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THE PARTICULARITIES OF THE BEHAVIOR AND MOTIVATION OF THE CONSUMER OF ECOLOGICAL PRODUCTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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Abstract. The integration of the concept of sustainable development into the market economy is closely linked to a clear understanding of the motivations underlying the ecological behavior of consumers. The hypothesis of the study was that consumers in the Republic of Moldova are increasingly motivated to purchase ecological products, and their consumption behavior is influenced by factors such as awareness of health benefits, concern for environmental protection, income level, etc. The purpose of the study was to analyze the behavior and motivation of consumers of ecological products in the Republic of Moldova. To achieve this goal, the following tasks have been proposed: developing a questionnaire, conducting a survey and collecting data, analyzing the information obtained and formulating relevant conclusions. The methods used for the research consisted of studying domestic and foreign literature sources in the field, using the systemic approach method to study market phenomena and conducting a survey. Research results showed that in the current context, characterized by growing concerns about sustainability, climate change and the negative impact of industry on the environment, the behavior of consumers of organic products in the Republic of Moldova is becoming a topic of major interest, and the motivation for purchasing these products is constantly evolving. The initial hypothesis has largely come true. The analysis of the behavior and motivation of consumers in the Republic of Moldova showed that the orientation towards organic products is determined by factors such as awareness of health benefits, concern for environmental protection and social influences.

Keywords: *sustainable development, ecological behavior, consumer motivation, ecological products, ecological consumption.*

Rezumat. Integrarea conceptului de dezvoltare durabilă în economia de piață este strâns legată de o înțelegere clară a motivațiilor care stau la baza comportamentului ecologic al consumatorilor. Ipoteza studiului a fost că consumatorii din Republica Moldova sunt tot mai motivați să achiziționeze produse ecologice, iar comportamentul lor de consum este influențat de factori precum conștientizarea beneficiilor pentru sănătate, preocuparea pentru protecția mediului, nivelul veniturilor, etc. Studiul a avut drept scop analiza comportamentului și motivației consumatorului de produse ecologice din Republica Moldova. Pentru a atinge acest scop s-au propus următoarele sarcini: elaborarea unui chestionar, realizarea unui sondaj și colectarea datelor, analiza informațiilor obținute și formularea concluziilor relevante.

Metodele utilizate pentru cercetare au constatat în studierea surselor de literatură autohtonă și de peste hotare în domeniu, folosirea metodei abordării sistemice de studiere a fenomenelor de piață și realizarea unui sondaj. Rezultatele cercetării au demonstrat că în contextul actual, caracterizat de preocupări tot mai mari privind sustenabilitatea, schimbările climatice și impactul negativ al industriei asupra mediului, comportamentul consumatorilor de produse ecologice din Republica Moldova devine un subiect de interes major, iar motivația pentru achiziționarea acestor produse evoluează constant. Ipoteza stabilită inițial s-a adevărat în mare parte. Analiza comportamentului și motivației consumatorilor din Republica Moldova a arătat că orientarea către produsele ecologice este determinată de factori precum conștientizarea beneficiilor pentru sănătate, preocuparea pentru protecția mediului și influențele sociale.

Cuvinte cheie: *dezvoltare durabilă, comportament ecologic, motivarea consumatorilor, produse ecologice, consum ecologic*

1. Introduction

The implementation of the concept of sustainable development in a market economy cannot take place without a clear understanding of the motivation for consumers' environmentally friendly behavior. This information is essential both for identifying environmentally friendly products with a high potential for market acceptance and for developing effective strategies to influence consumer choices in favor of environmentally friendly options.

One of the main objectives of companies producing environmentally friendly goods is to analyze the behavior and motivation for the consumption of these products. Through this assessment, they can understand the essential factors that determine environmentally friendly consumption and integrate them into the development of the product range.

In addition to the individual level of enterprises, the analysis of the behavior and motivation for environmentally friendly consumption on a national scale is equally important. The results of such studies can be used to guide consumption towards more sustainable practices that are beneficial to society.

Consumer choices have a significant impact on the environment, both directly and indirectly. Direct influence includes aspects such as: increased emissions caused by consumption, changes in water, soil and air quality, waste generation and impact on the landscape. On the other hand, the indirect influence is even more extensive, because any product or service involves a chain of actions – from production, transport and storage, to sale and use – all of which have an effect on the environment [1].

To make environmentally responsible choices, the consumer must be informed about environmental issues, be aware of the impact of their choices on the environment, take into account the ecological effects of consumption when purchasing products and evaluate the ecological compatibility of products and choose sustainable options.

Stopping environmental degradation depends on the eco-responsible behavior of consumers, which requires an adequate level of motivation and ecological culture.

2. Materials and Methods

Sources of domestic and foreign literature are used regarding the assessment of consumer behavior and motivation of ecological products and the method of systemic approach to studying market phenomena is used.

A questionnaire was developed to understand how consumers from the Republic of Moldova perceive the importance of ecological aspects in the process of making purchasing decisions [2]. The research was conducted within the Department of Economic Theory and Marketing of the Technical University of Moldova. Research period 01.07.2024-01.11.2024. The size of the researched sample is formed by 171 respondents with the following geographical-demographic characteristics:

- by age: under 18 years old – 1.7%, from 18 to 24 years old – 69.8%, from 25 to 34 years old – 5.8%, from 35 to 44 years old – 5.2%, from 45 to 54 years old – 11.6%, from 55 to 64 years old – 1.2% and over 65 years old – 4.7%;
- by gender: men – 27.3% and women – 72.7%;
- by type of locality of residence: rural – 30.2% and urban – 69.8%;
- by region of locality of residence: north - 18%, center – 76.2% and south – 5.8%.

3. Survey results

The study conducted on the subject mentioned in the title of the article is based on a survey of respondents from the Republic of Moldova who were asked to answer several questions related to their behavior and motivation for choosing organic products for their own consumption. With reference to the structure of the researched sample, it is identified that it is dominated by people with advanced formal education (university and postgraduate) located in all three geographical regions (north, center and south) of Moldova, as well as in urban and rural environments in sizes proportional to the population. The majority of respondents have incomes below 10000 MDL, and a significant percentage (36.8%) earns below 3000 MDL. The higher categories (10001-15000 and over 15000 MDL) constitute approximately 34.5% of the total, indicating a segment of the population with higher incomes. The data suggest a polarization of incomes, with a relatively balanced distribution between low and medium to high incomes.

The survey results for the thematic questions are presented as follows. One of these questions is related to the awareness of the importance of environmental issues for each respondent and is presented in Figure 1.

