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The Role of Green Self-Identity and Self-Congruity in Sustainable Food Consumption Behaviour

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Abstract. *The aim of this paper is to explore the role of green self-identity and self-congruity with green food products in predicting consumers' sustainable food consumption behaviour. Previous research suggests that there is a relationship between individuals' self-identity and the consumption of products. However, when it comes to the realm of sustainable food consumption, those relations are not unambiguous. This study employs a survey with a sample of 837 respondents in Lithuania. The findings confirm that green self-identity and self-congruity with green food products positively influence subsequent sustainable food consumption behaviour both directly and indirectly. The implications of this study can*

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be used to better understand green consumer behaviour and provide useful information to marketers and policymakers by suggesting that the promotion of sustainable food consumption behaviour should highlight not only functional but symbolic benefits as well.

Keywords: *sustainability, sustainable food consumption, green self-identity, self-congruity with green food products*

Introduction

The 12th goal in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals document, which addresses sustainable consumption and production, specifically focuses on the food consumption of individuals (United Nations, 2016). Food is one of the consumption domains, which is largely responsible for the economic, social and environmental impact, and therefore is a very important factor in shaping the sustainability of food supply (Verain et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2021; Rahman & Luomala, 2021). In this context, consumers play a central role in the transition towards sustainable food systems (Azzura et al., 2019; Holotová et al., 2021). Sustainable food consumption can be the result of conscious or unconscious actions of consumers related to "green" products in order to balance consumption and reduce waste, thus reducing their impact on the environment and contributing to socially responsible choices in the local economy (Sargant, 2014). The green product market has significantly evolved over the past decades since the increase in environmental consciousness has profoundly affected consumer behaviour. However, according to Azzura et al. (2019), "even though people's consciousness of food sustainability issues is increased, the consideration of sustainability in daily food choices remains marginal" (Azzura et al., 2019, p.95). Therefore, a deeper understanding of consumer behaviour regarding sustainable food consumption is needed, including inner, psychological consumer characteristics, such as their self-perception of being green and their perception of green food products. Despite concern about sustainability and positive attitudes toward the environment, consumers may be unwilling to buy green products if they do not identify themselves with being green. According to McLelland et al. (2022), when it comes to action, consumers may experience a variety of contrasting feelings that result in a lack of commitment to the green movement.

A number of studies addressing consumer behaviours regarding sustainable consumption and sustainable food choices have been published over the past decades. The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) was proved as an acceptable model for explaining sustainable food consumer behaviour (Nguyen et al., 2021). However, some researchers argue that the TPB is an expectancy-value theory, which has an assumption that individuals act based on rationality. Still, it is not always the case with sustainable behaviour, which cannot be wholly explained by practical reasons (Shin et al., 2016). Consumers also buy sustainable food products as a consequence of self-image and product symbolism. It can be stated that sometimes, symbolic meaning has a

more powerful influence over choice than the actual functional benefits of the products. The present study intends to capture this symbolic part of sustainable food consumption behaviour and, therefore, grounds its premises on the *theory of self-congruity* and *theories of identity* and *social identity*.

Self-congruity theory (Sirgy, 1986, 2018) supports the notion of the importance of symbolic benefits in consumer purchase behaviour (Shin et al., 2016), explaining the self-image congruence idea. Generally, it suggests that consumers are likely to buy products that have image or perceived personality traits corresponding to their own self-image. Thus, self-congruity is the degree of match between the consumer's self-image and brand, store, product, or user image (Sirgy, 2018). In other words, it is about the extent to which consumers identify themselves with the users of the brand/product. Unlike theories based on reasonable choices, such as the TRA (theory of reasoned action) and the TPB, self-congruity theory is based on symbolic or value-attributes. It premises that people make their choices to express themselves and often choose brands or products that can validate perceptions of their own self-image (Shin et al., 2016).

Other theoretical perspectives closely related to self-congruity are *Identity theory* and *Social identity theory*, which are useful when explaining the link between consumer self-identity, self-congruity and sustainable food consumption behaviour. Membership in a specific social group is an essential aspect of the meaning of self-concept. Although, in literature, self-concepts and self-identity are often used interchangeably, these concepts differ. According to Sharma et al. (2020), while self-concept relates to the cognitive, physical and social qualities individuals perceive in themselves, self-identity shows the tag individuals use to describe themselves. Self-identity commonly refers to how consumers describe themselves in terms of their personal motivations, social interactions and/or expectations about relevant others related to sustainability concerns (Confente et al., 2020). People define groups based on various categories and try to maintain a positive identity by aligning with those positively valued groups. Literature on sustainable consumption behaviour, including green products and sustainable food choices, incorporates the construct of "green self-identity", which explains how individuals describe themselves according to their environmentally friendliness, green values and behaviours (Neves & Oliveira, 2021). In the context of sustainable consumption, green self-identity is considered useful for differentiating oneself from others and compliance with the green values and behaviours of the group to which a person wants to belong.

