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## Article

# Ageing and responsible consumption

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## Ageing and Responsible Consumption

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**Abstract:** Multiple studies show that the contemporary society is increasingly more responsible and ask companies to prove responsible citizens, too. The current study aims to a better understanding of the role of age plans in responsible consumption attitudes and values. Investigating the literature in the field, including studies developed worldwide as well as on the Romanian market. The research documents that the younger adults are more responsible and greener than older persons. Nevertheless, the older the consumer, the more trustful in the personal impact of her/his consumption is. The older adults seem to be less inclined towards responsible buying. The available data also suggests that the age gap is closing, and older consumers tend to be increasingly more responsible.

**Keywords:** responsible consumers; ageing and responsible consumption; older consumers.

### Argument

The increased percentage of the aging population has generated attention in the studies from the consumer research domain (Rees Jones & Hyde, 2008). It is well known that the aging process comes along with a series of sensory, cognitive, and lifestyle changes, all affecting people's consumer behavior (Brand & Markowitsch, 2010). Although numerous studies approached changes in the consumer behaviors and consumer decisions later in life (e.g., Carpenter & Yoon, 2015; Moschis, 2012), few studies focused on responsible consumption at old age (see for example Diprose et al., 2019; Pinto et al., 2011; Urien & Kilbourne, 2011).

Responsibility is an increasingly hot topic, both when considering the organizational dimension (social responsibility) and the personal one (responsible consumption). Various literature reviews stress the complexity of factors influencing CSR as well as the impact it has on organizations (Vázquez-Carrasco & López-Pérez, 2013; Schmitz & Schrader, 2015). Among them is also the influence of CSR on the buying behavior of consumers (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore & Hill, 2006; Mohr, Webb & Harris, 2001; Servaes & Tamayo, 2013), documenting a positive effect on consumer loyalty and buying, while the lack of CSR leads to enhanced consumer-related problems in times of crises. Many studies document how CSR positively influences the buying behavior of consumers (Getzner & Grabner Krauter, 2004; Mohr, Webb, & Harris, 2001). Nevertheless, the concept of a "responsible" consumer is a complex element, influenced both by external and internal factors (Balderjahn et al., 2013; Caruana & Chatzidakis 2014). Most of the previous studies investigate the responsible behavior of young and adult consumers. The older buyers are overlooked, maybe because of the difficulty to investigate them. Studies developed worldwide, such as Nielsen consumer surveys, document an increase in the responsibility of the consumers, while the sales of organic/fair trade products are growing. The same studies show that the younger the consumer, the more responsible s/he tends to be.

The COVID-19 pandemic seems to have determined new patterns of shopping differentiated on age, gender and income (Valaskova, Durana, & Adamko, 2021), giving an additional impulse to responsible buying and sharing consumption (Degli Esposti, Mortara, & Roberti, 2021). Also, for

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companies, it has been an occasion for more authentic and relevant responsible behavior (He, & Harris, 2020).

In the current paper, we present a narrative literature review (Green, 2006) on studies that approached responsible consumption among older people. We select mainly studies conducted in Europe and North America, where responsible consumption discourse is mostly present. We aim to answer the following research questions: (1) Are there any particularities of responsible consumption at an older age? (2) To what extent we can find responsible consumption values/behaviors in older people in comparison with younger age categories; (3) What are the typical values/actions older people share or engage, that could be associated with responsible consumption. The current paper will deepen the discussion on the relationship between the aging process and consumer behavior, by focusing on “responsible consume”. Furthermore, we will discuss the implications of the findings for understanding the consumption patterns of older people.

### **Motives for responsible consumption**

Socially responsible consumers are persons who consider social and environmental aspects as key elements in the buying-decision processes and who act aiming a positive impact on the natural and social environments. To various extents, all people might be ecological and socially conscious but not all of them act responsibly to the same degree, with consistency, and perseverance. Maybe the first typology at a nationwide level was developed by Roberts (1995), for the United States, identifying four clusters labeled Middle Americans, Socially Responsible, Browns, and Greens. A socially responsible individual, who is also with strong environmental concerns, tends to be older and with lesser incomes although higher educated than other clusters.