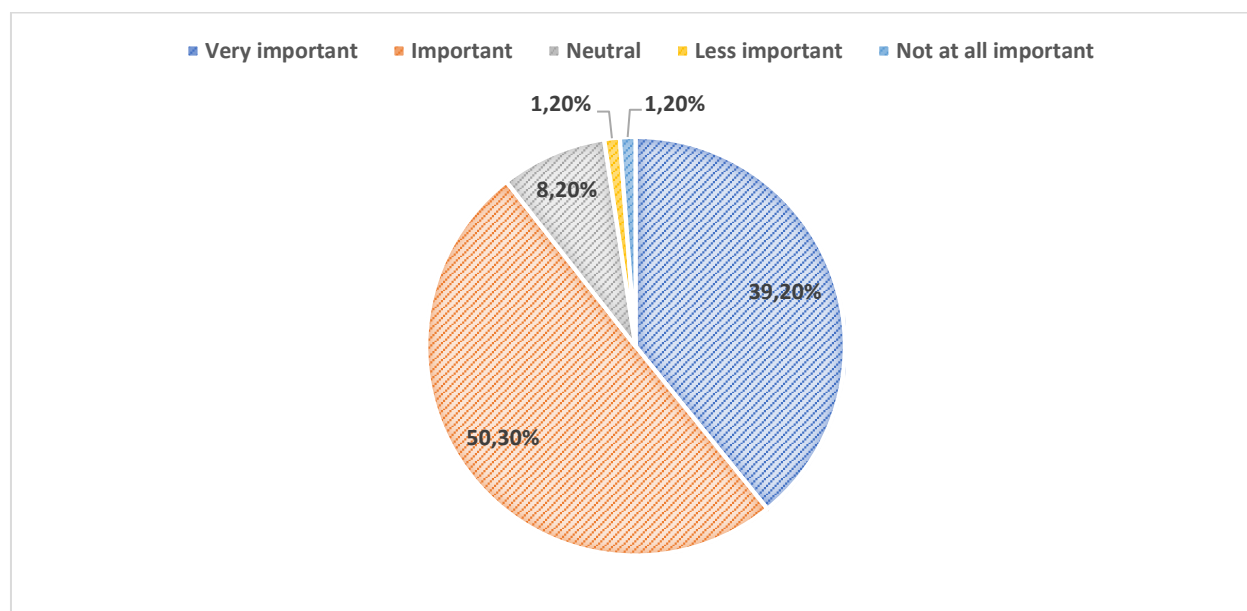


Figure 1. Respondents' answers to the question "How important are environmental issues to you?"

The analysis of the data obtained on this topic informs us that the overwhelming majority (89.5%) of respondents consider environmental issues to be either very important or important, which underlines a high awareness of the importance of this topic. Only an extremely small proportion (1.3%) consider them to be less important or not at all important, which indicates an almost general consensus on the relevance of environmental issues. The low level of neutrality (8.2%) suggests that the majority of participants have a strong opinion on the topic. The next question chosen was related to the level of information of the respondents about environmental issues and sustainability, and the results of the answers being presented in Figure 2.

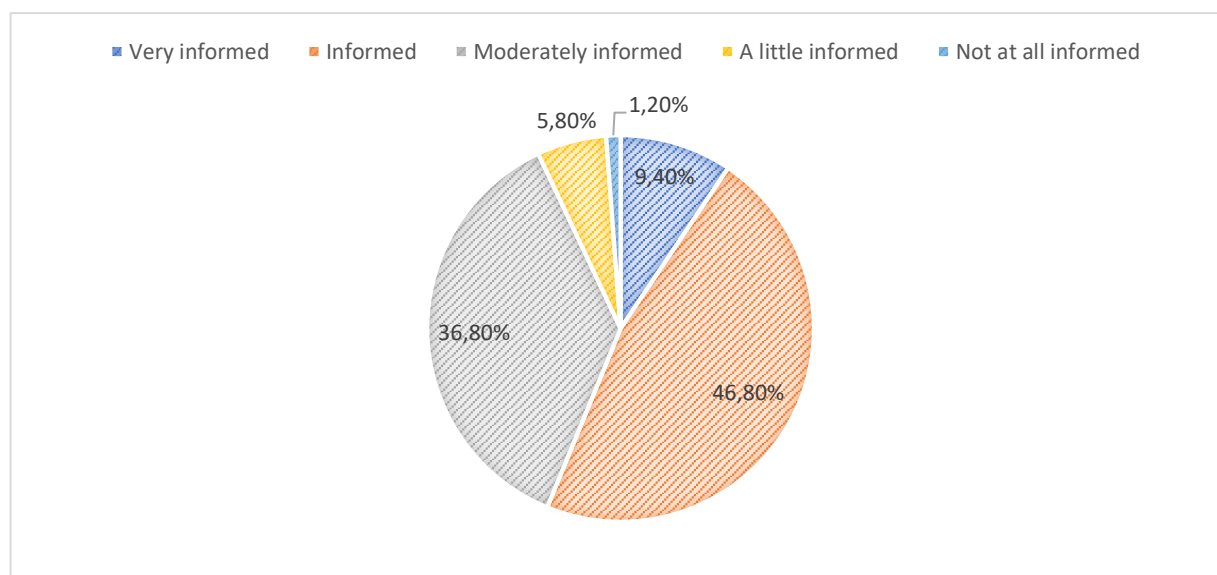


Figure 2. Respondents' answers to the question "To what extent are you informed about environmental and sustainability issues?"

Figure 2 shows the level of information of the respondents on environmental and sustainability issues and it informs us that over 90% of the respondents have some level of information ranging from moderate to very informed, which reflects a general awareness of the subject.

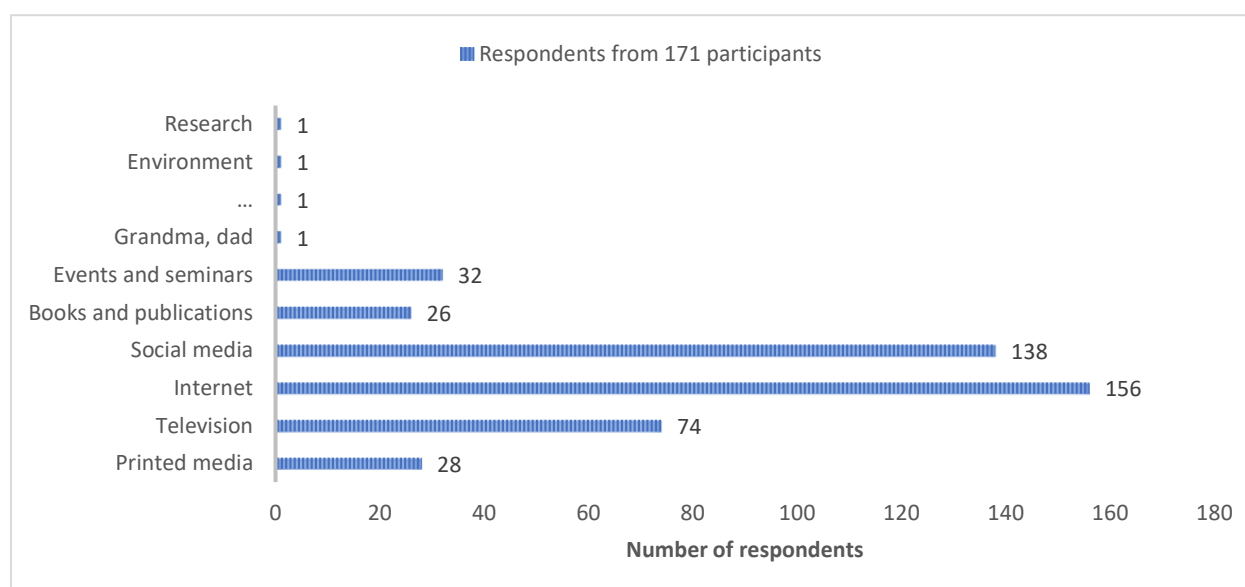


Figure 3. Respondents' answers to the question "Which of the following sources of information about environmental issues do you use?"

However, only about 9% consider themselves very informed, which highlights the need to more actively promote education and information on environmental and sustainability issues. The dominant level of information is “informed” (46.8%), which indicates a significant interest in this area.

The sources of information about environmental issues of the respondents presented in Figure 3 inform us that the dominance of the Internet and social media highlights the importance of digital platforms for disseminating information related to environmental issues. Traditional sources, such as print media and publications, are used less frequently, which may indicate a change in information behavior. Participation in events and seminars is reduced, highlighting a possible opportunity to stimulate active involvement by organizing more awareness-raising and educational activities.

