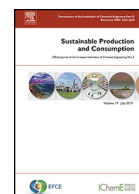
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Special section: Digital platforms and sustainable food consumption transitions

Digital technologies, data, and the services that they provide are inextricably woven into the fabric of everyday life. With them come major but often unsubstantiated claims regarding the capacities of the digital world to change the relationships between production and consumption in sustainable directions. Digitalization, it is often argued, will help us produce in ‘cleaner’ ways and reduce the environmental impacts of consumption, offering new means for the recirculation of material goods, alternative arrangements to support the provisioning of everyday life (e.g. sharing economies), and supply chain reform (Llamas and Belk, 2013; Gensch et al., 2017). Yet, as more critical scholars argue, digitalization often also leads to increased surveillance, the misuse of personal data, unequal access, the escalation (and outsourcing) of resource use, and the acceleration of capitalist modes of material accumulation (Singh and Lyon, 2013; Srnicek, 2017; Hazas and Nathan, 2018; Zuboff, 2019).

Against this background, the transformative potential of digital technologies within food systems is an emergent and potentially contested topic. The range of applications and their possible sustainability consequences are bewildering. They include online ordering and delivery of regular household groceries, with online ordering offering the consumer greater scope for comparison and auditing of their shopping basket based on environmental criteria, and deliveries reducing journeys by private car to collect grocery shopping. Perhaps more progressive are digitally enabled meal box schemes, food sharing apps and interactive maps. Each are claimed to facilitate alternative modes of food provisioning for households, opportunities for local food service providers to penetrate the dominance of supermarkets and the global food system, potential to reduce waste through more effective management of the volume of foods stored in the home, and even the use of QR codes and algorithms to direct consumers toward more sustainable options. To realise these potentials, digital food platforms have to be able to ‘reconfigure’ (Geels et al., 2015) what are often assemblages of interconnected household food practices, held in place by socio-technical systems, norms and habits (Fuentes and Samsioe, 2021). Major research questions are raised in relation to how this can be accomplished, what is required to make reconfigurations possible, and what are the sustainability implications?

This Special Section consists of five articles that provide empirical analyses of digital food platforms and their implications for shopping routines, localised food production and consumption, the re-configuration of food handling practices, the transformative potential of alternative food networks, and understandings of good

food. The articles are drawn from the Platforms project. This collaborative EU project aims to produce in-depth knowledge on how food practices in the home are affected by new innovations in food provisioning platforms. The project takes a comparative approach bringing together partners from Norway, Sweden, Ireland, Italy and Germany to explore if and how these innovative food platforms reconfigure household practices in these five countries. In this project, the dual goal has been to understand how and under what conditions do physical and digital food platform innovations work to promote sustainability change in practices, and how these sustainability changes in household food consumption practice can be stabilized and scaled up.

Making use of theories of practice and drawing on qualitative studies of the use of innovative food platforms, the papers in this special section attempt to develop theoretically informed and empirically grounded understanding of the appropriation of digital food platforms in everyday practices, the consumer work involved in integrating these platforms into household practices, and the resulting reconfiguration of these practices. Running through these papers is also a nuanced critical discussion of the sustainability effects of the changes in household practices brought about by the introduction of these new food platforms.

Samsioe and Fuentes examine the ways in which three types of digital food platforms becomes routinized within households’ everyday food shopping practices. Examining meal box, local food and food aggregation platforms, they demonstrate how platform-mediated food shopping practices are routinized in ways that could foster more sustainable food production and consumption. The authors illustrate that there are multiple ways of carving out a space for new (food) shopping routines. The digital platforms studied, and the modes of food shopping they enabled, replaced, complemented or reconfigured established food shopping practices. However, the key question is how such routinized practices can be stabilized to become the norm. In the cases analysed in this paper, only temporary stabilization was possible because of the built-dynamics. This accentuated the challenges faced by those trying to bring about sustainable food consumption transitions through the introduction of digital food platforms.

