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Article

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THE ROLE OF PERCEPTION AND KNOWLEDGE IN SHAPING CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR TOWARD GREEN AGRO-FOOD PRODUCTS IN ROMANIA AND ITS EFFECT ON WELL-BEINGS

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Abstract

Understanding the factors influencing consumer behaviour toward green agro-food products is crucial for shaping consumption habits in the interest of sustainable development. The conducted study expanded knowledge on sustainable consumption of green agro-food products by providing new insights for food market actors, derived from the evaluation of consumer behaviour and attitudes. Factors such as consumer perception and knowledge of green agro-food products, the importance of age, income, and children's involvement in issues related to enhancing well-being through sustainable food consumption were analysed. Data were collected through an online questionnaire from a sample of 614 respondents, representative of the studied consumer segment. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was employed to model the complex relationships underlying sustainable consumption behaviour. The study led to the development of a novel model of sustainable food consumption and highlighted how knowledge and perception of green agro-food products — still relatively unknown and understudied in Romania — positively influence attitudes, consumption behaviour, and consumer well-being. The moderation model empirically demonstrated that age, income, and the presence or involvement of children do not optimise the relationship between consumption behaviour and well-being.

This research provides valuable insights within a sustainability framework for decision-makers and marketing specialists operating in food markets.

Keywords: sustainable development, green agro-food products, consumption behaviour, well-being

JEL Classification: Q01, Q1, Q13, Q56

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Introduction

Concerns about reducing pollution and achieving a sustainable economy based on responsible consumption are becoming increasingly prominent globally. The European Commission has adopted the Green Deal, which aims to achieve ambitious goals: sustainable, sufficient, and affordable food products for consumers; fair income for producers; and enhanced competitiveness of European Union (EU) agriculture. The “Eat Smart. Eat Local. How Much Do We Produce and Consume Locally?” conference, held in Bucharest in October 2024, as part of the Green Report conference series, brought to the forefront the challenges and solutions in the Romanian agro-food sector related to climate-neutral agriculture, ecological measures, food waste reduction, rural development, and the funds allocated for implementing measures in line with global and European environmental and climate objectives (CGR, 2024).

Green agro-food products (GAFP) create a competitive advantage, as they are perceived as superior to conventional alternatives. Their enhanced attributes allow them to align with Michael Porter's (Porter and Heppelmann, 2015), differentiation strategy, addressing the demands of consumers concerned with sustainability. In this way, GAFP not only meets functional expectations but also foster consumer loyalty, positioning itself as a superior choice in the market.

The motivation of the study was given by: (1) the context of sustainable development based on sustainable consumption; (2) the necessity of knowing the factors that affect the behaviour of the responsible consumer, of modifying current consumption patterns for the benefit of sustainable development (Sargin and Dursun, 2023) and ensuring well-being; (3) the increased scientific interest in investigating behavioural consumption differences belonging to different generations of consumers, coming from different cultural areas, which would substantiate the way retailers operate in this specific market (Cramarenco et al., 2023); (4) the limited scientific references at the international and especially national level regarding the research of sustainable agro-food products (GAFP) consumption, compared to the research of organic (bio, ecological) product consumption, and the need to clarify the terminology of the two concepts.

In environmental consumerism models, researchers have shown that despite environmental concern (pro-environmental attitudes), knowledge, awareness, and other external and internal factors, consumers do not always manage to purchase eco-friendly or environmentally sustainable products and fail to develop consistent pro-environmental behaviour (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002; Vermeir and Verbeke, 2006; Gupta and Ogden, 2009).

The purpose of this study is to expand knowledge on sustainable consumption behaviour of green agro-food products (GAFP) by providing new and valuable insights for stakeholders in the food market, derived from the evaluation of consumer behaviour and attitudes. The study analyses factors such as consumer perception and knowledge of GAFP, the importance of age and income, and the presence and involvement of children in issues related to enhancing well-being through sustainable food consumption.

The research objectives are: (1) highlighting the impact of key determinants on the food consumption behaviours of green agro-food product (GAFP) consumers in Romania, focusing on perception, knowledge, and consumer attitudes; (2) identifying emerging trends in well-being enhancement through consumption behaviours that have the potential to shape food markets.