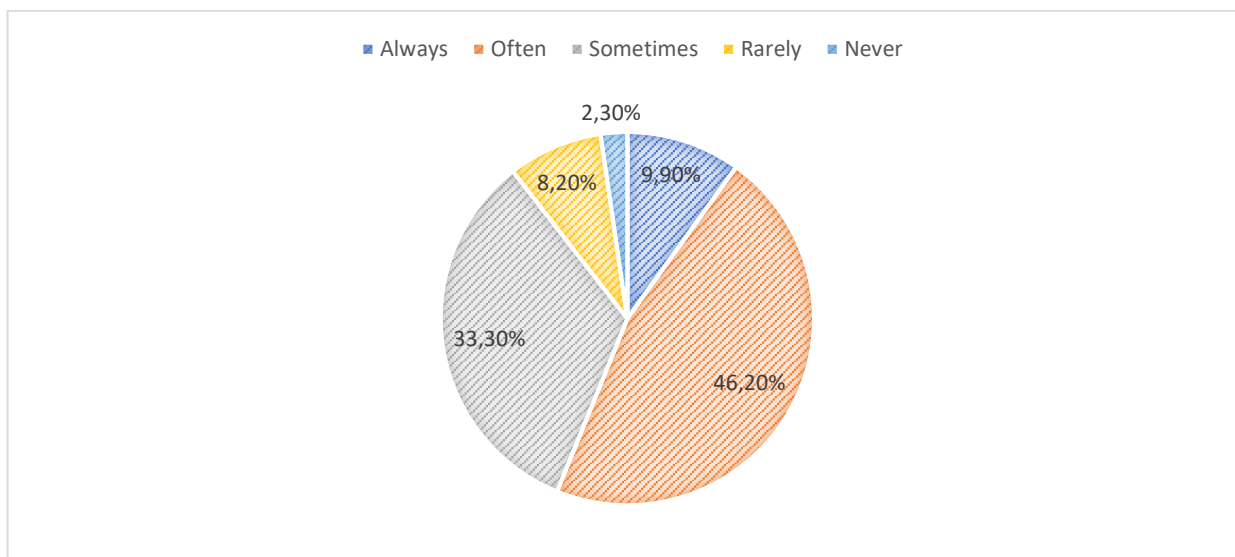


Figure 4. Respondents' answers to the question “How often do you consider environmental aspects when making purchasing decisions?”

The data in Figure 4, which represents respondents' responses to the question “How often do you consider environmental aspects when making purchasing decisions?”, informs us that the majority of respondents (46.2% + 33.3% = 79.5%) consider environmental aspects “often” or “sometimes”, which suggests a moderate concern for sustainability.

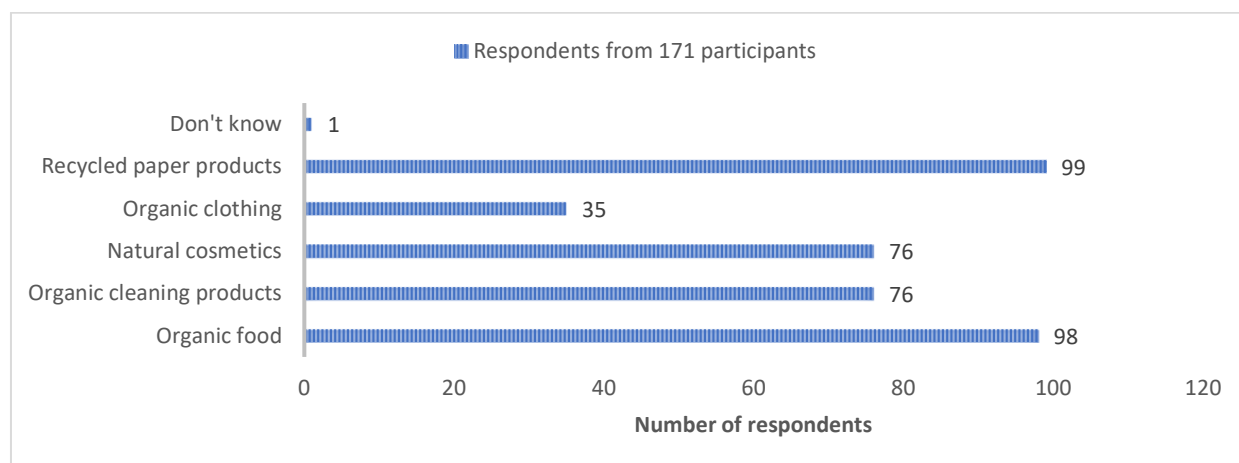


Figure 5. Respondents' answers to the question “What types of organic products have you purchased in the last 6 months?”

However, there is a significant percentage ($8.2\% + 2.4\% \approx 10.6\%$) that does not attach importance to this aspect and only 9.9% of respondents demonstrate a strongly environmentally oriented purchasing behavior. Although there is a positive trend among consumers to consider environmental factors, only a small percentage is consistent in this behavior. This suggests that more education and awareness regarding the impact of consumer choices on the environment is needed.

Analyzing the data in Figure 5, which represents the results of respondents' responses to the question related to the types of organic products purchased in the last six months, we can observe the following trends and conclusions:

- ✓ organic food is the most popular organic product purchased, with 57.3% of respondents choosing this option. This indicates an increased concern for health and healthy eating;
- ✓ recycled paper products are in second place, with 57.9% of respondents. This suggests an increased awareness of the importance of recycling and the use of sustainable resources;
- ✓ organic cleaning products and natural cosmetics are categories that were chosen by 44.4% of respondents. This shows a concern for using products that do not negatively affect the environment and are safer for health;
- ✓ organic clothing is the least popular category, with only 20.5% of respondents. This may indicate that organic clothing is still a relatively new concept or less accessible to many consumers;
- ✓ only 0.6% of respondents: chose this option don't know, indicating a good awareness of organic products available on the market.

Thus, the data shows a positive trend towards the consumption of organic products, with a preference for organic food and recycled paper products. There is also a significant concern for natural cleaning products and cosmetics, while organic clothing has a lower impact at the moment.

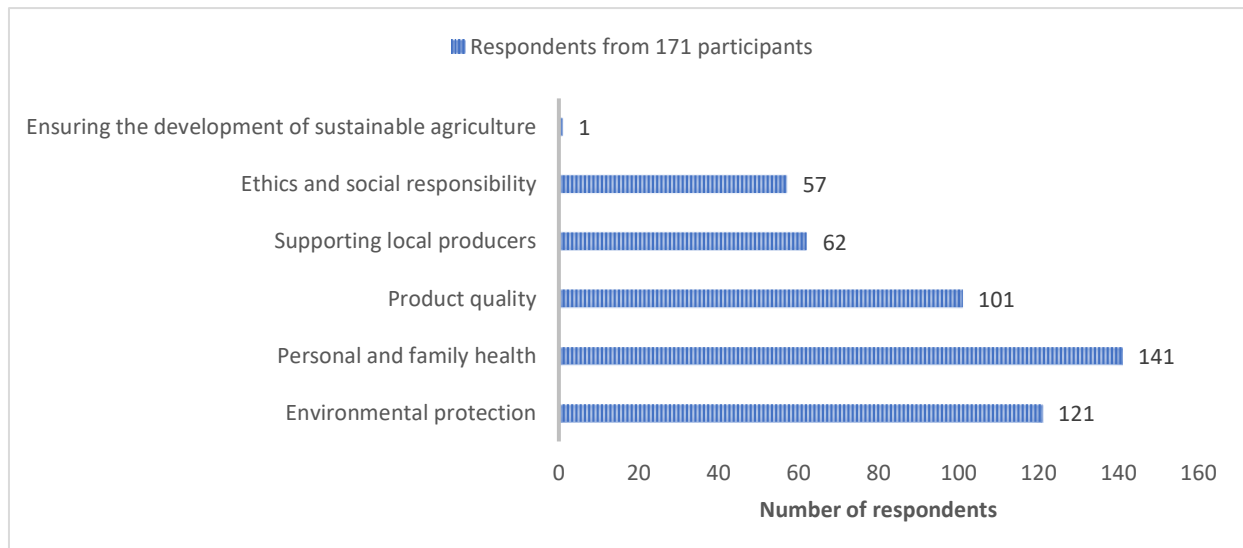


Figure 6. Respondents' answers to the question "What are the main reasons why you choose to buy organic products?"