With previously identified theories of identity and self-congruity, it is evident that there is a relationship between individuals' self-concepts and the consumption of products. However, when it comes to the realm of sustainable food consumption, those relations are not unambiguous. In fact, there are just a few studies incorporating self-concepts in predicting food buying behaviour, taking a particular sustainable food category, like local food (Shin et al., 2016) or organic milk (Carfora et al., 2019). Research usually concentrates on analysing the effect of green self-identity or self-congruity on general pro-environment behaviour (Whitmarsh & O'Neill, 2010; Khare, 2015; Lalot et al.,

2019), general green purchasing (Sharma et al., 2020, 2022; Hui & Khan, 2022) or a particular category of green products, like energy efficient heating appliances (Neves & Oliveira, 2021), apparel (Tung, Koenig & Chen, 2017) or bio-plastic products (Confente et al., 2020). There are no or very few studies where green self-concepts would be analysed together with sustainable food consumption behaviour in a broader sense (not only as a green buying behaviour).

When discussing the concept of sustainable consumption behaviour in a broader sense, there is a need for some clarification. Sustainable consumption is a complex concept, and literature is abundant of different terms used for conveying the idea. For example, Gupta and Agrawal (2018) identified five different perspectives: 1) the social perspective with socially conscious and socially responsible consumption; 2) the ethical perspective with ethically minded consumer behaviour; 3) the sustainability perspective with sustainable consumption; 4) the green perspective with green consumption and 5) the environmental perspective with environmentally conscious consumption. The variety of terms usually leads to several issues that were also identified in the literature: 1) focus on a single aspect of sustainability (e. g., environmental) or 2) focus on a single stage of consumption – most often on buying behaviour (Piligrimiene et al., 2020). Balderjahn et al. (2013) were among those calling for an integrated approach while defining sustainable consumption. The authors grounded their definition on the triple bottom line concept (planet, people, profit) and included all three dimensions of sustainability (economic, environmental and social). In their works, Gupta and Agraval (2018), Geiger et al. (2018) emphasized the need to include all three stages of the consumption process – purchase, use and disposal – when analyzing the consumption from the consumer's perspective. The authors of the present study, therefore, define sustainable consumption as behaviour that includes all three stages of consumption, namely, acquisition, use, and disposal, taken in a manner that reduces the negative impact of consumption and enhances the environmental, social and economic aspects of quality of life (thus, embracing three dimensions of sustainability). Such a systematic view of sustainable consumption is also transferred to the food consumption domain.

Based on the arguments mentioned above, *the aim of this study* is to examine the role of self-congruity with green food products and green self-identity in predicting consumers' sustainable food consumption behaviour. The results of this study will provide new insights into the effects of self-congruity and self-identity on consumers' decision-making processes regarding sustainable food consumption behaviour.

1. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

1.1. Sustainable Food Consumption

Improving the sustainability of food production and consumption is a key issue for sustainable development policy, as food consumption is closely linked to other areas of sustainable production and consumption and the challenges they pose. The need

to transform the food systems into more sustainable ones is evident but not easy to achieve. According to the definition by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the sustainability of diets goes beyond nutrition and environment, including economic and socio-cultural dimensions. It is stated that "Sustainable diets are those diets with low environmental impacts which contribute to food and nutrition security and healthy life for present and future generations. Sustainable diets are protective and respectful of biodiversity and ecosystems, culturally acceptable, accessible, economically fair and affordable; nutritionally adequate, safe and healthy; while optimising natural and human resources" (FAO, 2010, p. 7). Therefore, close involvement of civil society and private sector is needed to engage directly all stakeholders, along with consumers.

Consumers can significantly contribute to sustainability by improving their food consumption habits. According to Verain et al. (2015), improvements can be achieved in several ways, including the sustainability of food production and the quantity consumed. The authors distinguish two broad behaviour strategies toward sustainable food consumption: 1) sustainable product choices concerning the way the product is produced (e. g., organic food, Fair Trade), and 2) reduced consumption quantity within product categories (e. g., reduced meat consumption) (Verain et al., 2015). In general, many authors agree that reducing environmental damage can be achieved by promoting healthier organic food choices, reducing the consumption of meat and dairy products, avoiding the transportation of food by air, lessening the consumption of high-carbon foods, reusing food leftovers, avoiding over-consumption, promoting a healthy lifestyle, and proper waste management (Su et al., 2019; Maciejewski, 2020; Vermeir et al., 2020; Hoek et al., 2021; Verain et al., 2021; Holotova et al., 2021). Authors also notice that recent years have shown a growing trend in the importance of a healthy lifestyle, with the composition and origin of products becoming key factors in food purchasing decisions (Azzura et al., 2019; Švecová & Odehnalová, 2019; Kamenidou et al., 2019; Su et al., 2019; Rizzo et al., 2020). However, the significant gap between a favourable attitude to sustainability and the actual more sustainable purchase and consumption of food still needs to be closed (Vermeir et al., 2020).