The article aims to provide conceptual clarifications regarding green agro-food products (GAFP), as the existing literature primarily focuses on the consumption of organic, bio, or ecological products (Das et al., 2021; Radojević et al., 2021; Cramarenco et al., 2023) while often overlooking the sustainability aspect. The research findings contribute to the academic literature by presenting a novel model of sustainable food consumption behaviour, highlighting how knowledge and perception of GAFP positively influence attitudes, which in turn shape consumer behaviour, ultimately leading to enhanced consumer well-being. In Romania, research on this topic remains limited, particularly regarding quantitative approaches to studying the phenomenon, as well as analysing the role of consumer generations, their children, and income levels in optimising the relationship between sustainable consumption behaviour and well-being, a key objective of sustainable development.

The study contributes in this regard to the existing literature through the proposed model, which has empirically demonstrated that the factors indicated above do not moderate the relationship between sustainable consumption behaviour and well-being, a fact that highlights the need to reassess their role in sustainable food consumption models.

The article is structured as follows: the first section provides a literature review on green agro-food products (GAFP), the factors that determine consumption behaviours and attitudes toward GAFP, as well as the impact of age, consumer income, and children on the relationship between sustainable consumption behaviour and well-being. The second section presents the research methodology, describing in detail the instruments used, the participants, and the applied methodology. The next section is dedicated to the discussion of the obtained results. Finally, the conclusion section outlines the findings of the study.

1. Review of the scientific literature

1.1. Green agro-food products in the context of sustainable development

The concept of sustainable development should be regarded as a holistic framework, encompassing three primary dimensions: environment, community, and economy (Ruggerio, 2021; Zimek and Baumgartner, 2024). These dimensions are interconnected, contributing collectively to overall well-being.

Sustainable consumption, on the other hand, constitutes a cornerstone of sustainable development, ensuring the welfare of both current and future generations (Sesini et al., 2020). Previous studies have established a link between sustainable food consumption and the adoption of ecological or organic products (Das et al., 2021; European Commission, 2023). Additionally, various international organisations and scholarly works have associated sustainable dietary consumption with specific dietary practices (FAO, 2012; FAO, 2019), which focus on green agro-food products (GAFP). Annunziata and Scarpato (2014) suggest that maintaining sustainable dietary consumption requires a transition towards products with sustainable attributes, including a mix of organic or ecological products and traditional or locally specific goods. Similarly, Alshammari and Williams (2018) define green products as traditional or locally specific items. Kevany, Mason and Lang (2018) highlight that sustainable diets are influenced by a range of cultural and social factors, with time constraints often outweighing health and environmental considerations.

Seyfang (2006) emphasises that consumers of GAFP pay particular attention to respect for nature during production, the integrity of the farmer, the origin of the food, and, subsequently, the health benefits of the product. Additionally, GAFP, within the context of sustainable consumption—a prerequisite for sustainable development—are chosen, purchased, prepared, and consumed based on their fundamental attributes, including sensory characteristics, convenience, cost/price balance, and consumer health, such as sufficient and balanced nutrition (Kaya, 2016; Allès et al., 2017). Moreover, these products are valued for their additional pro-social and pro-environmental attributes tied to the production process, such as environmental well-being, animal welfare, and social justice, which reflect the core values of sustainability (Pickett-Baker and Ozaki, 2008). Thus, GAFP differentiates itself in the food market from conventional products and, by purchasing them, consumers can play an active role in building and strengthening a more sustainable system. Because of the broader social and economic impact, contributing to food security at the community (even regional level) as well as the positive environmental impact, GAFP differs from ecological (bio, organic) agro-food products, that provide direct health benefits to consumers and to the environment.

1.2. Determinants of sustainable consumption in dietary behaviours for green agro-food products

Current agro-food consumption behaviours are unsustainable and changing them is essential because “what humanity eats has a major impact on public health, the economy, the environment, and the future” (Kevany, Mason and Lang, 2018, p.9). Under these circumstances, achieving sustainable agro-food consumption requires a deeper understanding of consumption behaviour.