Analyzing the data in Figure 6 with reference to the reasons for choosing organic products purchased, we can observe the following main reasons why people choose to buy organic products:

1. Personal and family health is the most frequently mentioned reason, with 82.5% of respondents. This highlights the importance that people attach to their health and that of their loved ones when choosing organic products.

2. Environmental protection is in second place, with 70.8% of respondents mentioning environmental protection as the main reason. This reflects an increased awareness of the impact on the environment and the desire to contribute to its preservation.

3. Product quality accounts for 59.1% of respondents who chose product quality as a reason. This suggests that organic products are perceived as being of higher quality.

4. Supporting local producers accounts for 36.3% of respondents who mentioned supporting local producers. This indicates a preference for the local economy and sustainability.

5. Ethics and social responsibility – 33.3% of respondents chose this reason, which shows a concern for ethical practices and social responsibility of companies.

6. Ensuring the development of sustainable agriculture accounts for only 0.6% of respondents who mentioned this reason, which suggests that this aspect is still little recognized or considered by consumers.

In this context, we can mention that the main reasons why people choose to buy organic products are personal and family health, environmental protection and product quality. Supporting local producers and ethical and social responsibility considerations are also important, but to a lesser extent.

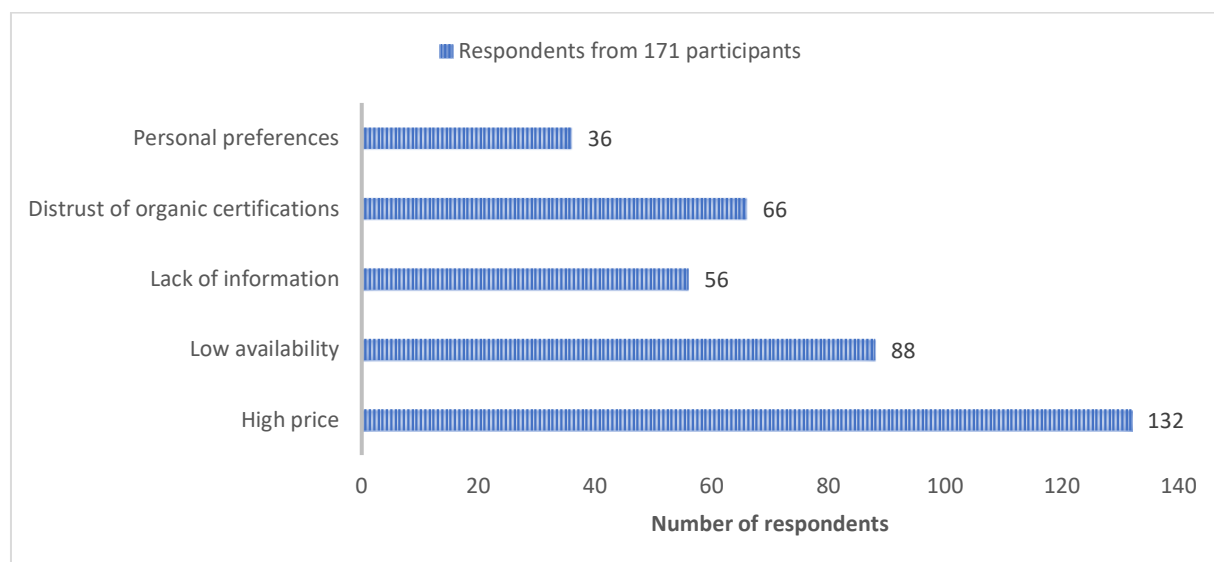


Figure 7. Respondents' answers to the question "What factors discourage you the most from buying organic products?"

Analyzing the data in Figure 7, which indicates the factors that most discourage the purchase of organic products, we obtained the following results:

- ✓ high price is the most frequently mentioned factor, with 77.2% of respondents. This indicates that the higher cost of organic products is a significant barrier for many consumers.
- ✓ low availability is in second place and 51.5% of respondents mentioned this factor as a deterrent. This suggests that organic products are not always easy to find in stores or on the market.
- ✓ distrust in organic certifications was mentioned by 38.6% of respondents. This may indicate a lack of transparency or trust in organic labels and certifications.

- ✓ about 32% of respondents mentioned lack of information as a deterrent. This shows that some consumers do not feel sufficiently informed about the benefits or characteristics of organic products.

Approximately 21% of respondents chose personal preferences as a factor. This suggests that some consumers simply prefer other types of products for various personal reasons. Generalizing the given topic, we could mention that the main factors that discourage the purchase of organic products are high price, low availability and distrust in organic certifications. Lack of information and personal preferences are also relevant factors, but to a lesser extent.

Analyzing the data in Figure 8, we can observe the following trends in terms of the influence of different sources on decisions to purchase organic products. Organic labels and certifications seem to have the greatest influence on purchasing decisions. Consumers are likely to attach great importance to these labels and certifications, as they provide a guarantee of the organic nature of the products. Family and friends also have a significant influence. Recommendations and opinions of those close to them play an important role in purchasing decisions. Social media has a moderate influence. Social platforms can be an important channel for promoting and informing about organic products. Mass media has a lower influence compared to other sources. This may indicate a decrease in the impact of traditional mass media in favor of digital channels. Advertisements seem to have the least influence on purchasing decisions. This may suggest that consumers are less influenced by direct advertising messages.

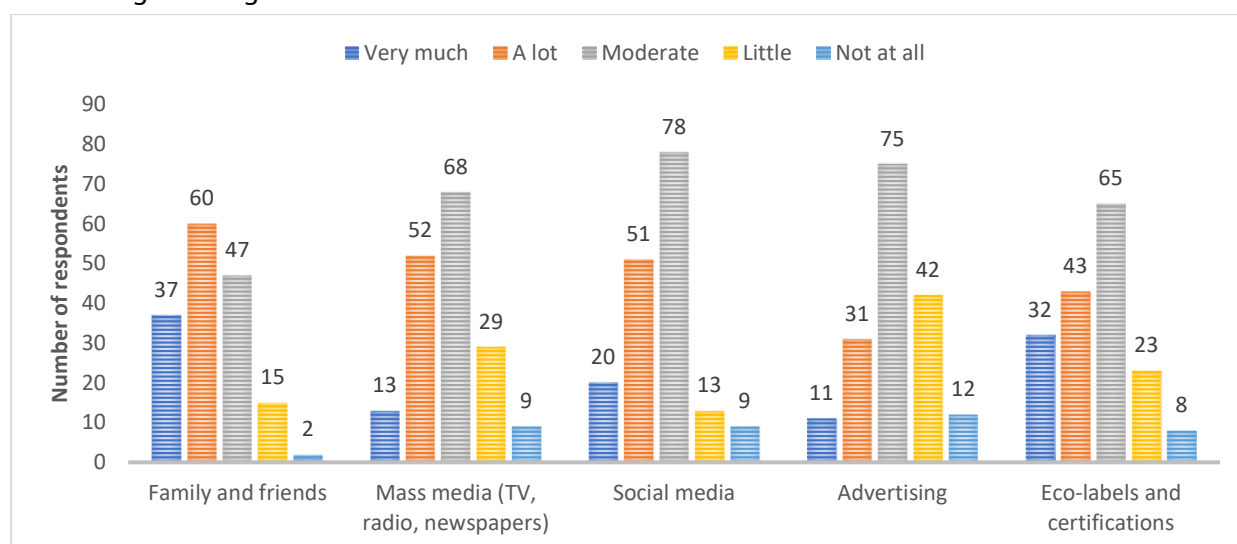


Figure 8. Respondents' answers to the question "How much do the following sources influence your decisions to purchase organic products?"

Thus, eco-labels and certifications, as well as recommendations from family and friends, are the most influential sources in purchasing decisions for organic products. Social media has a moderate influence, while mass media and advertising have a lower impact.