In this paper, the authors maintain the holistic approach to sustainability, explaining it with reference to the "sustainability cube" as proposed by Geiger et al. (2018) and the "Triple-P" concept, involving ecological (Planet), social (People) and economic (Prosperity) dimensions of sustainable consumption (van Dam, 2016; van Dam & van Trijp, 2011). Geiger et al. (2018) distinguished sustainability dimensions (ecological and socio-economic), consumption phases (acquisition, use and disposal) and consumption areas (food, housing, mobility, etc.) in their SCB-cube and suggested that it should be taken integrally when analysing sustainable consumption behaviour. A very similar call for integrating different aspects was evident in the works by van Dam and Trijp (2011), and van Dam (2016), where research was done in the domain of food products. Sustainable food consumption behaviour denotes a variety of food-related practices. These practices might include, for instance, behaviour to reduce food waste,

switching to "climate-friendly" food consumption patterns (with regard to meat consumption or focus on local food), or changing practices about food preparation (van Dam, 2016; Hedin et al., 2019).

Based on this logic, the construct of sustainable food consumption (*SFC*) was conceptualised as composed of different aspects of sustainable behaviour, including environmentally friendly acquisition and use of food products, choice of animal-friendly food products, local/seasonal food products, fair trade, organic food products, food waste prevention and health-related choice. Sustainable food consumption, therefore, is not limited to green food products purchase but constitutes a much broader range of food-related behaviour.

1.2. Green Self-Identity

Green self-identity (*GSI*) generally reflects how consumers describe themselves in terms of being a typical green consumer (Barbarossa et al., 2017; Hui & Khan, 2022). Green identity is useful both in distinguishing oneself from others and in adapting to the values and behaviours of a particular group to which an individual wishes to belong or belongs (van Gils & Horton, 2019). In the context of sustainable consumption, this construct is becoming increasingly important (Confente et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2020, 2022; Barbarossa & de Pelsmacker, 2016; Barbarossa et al., 2017; Khare, 2015; Chen & Chang, 2012). It reflects an overall consumer's assessment of the benefits of a product or service, comparing what is received and what is given, based on the consumer's environmental desires, sustainability expectations and ecological needs (Chen & Chang, 2012). The idea of self-identity is related to the Identity theory and the Social Identity theory, which show how a person's attitude to actions corresponding to his/her role can help him/her to take a certain position in society. In the context of sustainability, a green self-identity reflects a person's sensitivity to associating him-/herself with "green issues" (Sharma et al., 2020). Previous research has found that an individual's self-perception (identity) can be an important determinant of "green behaviour". For example, Whitmarsh and O'Neill (2010) identified that green self-identity is related to the intention to buy green products; meanwhile, Barbarossa and de Pelsmacker (2016) found that green identity is an antecedent to the intention to purchase environmentally friendly products and more generally, a factor in promoting environmentally friendly behaviour. Similar results were obtained by Khare (2015), suggesting the positive impact of GSI on consumer's environmentally friendly buying behaviour. Confente et al. (2020) also found that green self-identity led to higher value perceptions from bioplastic products and had a significant direct effect on the intention to purchase and switch to bioplastic products. Sharma et al. (2020) explored the impact of green self-identity on green purchase intention and concluded that a consumer's self-identity as a green consumer created more impact on the intention to buy eco-friendly products. Based on those findings, the present study considers a positive relationship between GSI and

SFC and posits the idea that consumers with higher green self-identity would demonstrate stronger sustainable food consumption behaviour.

H1: *Green self-identity positively influences sustainable food consumption behaviour.*