Cajic et al. consider the capacities of digital food platforms to foster more localized patterns of food production and consumption. Through a detailed analysis of two digital channels for food provisioning, the potential of digital platforms to localize food production and consumption is demonstrated. Platforms form effective sites of knowledge exchange between local food producers

and consumers, with consumers gaining a greater understanding of food production, including crop failures and supply or delivery-related problems. Producers gain better understanding of the skills that consumers need to develop in order to prepare meals using locally sourced ingredients. In the process the relationship between producer and consumer is reconfigured away from a simple exchange relationship (of seller/ buyer) to one of collaboration, solidarity and increased levels of trust. While such platforms offer significant scope for localized food practices, there are negative impacts in relation to gendered divisions of labour with women overwhelmingly taking on the additional 'consumption work' involved in digitally mediated localized food provisioning.

Heidenstrom and Hebrok turn attention to the ways in which conventional kitchen and digital technologies interact (or integrate) in the performance of 'food handling' practices such as planning, acquisition, storage, cooking, and disposal. Using a range of qualitative data, they examine digital platforms for meal box schemes and online groceries, which are widely held as more sustainable options for household food provisioning when compared to in-store shopping. They find that meal box schemes generate rigid meal planning that does not cater for the full range of daily eating activities, such as snacking. In search of flexible meal planning, consumers thus turn to in-store shopping activities to complement their use of meal boxes, and in doing so the forecasted environmental savings related to food transportation and waste are undermined. When it comes to the use of online grocery shopping, not only is variety of eating occasions catered for but the consumer gains greater control over food stocks within the home. Failures to deliver, missing items and changes of mind over planned meals meant that top-up trips to food stores were still required, and due to the cost and inconvenience of delivery slots online shopping encouraged large-batch ordering of food items. They conclude that digital food platforms offer significant potential for shifting food consumption practices in more sustainable directions, but improvements in the production-side services together with adjustments to the kitchen infrastructures of domestic homes are required for this potential to be realised.

Debates about the transformative potential of digital technologies often focus on opportunities for alternatives to the market mode of provision. Generically reflected in popular terms such as the sharing economy (see, for example, Frenken and Schor, 2017), the emphasis is on the capacity of digital platforms to undermine capitalist monopolies of the ways in which goods and service are provisioned. O'Neill and colleagues explore these debates through an analysis of two digitally mediated alternative food networks (AFN) consisting of a community supported agriculture (CSA) and a food assembly (FA) scheme. among the key findings is that engagement in AFNs changed relationships with local foods, diverted surplus and unfamiliar foods away from waste streams, and supported the principles of circular economy. It does so because membership and commitment to such AFNs foster forms of reflexivity and creativity that generate new skills and competencies in food production and consumption. This creativity together with the col-

laborative consumption ethos of AFNs helped to overcome barriers related to reduced variety and flexibility in meal planning identified in other sustainable food initiatives, such as box schemes. They conclude that AFNs should be understood as grassroots innovations with empirical and policy attention required to understand the capacity for scaling-up such initiatives.

Finally, Dal Gobbo and colleagues investigate if and how digitalization makes alternative provisioning more 'practic-able'. Focusing on three digitally enabled alternative food provisioning platforms operating in Milan, Italy, the authors show how these digital food platforms actualize memories of and enable access to 'good foods', while simultaneously reproducing and redefining understandings and interpretations of good foods. The study identifies important differences between platforms. While the more conventional for-profit platforms Cortilia and Alveare treat food as an end in itself focusing on making this food available to consumers while reducing the time and energy it takes to shop, the for non-profit food platform Buonmercato frames food as a means towards a more sustainable and just society. This study thus illustrates the importance of the design of the digital food platforms. Inscribed into these platforms are socio-material scripts shaping how consumers understand food as well as how they relate to the food system and its stakeholders.

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