Analyzing the data in Figure 9, we can observe the following trends in terms of consumers' willingness to pay extra for organic products compared to conventional products. 24.6% of respondents are willing to pay up to 5% extra for an organic product. This indicates a moderate openness to additional costs for organic products. 9.4% of respondents are willing to pay between 6-10% extra and this suggests that a smaller part of consumers is willing to accept a more significant price increase. 8,8% of respondents are willing to pay between 11-

20% extra which indicates an even lower willingness for significant additional costs. 54.4% of respondents are not willing to pay more than 20% extra for an organic product.

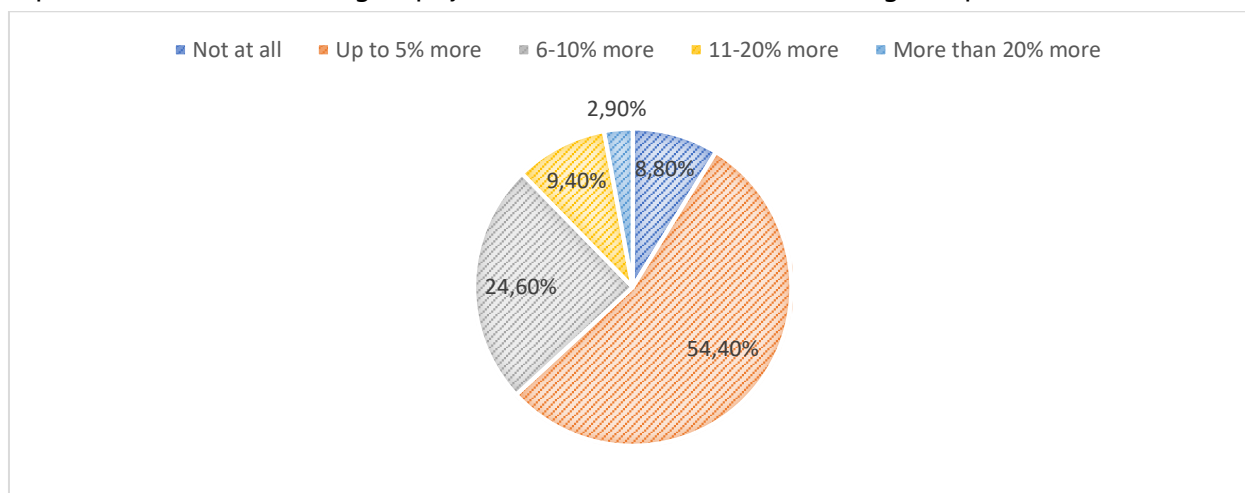


Figure 9. Respondents' answers to the question "How much are you willing to pay extra for an organic product compared to a conventional product?"

This result highlights that the majority of consumers consider a much higher price for organic products to be unjustified. A significant percentage of respondents (54.4%) are not willing to pay any extra for organic products. This may indicate a high price sensitivity and a preference for conventional products for financial reasons.

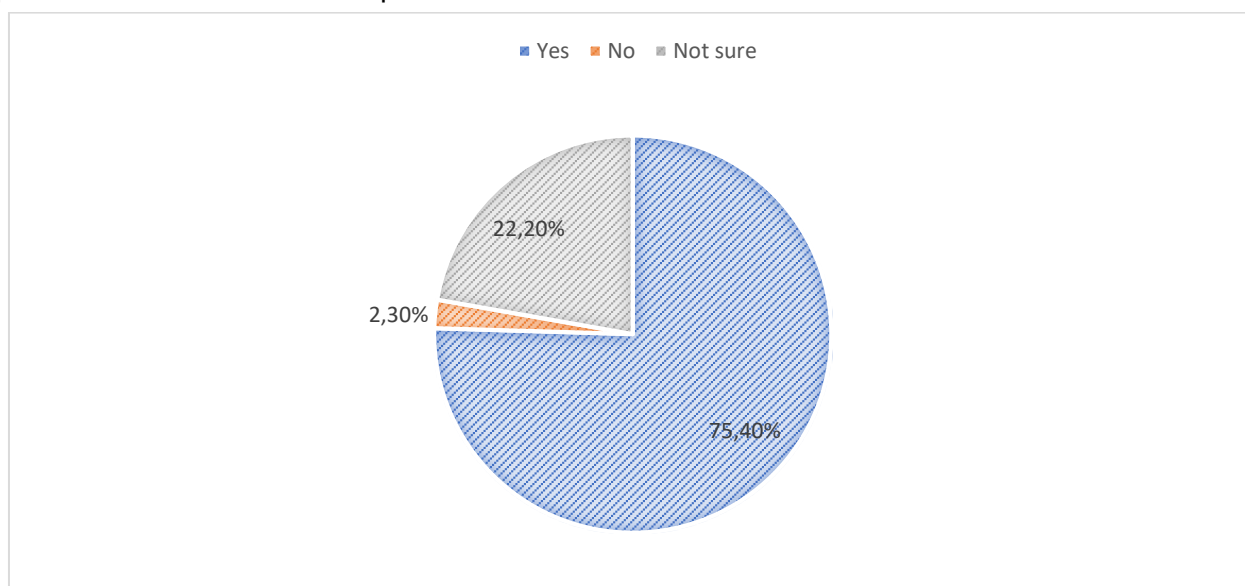


Figure 10. Respondents' answers to the question "Do you intend to purchase more organic products in the future?"

Analyzing the data in Figure 10, we can observe trends in consumer intention to purchase more organic products in the future. 22.2% of respondents responded that they intend to purchase more organic products in the future. This indicates that a minority, but significant, part of consumers is motivated to increase their consumption of organic products. 75.4% of respondents responded that they do not intend to purchase more organic products in the future. This suggests that the majority of consumers do not plan to change their purchasing behavior in favor of organic products. And a small percentage of respondents (2.4%) are unsure about their purchasing intentions in the future. This may indicate a lack of information or indecision related to the benefits or availability of organic products.

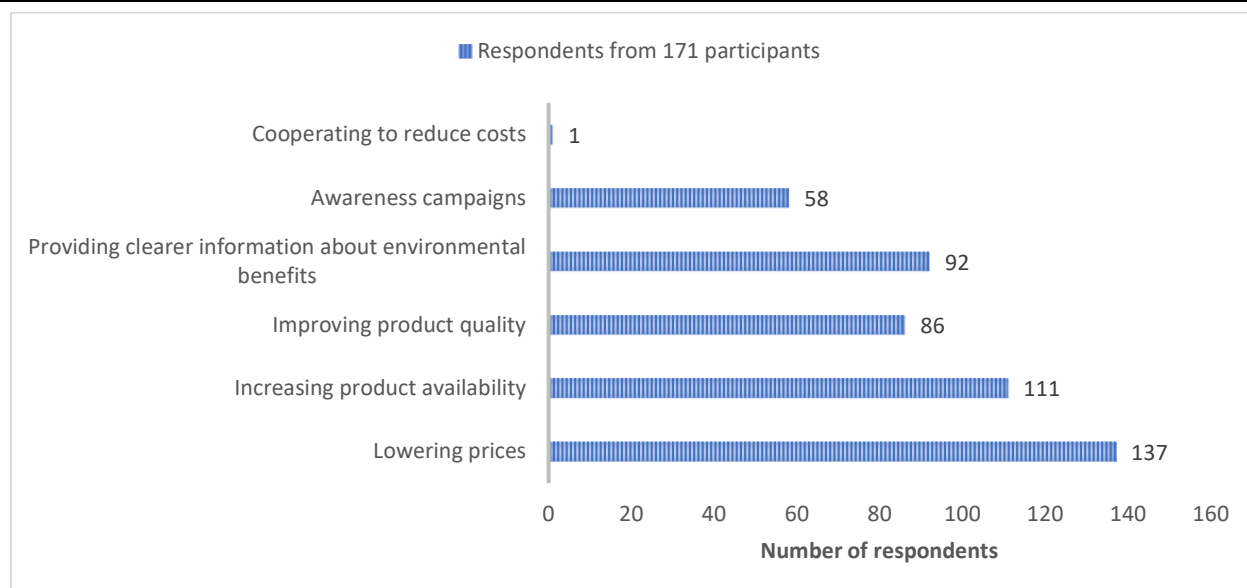


Figure 11. Respondents' answers to the question "What could companies do to encourage you to buy more organic products?"