1.3. Self-Congruity with Green Products

The link between green self-identity and environmentally friendly behaviour can be more generally anticipated within the framework of self-congruity (*SC*). Sirgy, the "father" of the theory in the early nineties, defined self-congruity as a psychological process and outcome in which consumers compare their perception of a brand image (more specifically, brand personality or brand-user image) with their own self-concept (Sirgy, 2018). Generally speaking, self-congruity reflects the assessment of the match between the consumer's perception of the brand/product and themselves. Matching brand/product user image with a consumer's self-concept, therefore, provides a self-congruity route, leading to more favourable attitudes and behaviours towards brand/product (Roy & Rabbanee, 2015; Shin et al., 2016; Confente et al., 2020; McLealland et al., 2022). According to Confente et al. (2020), self-congruity affects how consumers relate to and behave towards products. Usually, studies involving self-congruity investigate its role between the self-image of an individual and then the image of the object, afterwards establishing the link of self-congruity with the behaviour toward the object. However, the evidence about the relationship between self-congruity and behaviour is not unambiguous. Roy and Rabbanee (2015) found that self-congruity with a brand enhanced consumers' self-perception. They also found that self-congruity had an indirect effect on hedonic use via self-perception for brand. Thus, they suggest that the effect of self-congruity on consumer behaviour is mediated by a range of self-concept motives (Ray & Rabbanee, 2015). In the realm of the green market, for instance, Confente et al. (2020) found that self-congruity did not have a direct effect on customer intentions toward bio-plastic products but instead significantly moderated the relationship between green self-identity and perceived value. In the study of Shin et al. (2016), self-congruity was found to influence significantly actual local food purchases directly. Meanwhile, McLelland et al. (2022) found that self-congruity mediated the relationship between green attitudes and behaviours. In their research, Sharma et al. (2020) used two separate constructs that conveyed a similar meaning to self-congruity, namely, green self-concept and product self-concept and tested their impact on green buying intentions and behaviour via green self-identity. In this case, both the direct and indirect effect on intentions was supported.

Based on diverse and contradicting findings from previous studies, several hypotheses have been derived, covering the direct and indirect (mediating and moderating) effects of self-congruity with green products on sustainable food consumption behaviour. Moreover, since the literature clearly indicates the relationship between self-identity and self-congruity, reverse mediation is possible. Therefore, a hypothesis about green self-identity being a mediator was also derived.

H2: *Self-congruity with green products positively influences sustainable food consumption behaviour.*

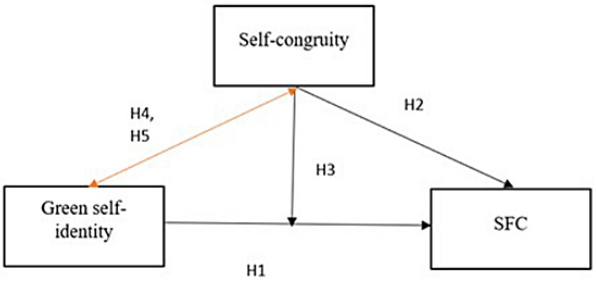
H3: *Self-congruity with green products moderates the relationship between green self-identity and sustainable food consumption, with higher self-congruity leading to a stronger relationship between green self-identity and SFC behaviour.*

H4: *Self-congruity positively mediates the impact of green self-identity on sustainable food consumption behaviour.*

H5: *Green self-identity positively mediates the impact of self-congruity on sustainable food consumption behaviour.*

The hypothesised relations are visualised in the research model, presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Research Model



2. Research Design

2.1. Method and Sample

A quantitative online survey was used for data collection. This research method is suitable for obtaining an overall picture of a complex phenomenon at a specific point in time. The survey was conducted using the SurveyMonkey online survey tool, which allows for a large sample of respondents, is convenient for data collection, and is therefore popular among researchers. The choice of the research method also partly determined the choice of the nonprobability convenient sampling method, which enables the collection of answers from those respondents who show a greater initiative to participate in the survey. It must be acknowledged that the use of nonprobability sampling may lead to some errors in the investigation results. However, the choice is justified by the fact that in the case of this study, the transfer of the results to the general population was not the main aim, as its fragmentary knowledge is equally important from a scientific point of view. However, the main advantage of this option is the ability to collect a suf-

ficiently large amount of data at a minimal cost. All data were collected anonymously and voluntarily, adhering to research ethics requirements. In total, 837 usable questionnaires were completed.

Of those respondents who provided their socio-demographic data, almost 73 percent were females. The sample was dominated by people between the age of 18 to 44 (almost 60 percent of the sample). More than 70 percent of respondents had a higher university education. About half of the respondents did not have children, were single, living with relatives or were in partnership/marriage. The other half had kids or grown-up children. The income per month mainly varied from 500 to 1500 Euro (47 percent), and almost 85 percent of respondents resided in one of the two biggest cities in Lithuania (Kaunas and Vilnius). About 15 percent of the respondents refused to indicate their socio-demographic characteristics, which is not very uncommon in social research surveys (Fulton, 2018; Hendra & Hill, 2019). Nevertheless, the answers to the main research questions were provided and therefore, data analysis included data from 837 respondents (see Table A in Appendix).