Studies document an increasingly more responsible consumer worldwide. Nevertheless, we recommend caution related to these studies. On one hand, worldwide studies are too general, blurring country-specificities. For instance, consumers in developing countries present themselves as more responsible and active, than those in developed economies (Crişan, Zbucnea, & Moraru, 2017). On the other hand, there is a (significant) gap between intentions/ declarations/ attitudes and actual behavior (Zbucnea, 2013; for organic food see Thøgersen, 2010). This is related both with the strength of the motivation to be responsible, as well as with the knowledge that the person has on the impact of her/his behavior or on how responsible are the brands s/he purchases.

Why consumers are increasingly more responsible is a complex question. The answer depends on many factors, most of them related to consumers, but also the specific market and society. For instance, for the organic food market, some contextual factors to consider would be the information available, the national labeling system and how aware consumers are of this, the economic and political regulation and standards (Thøgersen, 2010).

In the case of food & beverage consumption, health concerns are important, the bio/organic products being also considered better in quality and without health risks. Nevertheless, studies on various markets picture many variations and specific situations (Hughner, McDonagh, Prothero, Shultz, & Stanton, 2007). Nine motives have been identified in various studies for organic food purchases: Health and nutritional concern; Superior taste; Concern for the environment; Food safety, lack of confidence in the conventional food industry; Concern over animal welfare; Support of local economy; More wholesome; Nostalgia; and Fashionable/Curiosity. Also, this specific market is positively influenced by the beliefs in the attributes and benefits of organic food, which are more relevant than search and experience attributes (Massey, O'Cass, & Otahal, 2018).

A study on the Greek market identified four clusters of consumers of organic products. The largest cluster is that of “the explorers” – married, older women. It is followed by “the price-sensitive”, formed by low educated, married, young women, conscious of quality and health. The next cluster, almost as large as the previous is formed by “the greens” who are very educated, environmentally conscious young to middle-aged consumers. The last cluster is “the motivated”, formed by young to

middle-aged buyers who have a positive attitude toward the idea of organic. Some studies also show that on certain markets, organic food is also considered tastier to some extent (Fotopoulos, & Krystallis, 2002; Aertsens, Verbeke, Mondelaers, & Van Huylenbroeck, 2009) or more nutritious (Hutchins & Greenhalg, 1997; Tandon, Jabeen, Talwar, Sakashita, & Dhir, 2021). Another study, on Japanese adults up to 65 years old, revealed that health-oriented purchases are consistent, but they are reinforced by environmental and animal-friendly concerns (Tandon, Jabeen, Talwar, Sakashita, & Dhir, 2021). Interestingly, the study shows that purchases might take place even if consumers have doubts about the authenticity of organic food.

A review of Aertsens, Verbeke, Mondelaers, and Van Huylenbroeck (2009) of the personal factors influencing organic food consumption shows a series of values underlining this behavior: security, hedonism, universalism, benevolence, stimulation, self-direction, and conformity. The relationship between the preference for organic food and the level of education has not been documented since studies over time and in various regions are contradictory, probably other factors being more relevant on some markets. Age seems to be also a determinant – younger households, as well as women of 30-45 years old with children, tend to purchase organic food (Paul, & Rana, 2012).

We observed that reasons related to organic products are mainly personal in nature, the responsible dimension tends to be oriented toward consumers' health, as well as that of their family, as well as buying quality products. The environmental and social dimensions seem to follow. The younger, as well as the regular consumers, seem to be more environmentally concerned than the other groups (Aertsens, Verbeke, Mondelaers, & Van Huylenbroeck, 2009).

While some consumers declare they believe responsible products worthing more money than they are willing to pay, some others declare that price impedes buying such products – as in the case of organic products (Worner & Meier-Ploegger, 1999). General data document that respondents are increasingly willing to pay more for organic and responsible products (Fotopoulos, & Krystallis, 2002).