Analyzing the data in Figure 11, we can see what measures companies could take, in the opinion of respondents, to encourage the purchase of organic products. Reducing prices is the most frequently mentioned measure, with 80.7% of respondents. This highlights the fact that price is a major barrier and that price reductions would have the greatest impact on purchasing decisions. 64.9% of respondents mentioned increasing product availability as an important measure, indicating that many consumers believe that organic products are not easy enough to find. 53.8% of respondents requested clearer information about organic benefits, suggesting that there is a need for transparency and education regarding the advantages of organic products. 50.3% of respondents mentioned improving product quality. This indicates that some consumers believe that organic products could be improved to be more attractive. 33.9% of respondents considered that awareness campaigns would be useful. This could help to educate consumers and increase interest in organic products. Only 0.6% of respondents mentioned cooperation to reduce costs, which suggests that this measure is considered of minor importance.

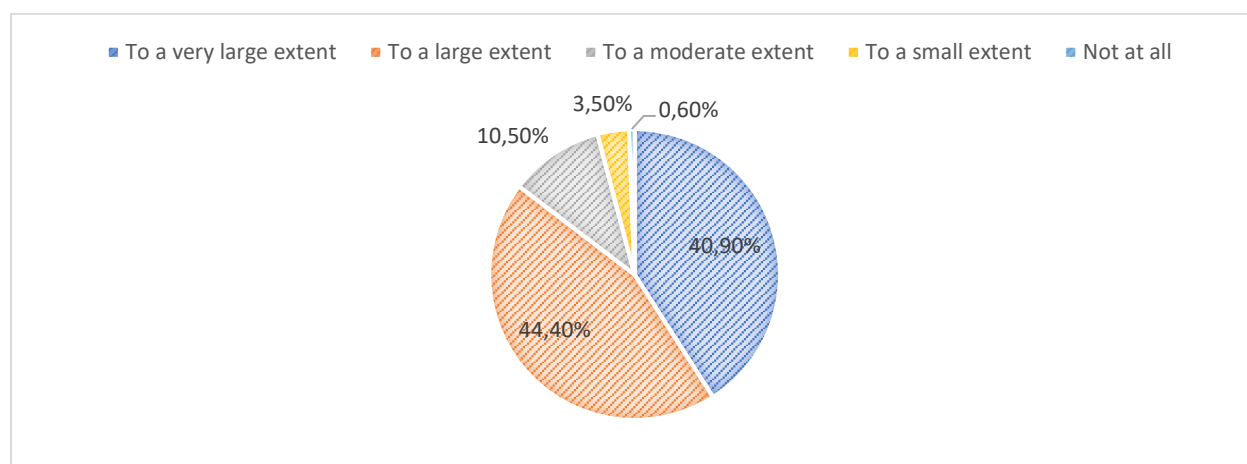


Figure 12. Respondents' answers to the question "To what extent do you think individual actions can contribute to environmental protection?"

Analyzing the data in Figure 12, we can see what the respondents' perceptions are regarding the contribution of individual actions to environmental protection. 44.4% of

respondents believe that individual actions can contribute to a moderate extent to environmental protection. This suggests that most people believe that each person can have an impact, but this is limited. 40.9% of respondents believe that individual actions can contribute to a large extent to environmental protection, which indicates a strong belief that individual efforts are significant. A smaller percentage of respondents (8.2%) believe that individual actions can contribute to a very large extent to environmental protection, reflecting a very optimistic perspective on the impact of personal actions. 5.3% of respondents believe that individual actions have a small impact in environmental protection, and this suggests some skepticism about the effectiveness of individual actions. Only 1.2% of respondents believe that individual actions have no impact on protecting the environment. This indicates that most people recognize at least some impact of their actions. In this context, we could mention that most respondents believe that individual actions can contribute to a moderate or large extent to protecting the environment, which reflects a general belief that personal efforts are important, even if their impact may vary.

Analyzing the data in Figure 13, we can see which green actions respondents have taken in the last 6 months. One of the actions would be recycling and this is the most frequently mentioned action, with 67.3% of respondents. This indicates that recycling is a widespread and accepted practice. 60.2% of respondents mentioned that they would use public transportation or other green transportation methods. This suggests a concern for reducing carbon emissions. 57.9% of respondents would take steps to reduce energy consumption and this reflects an awareness of the importance of energy conservation. 42.1% of respondents mentioned that they would reduce water consumption, which indicates a concern for the conservation of natural resources. Planting trees or participating in reforestation activities are activities that 21.6% of respondents would participate in. This shows a direct involvement in improving the environment. Thus, the most common ecological actions undertaken by respondents are recycling, using public or alternative transport and reducing energy consumption. These practices reflect a significant awareness and involvement in protecting the environment, although there are other actions that are less widespread.

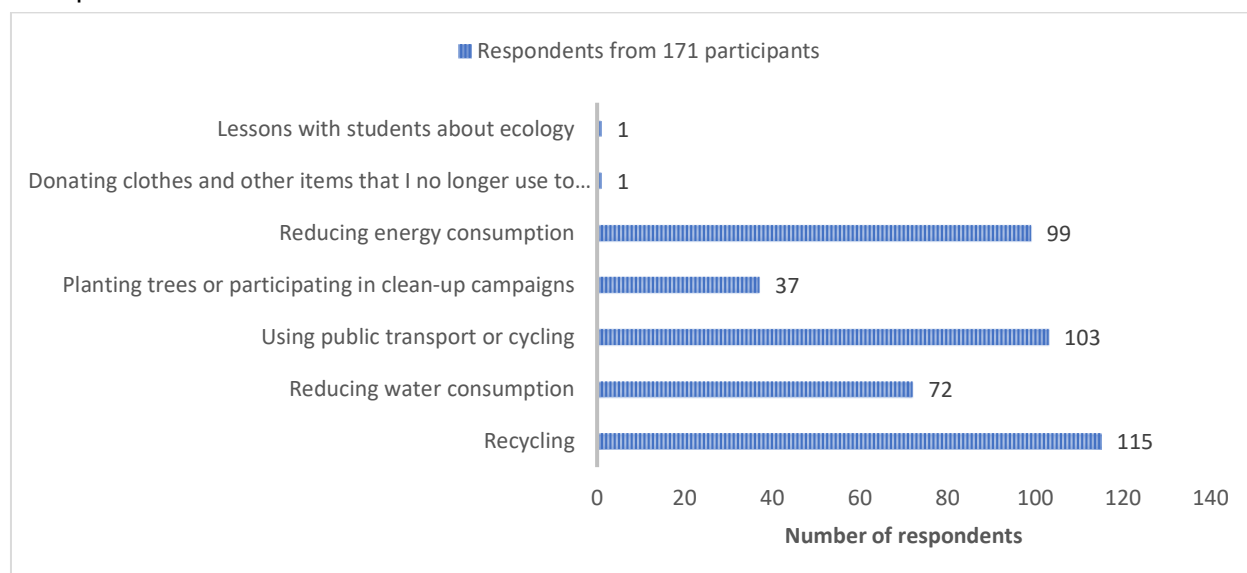


Figure 13. Respondents' answers to the question "Which of the following green actions have you taken in the last 6 months?"