2.2. Measures and their Quality Parameters

Sustainable food consumption (SFC). The scale for measuring sustainable food consumption consisted of 28 statements adapted from Verain et al. (2021), Fischer et al. (2017), Thøgersen (2017), Hunecke and Richter (2019), Kamenidou et al. (2019), and Sautron et al. (2015). SFC measures include environment-friendly acquisition and use of food, animal-friendly choice, local/seasonal food, fair trade, organic food, food waste prevention and health-related choice. Thus, SFC in this research involved 3P areas as described by van Dam (2016) and the aspect of foods' impact on health (Sautron et al., 2015). Each aspect of SFC was measured on the 7-point Likert scale (1 – "completely

Table 1

Results of EFA and Reliability of SFC Subscales

Factor (Number of items)	Authors	Cronbach's alpha	Factor loadings
Environmentally friendly acquisition (3)	Adapted from Verain et al. (2021), Fischer et al. (2017), Thøgersen (2017), Hunecke and Richter (2019), Kamenidou et al. (2019), Sautron et al. (2015)	0.781	0.636-0.805
Local / seasonal / fresh food (6)		0.741	0.436-0.741
Fair trade (3)		0.842	0.691-0.868
Organic food (5)		0.922	0.738-0.873
Food waste prevention (3)		0.657	0.400-0.836
Meat reduction/ vegan food (2)		0.721	0.793-0.820
Impact on health (2)		0.780	0.810-0.811
Overall scale (24)		0.896	

disagree", 7 – "completely agree"). An exploratory factor analysis (Principal component analysis with Varimax rotation) resulted in 7 factors representing different dimensions of SFC (KMO = 0.892, $p < 0.001$). Those seven factors accounted for 62.98% of the variability of the original 28 items. Four items were excluded from further analysis due to their poor representation of any of the new empirical factors. Internal consistency of sub-scales and the overall scale was tested, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients showed high levels of reliability (see Table 1).

Green self-identity (GSI). The scale with 6 items for measuring green self-identity was adapted from Confente et al. (2020) and Sharma et al. (2020). It was considered as a one-dimensional construct that allowed us to measure respondents' sensitivity by associating them with "green issues" (Sharma et al., 2020). Based on existing empirical evidence, it was assumed that the stronger the consumer's green identity, the more likely he or she will be toward sustainable food consumption behaviour. Items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale. Cronbach's alpha (0.860) showed a high level of reliability, and exploratory factor analysis (Principal component analysis with Varimax rotation) resulted in one dimension showing internal consistency of the scale (KMO = 0.818, $p < .001$, 59.10% of explained variance).

Self-congruity (SC). The scale with 3 items was adapted from Confente et al. (2020), representing the assessment of the match or mismatch between consumers' perception of green food products and themselves. Evidence shows that self-congruity affects how consumers relate to and behave toward products. Again, EFA resulted in one factor (KMO = 0.743, $p < .001$, 80.57% of explained variance), with high reliability of the scale (Cronbach's alpha – 0.879).

The items of all scales, along with means and standard deviations, are reported in Appendix, Table B.

3. Results

The results are provided in the following order: 1) first, we provide a descriptive analysis of sustainable food consumption behaviour, green self-identity and self-congruity; and then 2) results of hypotheses testing are presented.

Descriptive statistics of sustainable food consumption showed positive tendencies for SFC behaviour with a mean value of 4.68 (on a 7-point scale). The highest scores were on food waste prevention behaviour (5.67), concern about foods' impact on health (5.34), and environmentally friendly acquisition of food (5.03). In other words, the results showed that sustainable food consumption behaviour was most evident in the desire not to buy more than necessary, go shopping after making a shopping list, and intention not to throw away food leftovers. At the same time, consumers were concerned about the health effects of food and, therefore, increasingly interested in the composition of foods. Consumers were aware of the importance of reducing packaging or choosing environmentally friendly packaging. The results also showed that priority

was given to seasonal fruits and vegetables and local products, and the desire to consume fresh food is obvious, but the pace of life seems to mean that prepared or frozen food is not really given up (mean value for local/seasonal/fresh food was 4.77). Buying organic food reflected a somewhat moderate tendency (4.32), along with buying food with fair trade features (4.63). The lowest score was on behaviour reflecting the intention to reduce meat consumption or the choice of vegan food (3.25) (see Table 2 and Table B in the Appendix).

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics

Constructs	Mean	SD
Sustainable food consumption behaviour	***4.68***	*0.81*
Environmentally friendly acquisition	5.03	1.16
Local / seasonal / fresh food	4.77	1.01
Fair trade	4.63	1.29
Organic food	4.32	1.39
Food waste prevention	5.67	1.01
Meat reduction/ vegan food	3.25	1.58
Impact on health	5.34	1.02
Green self-identity	***4.42***	1.06
Self-congruity	***3.51***	1.31

The mean score of green self-identity (4.42 on a 7-point scale) reflected a little stronger than moderate identification with "green consumers". Meanwhile, self-congruity with green food products was lower than average (3.51), showing respondents' bigger mismatch than a match with green food products.