Another specific of responsible consumption is related to environmental concerns. It seems that people and organizations all over the world are more concerned about the environment and global climate change. These concerns are to some extent embedded in the buying-decision process. Being responsible in terms of environmental-related behavior is two-faceted. It is both related to a normative context, as well as with a planned-behavior context (Lee & Shin, 2010). Studies show that attitude towards the environment has a strong emotional component, and people experience pleasure and satisfaction while acting pro-environment (Lee & Shin, 2010, pp. 122-123). Another favorable drive for environmental-friendly behavior is the regulatory framework; people tend to comply especially when they perceive some personal benefits related to such behavior, but also moral and social aspects are to be considered (Lee & Shin, 2010, p. 124). Altruism, as well as perceived consumer effectiveness, are an enhancer of environment-responsible behavior (Straughan, & Roberts, 1999).

In terms of demographic characteristics, it is generally believed that environmentally conscious consumers are young people. Nevertheless, the evidence is not unequivocal (Straughan, & Roberts, 1999). One should also consider that the environmentally-conscious groups identified in the past decades are now much older, are part of other age groups, while their values and behavior might have not changed significantly in connection to the environment. There is more agreement on the ideas that women are more environmentally concerned than men, and that the higher educated are also more conscious, but still, some studies are not supporting strongly these either.

Eberhart and Naderer (2017) show that the motives and decision-making processes related to sustainable purchases are rather simple in nature, while the drives are both personal and environmental-related. This study concentrates on personal care products. In the case of sportswear and apparel, a study on a young-adults sample, show a willingness to purchase sustainable products and even to pay more for such products, but still, this would not be the most important purchase driver – design, comfort, and quality are more relevant factors for decision-making (Baier, Rausch, & Wagner, 2020). Buying sustainably in this study was tightly related to protecting the environment. Nevertheless, the hedonic approach is more important, aspect proved

also by the low acceptance to buy less to be more sustainable. Another study on a young-adult population highlighted as relevant drivers the need for uniqueness and the desire to have a positive contribution to society (Andrei, Gazzola, Zbucnea, & Alexandru, 2017).

Various studies support the idea that people, especially younger adults and women, are aware of the importance of sustainability and that they could have a positive contribution. At the same time, these studies show that the public believes that the level of information on the matter is not satisfying and more data and education is needed (Baier, Rausch, & Wagner, 2020; Coelho, Chkoniya, Madsen, & Figueiredo, 2020; Zbucnea, 2013). In this framework, labeling and packaging might influence the buying decisions (see also Galati, Schifani, Crescimanno, & Migliore, 2019; Phipps, et al., 2013; Seifi, Zulkifli, Yusuff, & Sullaiman, 2012). Nevertheless, the level of information is not the only factor justifying the observed intentions-actual behavioral gap when considering green and sustainable products (Groening, Sarkis, & Zhu, 2018; Zbucnea, 2013).

Studies on socially responsible buying show that it is influenced mainly by attitudes, followed by subjective norms (Han & Stoel, 2017). Attitudes' impact is moderated by ethical concerns, both related to the environment and human rights, with a preponderance of the first ones. The power of subjective norms varies on markets – for instance, it is stronger on the apparel market than on the food and tourism ones (Han & Stoel, 2017). Studies generally show a wide variety of factors, grouped into personal, environmental, and behavioral. At the same time, they also show great complexity and variance of situations, an interdependency between various factors, that their dynamics vary in time, and contextual inputs should be considered. Having this in mind, a social cognition framework for better understanding sustainable consumption might be welcomed (Phipps et al., 2013).

### **Trends in responsible consumption**

Since sustainable consumption is a topic with important practical significance, the research companies emphasize its understanding and periodically develop market research either at national or global levels. These studies allow us to have a dynamic picture of the evolution both geographically and temporally. For such a succinct image, we will present the main findings of the main results obtained in the past decade by Accenture, Cone Communication, and Nielsen.