4. Discussion

Consumer behavior towards organic products is an increasingly relevant topic in the current context, marked by concerns about sustainability, climate change and the negative impact of industry on the environment. Consumers in this category do not make decisions based only on price or brand, but also analyze the environmental factors of the products they buy.

An essential aspect of organic behavior is consumer motivation. Motivation, defined as the set of factors that influence a person's actions, includes needs and interests, stimuli and situational factors (Figure 14). In the context of consumption, motivation determines which products are purchased and for what reasons, thus influencing the impact on the environment.

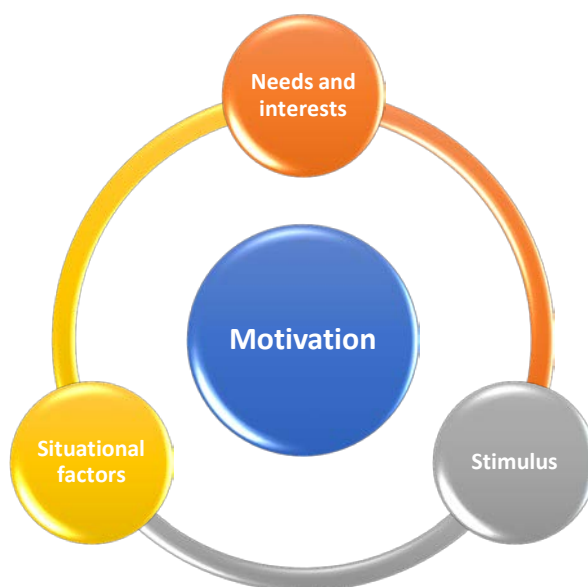


Figure 14. Components of consumption motivation.

The motivation for the consumption of ecological goods is constantly evolving. In particular, the adoption of stricter environmental regulations has stimulated the purchase of equipment designed to reduce harmful emissions, as well as the transition to environmentally friendly technologies.

At the same time, interest in the consumption of healthier food, sustainable products for daily use and other ecological goods for personal consumption is growing. This trend is determined not only by the increase in pollution levels, but also by people's increased sensitivity to the impact of environmental factors, a growing awareness of environmental problems and the development of environmental education.

The analysis of the motivation for the consumption of ecological products involves examining each essential component of this process (Figure 14). Motivations are relatively stable manifestations, reflecting the individual characteristics and values of each person (Figure 6).

Motives perform three essential functions: stimulation, direction and regulation [3]. The stimulation function determines a person's actions, behavior and activity. The directing function involves choosing and following a certain behavioral trajectory. The regulating function influences the way in which behavior is oriented either towards personal interests or towards collective goals, such as those of a company or community.

To understand the motivations for ecological consumption, it is essential to diagnose the environmental awareness of consumers. This analysis helps to answer some essential questions [4]:

1. How important is ecology in the consumer's consciousness (Figure 1)?
2. How do the six eco-psychological dispositions manifest themselves in everyday thinking and what is the relationship between them? These include:
 - ✓ subjugation – perceiving nature as an element that must be controlled;
 - ✓ submission – accepting the dominance of natural forces;
 - ✓ alteration – causing, consciously or unconsciously, damage to the environment;
 - ✓ indifference – lack of a clear attitude towards environmental problems;
 - ✓ necessity – an approach based exclusively on consumption;
 - ✓ collaboration – active support and cooperation with nature.
3. What specific features characterize the ecological consciousness of consumers (Figures 2 and 3)?

Identifying the dominant ecological disposition among consumers allows the application of effective methods of motivating ecological behavior. This contributes to the optimization of spending on behavioral influence both at the government level and in the strategies of producers of ecological goods and other market actors.

Humanity's attitude towards nature has evolved over time, going through several distinct stages [5]. In the stage of natural self-regulation, man acted as a predator, practicing hunting, fishing and gathering, minimally intervening in the ecosystem through reduced logging and building houses. The first stage of ecological imbalance begins when man becomes nomadic. Negative effects such as the destruction of vegetation, fires and migrations of people and animals appear. The second stage of ecological imbalance corresponds to the period when man becomes an agriculturalist. Soil degradation through burning and deforestation increases, leading to the disappearance of some plant and animal species and to landscape changes. The third stage of ecological imbalance begins when man becomes an explorer. During this period, the destruction of flora and fauna intensifies, and the excessive exploitation of the seas and oceans becomes a major problem. The next stage is that of ecological imbalance and here man becomes an inventor. Here, natural resources are intensively exploited, soils undergo wind and water erosion processes, and the impact on the environment becomes significant. The fifth stage of ecological imbalance coincides with the period when man becomes a wasteful consumer, where there is an intensive and unsustainable exploitation of resources, the depletion and destruction of some species, severe pollution of air, water and soil, as well as the emergence of the phenomenon of desertification. After this, the stage of transition to sustainability follows and man is considered a creator. During this period, the foundations of environmental protection are laid by creating nature reserves, parks and ecological quality standards. Low-waste technologies and sustainable practices are promoted to improve air and water quality. Currently, it is considered that we are approaching the future stages of the relationship with nature, with man having the significance of the leader. If we refer to Berdyaev's vision that states that "...power is a duty, not a right", it can be said that this stage would imply a moral and responsible commitment to environmental protection [6].

A key aspect of research on the motivation for consuming green products is the classification of consumers according to their involvement in environmental protection [7].

Thus, consumers are divided into three categories, namely true green, moderate green and green-like.

The market for green goods is still in a process of development, and the classification of consumers according to the motivation to adopt new products plays a key role. On this basis, consumers can be grouped as innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and conservatives.

In the domestic environment, it is easier to emphasize the rational reasons for adopting green consumption (Figure 5). Choosing cleaner foods, using green utensils for food preparation and installing high-quality water filters contribute to improving health, thus reducing spending on medicines and treatments. The use of green materials and sustainable equipment in industry and everyday life also has significant benefits.

Needs, according to Maslow's hierarchy theory, are classified into five categories (Table 1), frequently represented in the form of a pyramid: at the base are primary (essential) needs, and at the top, secondary (higher) needs [8].

Table 1

Maslow's classification of consumer motives according to the hierarchical model

Levels of needs	Needs groups	Examples of needs met by consuming degreaser and fresh fruits and vegetables
Primary needs	1. Physiological needs necessary for survival: food, water, sex and recreation. 2. Needs for safety and confidence in the future: protection against physical and other dangers (fear, pain, etc.) and confidence that physiological needs will be satisfied in the future. 3. Social needs: love, tenderness, belonging to any social structure and identification. 4. Esteem needs: in personal achievements, recognition by people around them. 5. Self-actualization needs: growth-development, realization of personal potential possibilities and abilities.	1. Nutritional (biological) value. 2. Necessity determined by various conditions, while ensuring safety and harmlessness. 3. Protecting the environment of children.
Higher needs		

Given the increasing importance of consuming cleaner products for the health of the population, as well as the need to identify development trends of enterprises in this sector, the analysis of the motivation behind the consumption of cleaner food becomes extremely relevant.

Table 1 correlates the needs satisfied by consuming cleaner fruits and vegetables with Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Although the needs in the third and fourth groups are not usually activated, in certain situations they can influence the decision to consume cleaner food products.

If the ecological compatibility of products is essential for satisfying basic needs (such as health), a greater number of consumers are willing to pay for it (Figure 9). The reason is simple: the positive impact on health is immediate and easy to observe. On the other hand, fewer people are ready to invest in "green" products that meet secondary needs (e.g. luxury or status), as these are a priority only for those with specific requirements or high standards [9].

Therefore, producers of ecological goods must prioritize satisfying consumers' primary needs (Figure 11). These influence purchasing decisions more quickly and directly than complex or abstract needs.