Simple linear regression analysis confirmed the significant positive effects assumed in H1 and H2. H1, postulating the positive effect of green self-identity on sustainable food consumption, was significant as $R^2 = .436$, $F\,(1, 730) = 563.234$, $p = .000$. Likewise, H2 presumed the positive effect of self-congruity with green products on SFC and it was supported, since $R^2 = .308$, $F\,(1, 730) = 325.212$, $p = .000$. Thus, considering the direct effects, green self-identity explains a bigger portion of variance in sustainable food consumption behaviour than self-congruity does (44% vs 31%). However, both independent variables do have a significant impact on SFC. A strong correlation was found among GSI and SC, as expected ($r = .734$, $p = .000$).

Mediation and moderation analyses were performed to test the relations in the research model (Figure 1) using the PROCESS macro for SPSS with the mean composite scores for each construct (Hayes, 2022).

At first, Model 4 in PROCESS (Hayes, 2022) was used to model the mediator self-congruity with green products on the relationship between green self-identity and sustainable food consumption. To assess the significance of the direct and indirect ef-

fects, a 95% bootstrap confidence interval (CI) was calculated by using 5000 samples. Second, the same procedure was repeated with the green self-identity as a mediator between self-congruity and sustainable food consumption since the model envisioned a two-way relationship between green self-identity and self-congruity (see Table 3). And finally, Model 1 by Hayes (2022) was used for moderation analysis, where self-congruity was seen as a possible moderator of the relationship between GSI and SFC.

Table 3

Direct, Indirect and Total Effect of GSI on SFC and SC on SFC

Mediator	Pathway	Effect		95% confidence interval	
		β	p	LLCI	ULCI
Self-congruity	Direct effect *GSI - SFC*	.4102	.0000	.3503	.4700
	Indirect effect *GSI - SC - SFC*	***.0827***		.0313	.1307
	Total effect	.4929	.0000	.4521	.5336
Green self-identity	Direct effect *SC - SFC*	.0904	.0003	.0422	.1387
	Indirect effect *SC - GSI - SFC*	***.2439***		.1988	.2915
	Total effect	.3344	.0000	.2980	.3708

The results showed that green self-identity affects sustainable food consumption more than self-congruity with green products, as the total effect, in this case, was bigger (.4929 vs .3344). However, the indirect effect of self-congruity on SFC through GSI was stronger than the indirect effect of green self-identity on SFC through SC (.2439 vs .0827, respectively), showing that green self-identity had a more substantial role as a mediator than self-congruity. Overall, both GSI and SC proved to be partial mediators, predicting the higher concern for sustainable food consumption behaviour and thus confirming hypotheses H4 and H5.

The results of the moderation analysis did not support the assumptions made in H3. There was no significant effect of self-congruity on the relationship between green self-identity and sustainable food consumption (R^2-*chng* = .0004, F (1, 728) = .5910, p = .4423); SC did not act as a moderator.

In general, the results suggest that individuals who display higher green self-identity tend to act more sustainably regarding food consumption behaviour. The relation even grows stronger when individuals' self-congruity with green products is evident. Nevertheless, green self-identity alone is a strong predictor of SFC behaviour. Self-congruity with green food products also positively affects SFC behaviour directly and indirectly via green self-identity, but the indirect effect is stronger.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

This paper investigated what drives individuals to behave more sustainably regarding food consumption (including the acquisition of food products, use and disposal), addressing consumers' green self-identity and their self-congruity with green food products. Four of the five proposed hypotheses were supported. The results showed that GSI as well as SC played a role in driving sustainable food consumption behaviour. Green self-identity had a significant positive direct effect on sustainable food consumption behaviour, consistent with previous research (Khare, 2015; Tung et al., 2017; Carfora et al., 2019; Lalot et al., 2019; Sharma et al., 2020; Hui & Khan, 2022; Sharma et al., 2022). However, it should be noted that previous research usually dealt with only buying behaviour or purchase intentions, and this is the first time, to our knowledge, when the dependent variable represents the complex three-stage consumption behaviour. Self-congruity with green food products was also proved to have a positive effect on SFC, in contrast to the results of Confente et al. (2020). However, the positive effect of SC on SFC was stronger through the GSI as a mediator. That is in line with previous research, suggesting that the effect of self-congruity on consumer behaviour is mediated by a range of self-concept motives (Roy & Rabbanee, 2015). For instance, Roy and Rabbanee (2015) found that self-congruity with a brand enhanced consumers' self-perception. They also found that self-congruity had an indirect effect on hedonic use via self-perception of the brand. Therefore, the authors claimed that self-congruity could be a promoter of a plethora of positive psychological outcomes related to the enhancement of the self (Roy & Rabbanee, 2015). Similarly, Shin et al. (2016) found that self-congruity impacts consumers' local food purchases directly and indirectly (via attitude and perceived behavioural control). On the other hand, studies suggesting self-congruency as a significant mediator between self-perception or attitude and behaviour also found support in the present study since it was confirmed that self-congruity with green food products partially mediated the relationship between green self-identity and sustainable food consumption behaviour. For example, McLelland et al. (2022) reported that the relationship between attitude towards being green (which actually is very close to the notion of green self-identity) and green behaviours was mediated by self-congruity with "green consumer". They also found that self-congruity perceptions had a positive effect on green behavioural intention, as well as the direct positive effect of attitude on intentions. This study did not support one of the five hypotheses, predicting the moderating role of self-congruity. This possible relation was hypothesised based on findings by Confente et al. (2020), who found that self-congruity significantly moderated the relationship between green self-identity and the perceived value of bioplastic products. However, in the present study, with behaviour as a dependent variable, the moderation effect was not significant.