The studies of Accenture between 2010-2019 investigated responsible corporations and documented their continuous interest in becoming more sustainable. This could be put in connection to the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are increasingly more promoted and accepted (Accenture, 2016 & 2019), but probably more with the worldwide shifts towards responsible purchases and consumption. A study in 2014 found out that a third of the consumers considered sustainable criteria in their buying decisions, but also documented large gaps between developing countries and developed ones, as well as the young optimists & mothers and the rest of the population (Accenture, 2014). In 2018, an Accenture study observed that 63% of buyers prefer companies displaying similar values and beliefs, while 47% stopped buying from irresponsible companies (Accenture, 2018). A study on consumers worldwide in 2019 revealed that primary concerns were quality and price, but at the same time large segments considered that companies should focus on products meant to be reused/recycled (83%), were buying greener than five years in advance (72%) and expected to buy more over the next five years (81%) (Accenture, 2019). The study developed in Nov. 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic shows a significant value shift of the consumer towards spending less on products and services consumed away from the public space (Accenture, 2020). The shift towards responsible buying is documented both in connection to spending more wisely from a financial perspective, and also considering ethical choices.

Cone Communication develops a systematic investigation of CSR and consumer behavior in the US, since 1993. Although the focus is on corporations, the study also reveals a responsible dimension of the consumers. The study shows that a very high percentage of Americans – almost nine in ten persons – would buy from responsible organizations and three in four would avoid irresponsible organizations (Cone Communications, 2017). A large majority of Americans prefers responsible

organizations and asks those companies to prove their purpose (Cone/Porter Novelli, 2018). The Millennials are the most likely to be responsible and to ask companies to behave for the good of the community. The company pays great attention to beliefs and behaviors of the younger consumers, developing several studies in the past few years or highlighting specific aspects in their other reports (Cone Communications, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2013, 2015a, 2017; Cone/Porter Novelli, 2017, 2019). The younger consumers are putting their faith in corporations more than the general American population (Cone Communications, 2015a; Cone/Porter Novelli, 2017h), but they are closely followed by the Baby Boomers (Cone/Porter Novelli, 2017). It also seems that the behavioral gap between the young and the average American increased in time (Cone Communication, 2013a). Another Cone Communications study (2014a) revealed that young adults are also more active on social media supporting social causes, showing another form of responsibility towards society. Millennials tend to be more responsive to cause marketing, too (Cone Communication, 2008). Also, studies show that young women are more proactive than men in their generation (Cone Communications, 2015a). The generations to come might prove even more responsible and active in this direction. This idea seems to be supported by a Cone Communications study (2014b) on recycling, which reveals that children under the influence of school are an important positive factor for recycling at home. Children also have another type of influence, indirect – mothers seem to be more responsible (Cone Communications, 2010), probably thinking more about the future and feel responsible to ensure better living conditions for their offsprings.

At a global level, the figures related to responsible consumers are even higher than in the States, with India, China, and Brazil as leading countries (Cone Communications, 2015b). Nevertheless, some items of responsible consumption decreased slightly in the past few years. This could be related to the fact that most consumers do not pay attention to the CSR efforts, rather observe the wrongdoings. It is worth mentioning that less than a third of the global consumers consider that their buying behavior counts. The older the respondent, the more likely to consider that personal purchases count (Cone Communication, 2013b). Although the “Old Guard” would like to a wide extent to hear about CSR initiatives, their buying behavior is self-centered and CSR is less significant compared to other age groups. A Cone Communications study (2008) on cause-related-marketing pictures the older population, especially the older men, as “disbelievers” – being more pragmatic, local-oriented, and skeptical, they are sensitive to quality, price, and convenience.