With the increase in awareness of environmental issues and the evolution of technologies, some needs become more pronounced, others fade. In order for a higher-level need (e.g., social responsibility) to become a main reason for choosing a product, basic needs (e.g., access to safe food) must be at least partially satisfied. This principle reflects the connection between sustainability and Maslow's pyramid – without a solid foundation, complex motivations cannot take root.

People's ecological interests and needs manifest themselves both at the individual level and as members of social groups and associations and are classified on several levels. National ecological interests reflect a society's aspiration to maintain a healthy environment, which allows for the normal development of life and the reproduction of future generations. Regional ecological interests are influenced by the level of pollution specific to each region. The population in areas more affected by pollution has a stronger concern for environmental protection, compared to regions less affected. Local ecological interests are found in communities living near sources of intense pollution, such as metallurgical plants, uranium mines, nuclear power plants or chemical complexes, being directly affected by the increased anthropogenic impact. And personal ecological interests are specific to individuals who directly feel the effects of environmental quality on their health.

Producers of goods, such as water treatment equipment, can also be consumers of green products. Other consumers include the government, acting through regulations and public procurement, companies and international organizations, as well as various commercial intermediaries. Each of these groups has distinct interests.

Thus, end users are primarily concerned with benefits such as protecting health, reducing acquisition and maintenance costs (Figure 6). In contrast, consumer-producers are interested not only in environmental aspects, but also in the economic profitability of products. Government institutions emphasize the ecological and economic safety of the country, stimulating the national economy, increasing competitiveness, improving the health of the population, and generating budget revenues.

Companies and international organizations have specific requirements, such as reducing emissions during the use and disposal of products, as well as optimizing resource consumption. On the other hand, intermediaries are more interested in price, profit margins, and increasing sales volume.

In general, ecological needs and interests can be deliberately influenced and shaped at different levels. However, it is important to distinguish between elastic and inelastic demand in the field of ecological products, each of which has a different impact on the market.

If an insufficient level of motivation and demand is found in the decision-making process regarding the manufacture and marketing of ecological products, it is necessary to assess the appropriateness of their production. It is also necessary to analyze the effectiveness of the implementation of measures to stimulate consumption, by comparing the expected costs with the desired results.

Incentives for the consumption of ecological products can be structured at three essential levels: the market, organizational culture and state regulations. At the market level, incentives are mainly aimed at promoting sales. Among the measures used are tax reductions and exemptions, financial support, credit and leasing facilities, the provision of free samples

and other benefits aimed at encouraging the consumption of ecological products. At the level of organizational culture, incentives are determined by the values, norms and traditions accepted by a community or organization. Standards of behavior, ethics, morality and aesthetic principles influence individual and collective choices. There are numerous examples in which polluting production has been banned or stopped due to the opposition of society, which does not recognize it as acceptable. At the legislative and administrative level, regulations imposed by authorities guide economic behavior towards more sustainable practices. Sanctioning systems, restrictions imposed by laws and punitive economic, administrative or even criminal measures contribute to the compliance of economic agents. Thus, many companies are determined to invest in waste treatment equipment and other ecological solutions to avoid sanctions and comply with the imposed norms.

By combining these three levels of incentives, the consumption and production of green goods can be effectively supported and developed.

In the process of stimulating the consumption of green products, four main categories of factors that need to be considered are distinguished, namely price, quality, convenience and availability [10]. Green products usually have a higher cost than conventional alternatives. Even environmentally conscious consumers may be reluctant to pay a premium price for sustainability. Demand for these products decreases as the price increases, especially if the difference exceeds 50% compared to a regular product (Figure 9). However, loyal or high-income consumers are willing to pay more for green products. Also, clear information about their benefits is essential to justify a higher price (Figure 8). Most consumers are less willing to compromise on quality than on price. An eco-friendly product must offer competitive features, such as high performance, attractive appearance, comfort or technical advantages, and these aspects must be communicated effectively (Figures 10 and 11). Eco-friendly products must be easy to use. Consumers accept only minor inconveniences, such as refilling reusable containers, but complicated actions can discourage purchase. Few consumers actively search for eco-friendly products. Their lack in frequented stores leads buyers to choose less environmentally friendly alternatives.

Situational factors directly influence purchasing decisions and can cause an increase or decrease in the consumption of eco-friendly products. Among such factors, we could primarily mention environmental events and crises. Ecological disasters, excessive pollution or health-related problems can significantly increase the demand for eco-friendly products. For example, a water pollution crisis can stimulate sales of filters and purifiers. Another factor would be the context of the interaction between the consumer and the product, which is manifested in the fact that positive or negative experiences with an organic product can influence long-term consumption behavior. Merchandising strategies would also be a situational factor. Strategic placement of organic products in stores can significantly increase sales, since approximately 70% of purchasing decisions are made directly in the store [11,12].

Understanding consumer motivations and the factors that influence their purchasing decisions is essential for the development of the organic product market (Figure 12). By combining effective incentive strategies – at the consumer, producer and state levels – and by adapting to situational factors, responsible and sustainable consumption behavior can be encouraged (Figure 7). Thus, the perception of a product varies depending on the individual needs and expectations of consumers, which influences the way it is promoted and positioned on the market.

The consumer's final decision to purchase a product is influenced not only by its essential attributes, but also by other significant characteristics for him, such as prestige, current trends, durability or price. It is important to note that there are no products that fully satisfy all the components of an individual's motivation [13,14].

The most relevant motivational components are those that, at a given moment, have the greatest importance for the consumer. Depending on them, he may accept certain compromises or give up products that would satisfy other, less urgent needs. In addition, the motivational structure varies from one person to another, both in terms of the combination of motivational factors and their intensity. Moreover, even for the same individual, the influence of different motivational components can fluctuate over time.

To steer demand towards environmentally responsible consumption, which is essential for sustainable economic development, it is necessary to analyze how environmental attributes are perceived by consumers in the decision-making process (Figure 13). Each product has multiple characteristics, some of which may be related to environmental protection [15,16].

5. Conclusions

Following the analysis of the behavior and motivation of the consumer of organic products in the Republic of Moldova, it was found that the trend towards organic products is influenced by factors such as awareness of health benefits, concern for the environment and social influences. At the same time, high price and limited accessibility remain the main obstacles to the adoption of this type of products on a large scale.

The study also reveals that education and information campaigns play an essential role in strengthening consumer confidence in organic products. In order to stimulate consumption, more active involvement of producers, traders and authorities is necessary through support policies, reducing costs and increasing the availability of organic products on the market.

Thus, the development of the organic sector in the Republic of Moldova depends on a joint effort, combining both consumer demand and government and private initiatives to make organic products more accessible and attractive.

In order to encourage the adoption of organic products in the Republic of Moldova and overcome the identified barriers, a set of concrete actions is needed. These can be divided into several directions:

- ✓ educating and raising awareness of consumers, which would involve organizing national information campaigns on the health and environmental benefits of organic products, integrating organic education in schools and promoting a sustainable lifestyle, as well as creating online and offline platforms where consumers can find out about local producers of organic products.
- ✓ stimulating the production and accessibility of organic products by implementing support policies for local producers of organic products (subsidies, tax breaks, advantageous loans), developing an adequate infrastructure for the distribution of organic products (specialized markets, dedicated stores, eco sections in supermarkets) and creating cooperation networks between organic farmers to reduce production and distribution costs.

- ✓ monitoring and controlling organic standards to prevent „greenwashing” (false labeling of products as organic) and introducing clear and informative labels on the packaging of organic products.
- ✓ increasing financial accessibility such as stimulating the purchase of organic products through tax breaks, vouchers or subsidies for consumers, creating support programs for vulnerable groups so that they can also have access to organic products and supporting innovations in organic production to reduce costs and, implicitly, final prices for consumers.

Widespread adoption of organic products in the Republic of Moldova requires an integrated approach, involving both consumers and producers, authorities and retailers. Through education, financial support, clear regulations and increasing the accessibility of organic products, a favorable environment for sustainable consumption can be developed.

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