In a systematic review of theories and models applied to understanding sustainable consumption behaviour, was found that the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) was the most frequently used. TPB highlights the influence of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control on sustainable consumption, expanding upon the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), which initially focused only on two factors in shaping individual behaviour: attitudes and social norms. According to TPB, consumer behaviour is influenced by their perception of their ability to perform a specific behaviour. Linear models, which assume a causal relationship from perception → attitude → intention → decision → behaviour, have dominated consumer behaviour research. Studies on sustainable consumption behaviour emphasise the need for multidimensional approaches that integrate psychological, social, and contextual factors (Sesini et al., 2020; Syed et al., 2024), highlighting the complexity of sustainable consumption behaviour.

Thus, the present study proposes a clear theoretical framework that explores the relationships between perception, knowledge, attitude, and the consumption behaviour of green agro-food products (GAFP) among Romanian consumers, providing a comprehensive understanding of the key determinants of sustainable consumption behaviour and its implications for well-being.

Consumer knowledge regarding the harmful environmental consequences of intensive agricultural practices, as well as their awareness of sustainable agricultural practices, can foster positive attitudes toward GAFP, ultimately leading to the adoption of sustainable food consumption behaviours. Halicka et al. (2021) found that although over 80% of parents participating in their study stated that teaching children about the connections between food, health, and the environment was their responsibility, 27% of them had no intention of

educating their children in this regard. Knowledge of environmental and food sustainability is essential for changing current unsustainable consumption behaviours (García-González et al., 2020; De Marchi et al., 2024). The findings of Chanda, Isa, and Ahmed (2023) reveal that environmental sensitivity mediates the relationship between environmental knowledge and attitudes toward green products.

In Romania, consumers are not sufficiently familiar with the concept of sustainability in agro-food production and green agro-food products (GAFP) - products enhanced by their contribution to well-being, featuring pro-environmental and pro-social attributes. Because of this, what consumers believe (perception) and what they know (knowledge and experience) about GAFP forms the starting point in evaluating sustainable food consumption behaviour. Regarding consumer knowledge of GAFP, research suggests that product origin strongly influences attitudes toward foreign products (Alshammari and Williams, 2018). Bojnec et al. (2019) found that Romanian consumers prefer food production to be more locally sourced, with 65% of respondents favoring locally produced food over other domestic sources, and 77% preferring Romanian products over those from other EU countries. Additional research on ethnocentric consumer behaviour supports these findings. Such attitudes and behaviours support local farmers, ensure product availability, and are shaped by factors such as perceived vulnerability and the economic and political development of the country of origin (Kaynak and Kara, 2002; Balabanis and Siamagka, 2017; Pagliacci et al., 2019).

Perception refers to how consumers interpret and understand the attributes of GAFP. A crucial element of sustainable food consumption is the consumer's holistic image, which goes beyond individual rational purchasing decisions. In the purchasing process, consumers also consider how their choices make them feel (Fraj and Martinez, 2006). They may also take into account the sustainability of the production process, ensuring environmental well-being, animal welfare, and social equity (Agrillo et al., 2015; Sama et al., 2018). In the formation of attitudes toward sustainable products (Cuc et al., 2023), consumer perception remains a key factor for both food marketing and technological development. This perception is shaped by sensory properties, personal factors, and environmental influences (Rai et al., 2023). A favorable attitude toward organic products is also influenced by cognitive aspects such as attractive packaging design, the absence of additives and harmful chemicals, and price (Radojević et al., 2021).

According to researchers, sustainable food consumption is hindered by the gap between consumer attitudes and actual purchasing behaviour in the agro-food market. Dorce et al. (2021) found that attitude has the strongest impact on a consumer's intention to buy organic vegetables, followed by perceived behavioural control and subjective norms. Another study highlights that willingness to buy organic products, an environmentally oriented lifestyle, and willingness to pay a premium mediate the relationship between current ecological behaviour and future intention to purchase organic products (Cuc et al., 2022). Many consumers already hold positive attitudes toward sustainable food, yet a significant gap remains between favorable attitudes, purchase behaviour, and actual consumption of more sustainable food products (Vermeir et al., 2020).