Nielsen has also developed a series of studies online documenting the global consumer responsible behavior, reflecting the consumers in more than 58 countries. The research shows great geographical variations, with those in Europe being the most skeptical (Nielsen, 2012, 2013). These reports pay more attention to the age gap, therefore, highlight more details on the behavior of the 50+. They are the least likely to pay more for responsible products, but also they are the ones who made the most progress in this issue from the previous study. Consumers 65+ are both the most unlikely to spend more, and the most inflexible in changing their opinion (Nielsen, 2013). The 50+ respondents also report less than the other groups their actual purchase from socially responsible companies. 1 in 3 persons aged 55-65 has self-reported buying responsibly, while only 1 in 5 persons aged 65+ declared this behavior (Nielsen, 2013). The age gap was documented around the world, with the smallest values in Europe and the Americas (Nielsen, 2014). The 50+ cohort also checks less the labels for sustainable information (Nielsen, 2014). Nevertheless, the social-conscious consumers are increasingly numerous in the 50+ age group, and one in two would pay extra for sustainable products (Nielsen, 2015). The more recent studies show that the age gap is closing and consumers are increasingly more educated and aware of what they want and if the companies’ practices (Nielsen, 2018).

Some other aspects these studies reveal is that socially-conscious consumers are more trustful in advertising and social media than other consumers (Nielsen, 2012), their trust in the brand is a main driver of purchase (Nielsen, 2015), they check product packaging for sustainable impact (Nielsen, 2014), expect companies to ensure environmental sustainability (Nielsen, 2012). For persons aged 50+, the following causes seem to be slightly more important than for other age groups: provide relief after natural disasters, support small businesses and eradicate poverty and hunger (Nielsen, 2012). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the interest shifted from more global and long-term issues to (personal) health, determining consumers to look for premium products

ensuring better health security (Nielsen, 2020). At the same time, due to a decline in revenues related to the pandemic, many consumers are more price-conscious and look at sales and the lowest price (Nielsen, 2021).

### **Ageing and responsible consumption**

When taking age into account, there are at least two important issues to be considered. Are older people more responsible consumers than younger ones? And to what extent we are changing our consumption behaviours during the life course, once we get older? In the following, we try to answer such questions based on studies conducted on responsible consumption in which samples of older adults were also included. Note that the interest in studying older adults and their consumption behavior has recently grown, with the increased purchasing power of seniors, in many Western societies (Kim & Gin, 2019; Kohlbacher & Herstatt, 2011). Also, responsible consumption could be seen as embedded in the broader idea of intergenerational solidarity (Inglehart, 2008): we save resources for our children and grandchildren.

To some extent responsible consumption requires future orientation and mutual understanding between generations. However, the negative stereotypes older adults hold regarding the young generation indicate impulsivity, superficiality, and consumer excess with the potential of destroying the environment (Carr et al., 2012). On the contrary, older people portrayals are of a generation (starting with the Baby Boomers – the generation born after World War 2) who grew up in times of scarcity and, therefore, are less inclined to waste resources or to be frugal consumers. At the same time, we have to be aware of the fact that the “responsible consumption” discourse became dominant in the public sphere during recent decades (Forkert, 2014), especially following the 2008 financial crisis; Sustainable consumption practices could be seen as adaptive means in times of austerity. It is largely acknowledged that the economic difficulties over the past 10 to 12 years have affected the younger generation (Millennials – the generation who is nowadays 24 to 40 years old) to a deeper extent than the older generations and the “idealized” responsible consumption rhetoric has targeted mainly younger adults.

Studies conducted on different generations indicated differences in the type of responsible consumption older and younger generations engage in, and particularly differences in the type of consumption they value. The hypothesis of intergenerational value change (Diprose et al., 2019) suggests that older people tend to save and are careful not to waste the limited resources, whereas the younger generations tend to be careless with scarce resources, holding responsible consumption values as a form of self-expression and self-actualizing process (see Maslow, 1999 for defining self-actualizing values as transcending basic consumerist values).