In general, the findings clearly show that green self-identity and self-congruity are likely to influence subsequent sustainable behaviour both directly and indirectly and

play a significant role in the manifestation of consumer behaviour concerning sustainable food consumption. Since sustainable food consumption behaviour in the present study includes not only the purchase of green products but also different stages of consumption (acquisition, use, disposal) and different aspects of sustainability (environmental, social, economic), it seems that the concept of green self-identity has more explanatory power than self-congruity with green food products, which is limited to only a small part of SFC. It seems that it could be challenging for consumers to match themselves with green food products. The object of self-congruity in other studies was usually a known green brand or green products in general (Confente et al., 2020; Shin et al., 2016). Thus, the relationship between self-congruence and the behaviour towards those brands or products was analysed. Obviously, when the more complex behaviour is taken, there is some kind of asymmetry between the object of self-congruity and the object of behaviour. Future research should take it into account, considering the need to include the self-congruity construct in the research model.

This study contributes to the literature on sustainable consumer behaviour by shifting the focus on behaviour drivers with symbolic, irrational/emotional meaning for consumers rather than rational decision-making explanations. Based on the theories of self-congruity, identity and social identity, it explores the effects of symbolic antecedents of sustainable food consumption behaviour, showing that there may be an interesting interplay between self-congruity and green self-identity in the explanation of sustainable consumer behaviour.

5. Managerial Implications

The study results provide useful information to marketers and policymakers by revealing the importance of considering consumer self-concept (green identity and/or self-congruity) as a factor that can fundamentally influence behaviour regarding sustainable food consumption. When advertising or promoting environmentally friendly/eco/organic food, marketers should highlight not only functional benefits but also symbolic benefits. They must present "being green" as being more mainstream and use social influence to create positive associations with being sustainable.

The relevance of green consumer identity formation in society is visible when analysing the results of a global consumer survey conducted by NielsenIQ (2022), which indicates the change in consumer purchase preference over the last 2 years. Their survey results reveal a significant increase in willingness to buy nutritionally beneficial , hygienic/safe, freshly produced, environmentally safe and sustainable products, and products of local origin. Also, there are increased preferences indicated in buying products which have healthier options, are transparent in terms of their ingredients and supply chain, and contain attributes of socially responsible production. Integrating such global trends into the marketing communication about the benefits of consuming eco/organic food products could increase the consumer's perceived social value and strengthen self-con-

cept. The desire to "be green" might further lead to the increased consumption of organic food, a choice of meat-reduced diets, and fair trade products.

To strengthen the role of green self-identity in the context of promoting sustainable food consumption, brands need to support the idea of green activism and low-carbon lifestyle more actively and with real actions. Given the fact that today's consumers increasingly attribute to themselves the role of climate changers (Euromonitor International, 2021), brands have the opportunity to increase consumers' trust through the transparent labelling of carbon-neutral products. That is in relation to the dissemination of the idea of fair-trade labelling as well as consumer education.

The research results demonstrate the need to further educate the young generation, i. e., primary, basic, and secondary school children while developing their self-perception of being green and encouraging them to apply green ideas in their daily routine. In that sense, educators could add their input to the increase of sustainable food consumption by future consumers.

6. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study has several limitations. The degree of generalisation of the results is limited by convenience sample and specific geographical area. Cross-cultural (cross-country) comparison would definitely add additional value to understanding the phenomenon. The self-reported results from the actual sustainable food consumption behaviour might suffer from social desirability bias. Since the SFC behaviour in this study was defined from a holistic point of view and included three-stage consumption behaviour, self-reported measures were inevitable. However, future research might consider the use of indirect techniques in order to diminish the threat of social desirability error. Another possible limitation, as well as direction for future research, is related to the complexity of the phenomenon under investigation, i. e., with the concepts of "sustainable food consumption", "green food products", "green consumption", etc. Literature is abundant with different definitions, meanings and terms in this area (Durif et al., 2010; Sdrolia & Zarotiadis, 2019). But as well as academic definitions, consumers/respondents might also have a different understanding of or give a different meaning to those concepts, which in turn might lead to misleading results. Therefore, it is important to consider including language-specific explanations for the respondents while analysing multifaceted concepts. Finally, this study focused on symbolic, irrational factors in explaining SFC behaviour. Still, a large part of SFC (approx. 60%) remained unexplained, showing that there are a lot of other rational and irrational factors that should be examined to promote sustainable behaviour in food consumption.

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Appendix

Table A

Sample Description

Characteristic	N	%
Gender		
Male	103	12.3
Female	610	72.9
Refused to indicate	124	14.8
Age		
<18	6	0.7
18-29	209	25.0
30-44	281	33.6
45-60	130	15.5
>60	87	10.4
Refused to indicate	124	14.8
Education		
High school / Vocational	101	12.1
College / Higher non-university	74	8.8
University	538	64.3
Refused to indicate	124	14.8

Family status		
Single	108	12.9
Living with relatives (not married, not in partnership)	103	12.3
Partnership/marriage without children	154	18.4
Partnership/marriage with small children	235	28.1
Partnership/marriage with grown-up children who live independently	79	9.4
Single parent with children	24	2.9
Other	10	1.2
Refused to indicate	124	14.8
Income per month (Euro)		
≤ 300	45	5.4
301-500	63	7.5
501-800	138	16.5
801-1000	111	13.3
1001-1500	147	17.6
1501-2000	66	7.9
>2000	68	8.1
Refused to indicate	199	23.8

Table B

Measures

Construct	Items	Means	S.D.
Sustainable Food Consumption Behaviour			
Environmentally friendly acquisition	1. I choose food products that are produced/prepared in an environmentally friendly way.	4.62	1.32
	2. I choose food products in environmentally friendly packaging or, if possible, unpackaged.	5.04	1.44
	3. I avoid using excessive food packaging.	5.44	1.42
Local / seasonal / fresh food	1. I avoid frozen products (e.g. frozen vegetables) when cooking.	3.79	1.91
	2. I usually use fresh food ingredients for cooking.	5.42	1.16
	3. I avoid buying ready-to-eat, pre-prepared meals.	4.97	1.71
	4. I choose local/regional foods.	4.99	1.39
	5. I avoid buying food products brought from faraway countries.	3.82	1.58
	6. I give priority to seasonal fruits and vegetables.	5.68	1.12
Fairtrade	1. I choose food products that are produced without human exploitation (which happens in some countries).	4.62	1.46
	2. I choose food products that are made without the use of child labour.	4.87	1.54
	3. I buy food products with fair trade labelling.	4.40	1.45

Construct	Items	Means	S.D.
Organic food	1. I prefer organic (organically produced) food products.	4.80	1.50
	2. I buy organic meat.	4.06	1.68
	3. I buy organic fruits and vegetables.	4.38	1.58
	4. I buy organic dairy products.	4.12	1.63
	5. I buy organically labelled food products.	4.23	1.56
Food waste prevention	1. I go shopping after making a grocery list.	5.26	1.61
	2. I try not to throw food away.	6.00	1.08
	3. I use leftovers to make other dishes.	5.74	1.28
Meat reduction/ vegan food	1. I try to reduce my consumption of meat products.	4.01	1.96
	2. I avoid buying food products that contain ingredients of animal origin (e. g., I choose a vegan diet and avoid cheese and milk).	2.49	1.62
Impact on health	1. When choosing food, its composition is very important to me.	5.29	1.13
	2. When choosing food, I consider its effect on my health.	5.40	1.13
Green self-identity			
	1. I think of myself as of someone who cares about environmental issues.	5.30	1.17
	2. I think of myself as of a green consumer.	4.18	1.35
	3. I am sure that I am an environmentally responsible person.	4.80	1.18
	4. I put a lot of effort into presenting myself as a green consumer who avoids environmentally harmful products.	3.90	1.53
	5. Buying green food products makes me feel like a green consumer.	3.90	1.49
	6. I am completely satisfied with myself when I buy green food products.	4.46	1.53
Self-congruity with green food products			
	1. I feel that I am a part of the green food consumer community.	3.59	1.53
	2. People who buy green food products are a lot like me.	3.53	1.35
	3. Buying green food products reflects who I am.	3.41	1.50