In terms of responsible consumption practices, older people, at least in the Western European societies, where many of such studies have been conducted, tend to save energy more (Carlsson-Kanyama et al., 2005); they reuse more different products from the households and tend to have an environment-friendly consumer behavior (Bulut et al., 2017). Instead, younger generations (particularly Millennials) hold stronger environment protection values and concerns for the environment and climate change (Heo & Muralidharan, 2019). They are not necessarily “obsessive consumers” and they show different patterns of responsible consumption in comparison with older adults: for example, they tend to give up to the idea of using a car in favor of public transportation, engage more in the sharing economy (Hwang & Griffiths, 2017) and tend to share more goods and services or to get involved in collaborative consumption (for example share a car or use exchange houses practices to travel). Still, when people self-report general opinions about responsible consumption, we might find little differences between younger and older generations, but when some particular actions and consumption values are researched, there is empirical support for the hypothesis of intergenerational value change, namely the idea that younger people have a stronger tendency of defining and express themselves (including political express) through environment protection values and values of responsible consumption.

Some other studies (Kim & Jin, 2019) show that future-oriented older adults tend to be more concerned about environmental protection issues and deploy responsible consumption practices, than those who are less future-oriented. A potential explanation for such a pattern is the fact that

older adults who believe they have expansive time to live would be more concerned about the scarcity of resources in the future.

Also, in a previous study conducted in Romania (Ivan & Fernández-Ardèvol, 2017) we recorded the fact that older adults are more concerned about different risks and vulnerabilities their grandchildren may face in the future than about their risks. Consequently, grandparents might experience responsible consumption behavioral patterns. In our study on Romanian seniors, we interviewed grandparents and we did not ask them about daily practices of responsible consumption (our research focus was on technology use); No study that we know about focused on grandparents in particular. The fact that grandparents might act more responsibly in their consumption is a hypothesis that needs to be further tested: it can be that older persons who experience grandparenting become more aware of the importance to save resources for the younger generations. They might also be more future-oriented, as a result of intergenerational connections.

Several studies have indicated gender differences when responsible consumption values and practices were investigated, also in the studies with older adults (Kim & Jin, 2019). Women tend to hold stronger environment protection values and engage more frequently in responsible consumer behaviors than men. This has also been proved as well in the case of older women, as compared to older men. Indeed, being protective with your family (children/grandchildren) and avoiding risks is more consistent with women gender roles and numerous studies have shown that in general women tend to be more risk averse and save more financial resources, engaging more in activities meant to plan a rational use of resources and reduce the waste (see a review of the studies in Ivan, 2017).

Nevertheless, the responsible consumers tend to be also more educated, with high socioeconomic status, from liberal professions. Probably the dominant environment-friendly rhetoric resonates more for such categories and it is always problematic to talk about responsible consumption with those who live in extreme poverty and scarcity of resources. This applies as well to older adults, as some of them (especially very old, retired, and living in rural or isolated areas, from the developing countries) are living in poor conditions and at risk of extreme poverty and isolation.

Studies of responsible consumption of older adults are normally conducted in Western countries, and little is known about older adults from other parts of the world. A study conducted in Poland (Zelega, 2018), using a quota sample (N= 2537, from 10 large cities) of people 65 years and above, showed that responsible consumption patterns are present among older adults, but to a smaller extent (one in eight of the participants declared deliberated strategies that could be described as responsible consumption). Also, the data showed that older adults have little knowledge about what sustainable consumption might be and what type of activities could be described as "responsible consumption". Again, most of the seniors, who were engaged in some activities that were in the line with the responsible consumption discourse, were more educated, had higher economic status and there was evidence of gender differences, with older women being more involved in such practices than old men. The most common responsible consumption practices found in this survey based on the questionnaire were: go shopping at markets, in small corner shops, and avoid hyper-and supermarkets; use reusable bags; save water and electricity, and sort waste in the households. These are behaviors expressed by more than two-thirds of the participants. Also, a large percentage of the participants (approximately 80%) tried to buy not more than they need, to reduce the risk of waste - thus supporting the idea that the older generation might pay more attention to overconsumption of the "unnecessary" goods. This research found also that approximately half of the participants used to buy eco-friendly products, but of course, we talk about older adults in the ten major cities of Poland, and their choices were highly mediated by the declared revenues. Some other studies (e.g., Şener, & Hazer, 2008) conducted in the developing countries of Europe showed that responsible consumption among older people is merely found in affluent neighborhoods and generally speaking more present at those with higher economic status. Also, such studies offer support for the idea that women tend to express more responsible consumption actions and values than men.



To a lesser extent, it has been investigated the dynamic of people's responsible consumption behaviors and values during their lifespan. Such questions would then require a longitudinal approach. This issue deserves to be studied, as our values spectrum changes when we move from our adult life to old age.

Using a lifespan perspective, Kalmus et al. (2009) distinguished between the following responsible consumers' categories: (1) young adults – who are more brand-oriented consumers and would prefer to buy products and services of brands who are perceived as eco-friendly and environment-oriented; (2) young adults that share strong “green values” and level of environmental concerns, therefore being involved in related consumptions practices (for example recycling, using reusable bags) as a form of self-expression; (3) middle age and older individuals who are more preoccupied of saving resources but with relatively low engagement with the environmental issues. Such typology, although supported by data, does not capture our changes in values and routines during the lifespan. We are part of age cohorts who internalized some values in the formative years, also in connection with contextual aspects of the societies and the major historical events we have been living. In the ex-communist countries, for example, the so-called “baby boomer generation” lived their mature lives in societies characterized by a paucity of goods, and experienced different periods of deprivation (for example the government action plans to reduce consumption of electricity, resulting in forced temporary electricity cuts). This will then explain, at least partially, some of the differences between young and older consumers on responsible behaviors and values, identified in some such countries.

Regardless of the cohort effect, still, people change their everyday routines and consumption patterns during life-course transitions (Schäfer et al., 2012), and this impacts as well the sustainable behaviors they will engage with. There is evidence that once we get older we become more heterogeneous in our responsible consumption actions. This is an aspect the current public communication campaigns should take into consideration. Relevant changes occur in our lives once we move from a life stage to another (for example from young adults to old ages) and immediately after such transitions and probably campaigns should target people finding themselves in such transitional stages, marked by significant changes in daily routine. And it is not only the fact that we age that changes our consumption routine, as a part of changing daily life activities but also events that happen through our lifespan, Motherhood for example changes significantly our daily routine and consequently our consumption patterns and there is evidence that responsible consumption is related to the size of the household (number of children; several people living together). Similarly, retirement brings a lot of changes in people's daily routine and different consumption patterns result from such changes. Knowing moments in life when people most probably change their routine could be important for those who launch communication campaigns to promote responsible consumption.

### **Responsible consumption of older adult Romanians**

In 2020, the Romanian population over the age of 60 was over 5,5 million persons, a significant increase from 2,755.63 thousand people in 1971, with an average annual rate of 1.22%. Related to the population density per region most of the older people live in the rural area 54.4%. Regarding the way, older adults behave related to responsible consumption, there are significant differences between rural and urban older people from Romania which are mostly due to the level of income, level of education and degree of training, health issues, lifestyle, and social integration.

Following a study carried out by Ipsos Romania in 2019, the results reveal that the biggest percentage of households in a critical situation is in the most developed regions of Romania. This situation is related to the increased difficulty to cover higher expenses/needs and higher costs of living, despite the higher incomes of older people in these areas. Rural households' finances cover a large portion of their consumption, therefore, their expenses are lower than in urban areas. Another interesting fact is related to the differences in living standards between urban and rural areas. The living conditions of older people from rural areas favor their consumption which makes them less cynical about subjective insecurity. It is estimated that for rural households the necessary amount for their monthly consumption is about 130 Euro (150 US dollars), while this

amount would cover only 30% of the consumption in urban areas. The most problematic, for both segments (rural and urban) are expenses related to adequate food, followed by housing expenditure (electricity, gas, water, etc.), as well as expenses for communications and media (radio-TV subscriptions, telephones) and, on the last place, rent. Food and health are the major concerns for older persons and there are also differences in consumption behavior related to this topic between rural and urban older people. Urban older adults are more responsible related to food waste but the range of food they use for their daily diet is poorer than those in rural areas. This causes serious health issues confirmed by the increased number of older people with severe health problems among urban elders. Another interesting fact revealed by the study related to food consumption and food waste is that urban older adults are much more attentive to the food expiration date mainly because of two reasons: lack of money for the daily basket and a generational behavior which has to do with the Communist legacy before the 1989 Revolution when good food was hard to find and also with moral/religious beliefs about the sin of throwing away the food.

An additional fact unveiled by the study about the differences between rural and urban older adults is the fact that the last-mentioned are much more responsible regarding payments and expenses. They are perceived as the most loyal customers that always pay on the due date or their loans without missing a payment different from those in rural areas which are less responsible and have successive delays in paying invoices.

A study in urban areas shows that Romanian seniors are the ones recycling the most (Ciobanu, 2020). 84% of the urban older persons declare they are recycling, especially using the containers in the public space provided by the town halls. The explanations are related to lower incomes and the desire to avoid waste. The pensioners are followed by "modern families" (76%), the "mature singles" and young professionals (75%).

## Conclusions

Aging and responsible consumption is a topic relatively neglected in the literature. On the one hand, we can wonder whether we are getting more responsible as consumers once we age and we go through different stages of our life span. On the other hand, we acknowledge the fact that responsible consumption is relatively recent rhetoric, and it did not accompany other generations during their formative years. Also, nowadays, businesses look more carefully at their older customers, who are increasingly more active, demanding, and responsible. Other variables shape the probability people must engage in responsible consumer behaviors, especially socio-economic characteristics. Thus, we record differences between geographic areas and the fact that responsible consumption values and actions are mostly found at educated socio-economic affluent persons, as well as citizens from the emerging economies. Also, women, especially married and with children and are generally more responsible, at least in terms of intentions, pointing out the fact that responsible consumption discourse resonates differently for people finding themselves on different life stages. The reasons for responsible consumption are personal, as well as related to the environment and society. Nevertheless, the decision-making process is complex, and the responsibility and value-related aspects are only part of it.

Regarding the particularities of responsible consumption at an older age, the research shows an increased concern and tendency to explore the consumption of responsible products among older adults. Worldwide studies reviewed show that the younger are more responsible and greener, being also more active in promoting social and environmental causes. The younger are also more trustful in corporations, followed by older adults. The latter, especially men, are more pragmatic and skeptical. Also, studies suggest that the older the consumer, the more trustful in the personal impact of her/his consumption is. Studies show that the older generations pay less attention to responsible buying, both in terms of looking for related information and buying responsibly. Still, the age gap seems to be closing, this being probably an organic result connected to the advance in the age of more responsible consumers, with values tighter related to sustainability.

Studies offer various explanations for the increased responsibility of younger generations, especially that a general view considers them more hedonistic, therefore, should be less inclined to be responsible and observe sustainable consumption behavior. Among the facilitating factors, studies mention education/sustainability rhetoric, the impact of recent economic crises, self-expression, and uniqueness. The responsible practices of older adults tend to be based on more rational reasons, such as saving resources and money or offering help to future generations.

We mapped the typical values/actions older people share or engage, that could be associated with responsible consumption. The older generations are interested in responsible consumption, but they tend to be more sensitive to price, quality, and convenience. In terms of values, the older cohorts are looking more to provide relief after natural disasters, support small businesses, and eradicate poverty and hunger. In terms of behavior, they are oriented toward recycling and collaborative consumption, especially future-oriented persons. Seniors seem to be more responsible in observing their duties toward society, as citizens and consumers.

The responsible profile of older adults is a useful tool for more effective marketing strategies, both in terms of product development and communication. Still, more data, including qualitative knowledge on this age group, would be needed.

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