The role of income (material wealth) in moderating the relationship between sustainable behaviour and well-being has been less studied. Researchers Issock, Muposhi and Dlamini (2024) state that materialistic values can motivate sustainable practices, ultimately contributing to individual consumer well-being. Materialists (those who value possessions) may become GAFP consumers because sustainable choices represent a form of personal

fulfillment that enhances their social status. This assumption is also valid for snobs, as materialistic values can reinforce self-affirmation through eco-conscious choices.

Baumann et al. (2019) analysed food preferences in 105 families in Canada from lower and higher socio-economic backgrounds. Their findings indicate that families with lower socio-economic status prefer low-cost, familiar, predictable, and accessible foods, whereas for higher-income families, these were not priorities. Thus, consumer income influences the purchasing of GAFP, as these products tend to be more expensive than conventional alternatives. Consumers with above-average incomes can afford to purchase GAFP regularly, contributing to their well-being. In contrast, low-income consumers, despite being well-informed about the multiple benefits of GAFP, may not be able to afford them.

Parents and grandparents can contribute to the formation of sustainable eating behaviours in children, influencing healthy food choices, reducing food waste, and encouraging family meals. Nazzaro et al. (2018) emphasise the role of parental influence in shaping consumption behaviour by promoting more balanced and responsible eating habits.

Age can influence how individuals adopt sustainable food behaviours. In general, younger generations are expected to be more inclined to consume GAFP due to early education on healthy and sustainable eating, participation in school programs (e.g., “Green Week”), and exposure to updated information on the benefits of GAFP through social media. Musso et al. (2022) find that young people are more receptive to statements regarding personal health and environmental considerations. Older adults and the elderly tend to have a positive attitude toward sustainable foods, as their health status influences their perception, associating sustainable consumption with personal well-being (Rodríguez-Bermúdez et al., 2020).

There is limited research examining the direct impact of GAFP consumption on well-being. The present study provides empirical evidence supporting this connection.

2. Research methodology

2.1. Research hypotheses and conceptual model design

To ensure sustainable consumption, it is necessary to determine under what conditions consumers tend to engage in such behaviours and which factors influence consumption behaviours for green agro-food products (GAFP). The literature highlights a gap in understanding the consumer decision-making process regarding sustainable food consumption. Consumer perception of agro-food products is a highly complex and dynamic phenomenon, influenced by a wide range of factors. Authors such as Willet et al. (2019) emphasise that a transformation of agro-food systems will not be possible unless people change how they perceive and engage with these systems. Consumers who possess knowledge about the negative environmental effects of conventional agriculture will be more likely to choose GAFP over conventional products. GAFP serve as a sustainable alternative, contributing to environmental protection, personal and community health, and social equity. Moreover, education on healthy eating, combined with an understanding of sustainable agricultural practices, will stimulate preferences for GAFP and, consequently, increase their consumption. Based on the literature review, we formulated the following hypotheses:

H1: Consumers’ perception of GAFP has a positive and significant effect on their attitude toward these products.

H2: Consumers' knowledge about GAFP has a positive and significant effect on their attitude toward these products.

H3: Consumers' attitude toward GAFP has a positive and significant effect on their consumption behaviour of these products.

Authors such as Tian and Henseler (2024) reveal that individual and environmental well-being are key factors in happiness related to food, while social well-being exhibits even stronger effects. These dimensions are supported by motivations for health and environmental responsibility, which moderate food well-being to encourage sustainable consumption behaviours. In this context, we posit the following hypothesis:

H4: Consumption behaviour of GAFP has a positive and significant effect on consumer well-being.

To understand sustainable behaviour, the most commonly used socio-demographic variables in research have been gender, age, and education. However, findings have been somewhat ambiguous (Verain et al., 2012). Based on the reviewed literature, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H5: Demographic factors (children, income, age) play a moderating role in the relationship between GAFP consumption behaviour and consumer well-being.

Based on the presented hypotheses, we proposed a conceptual model for the study (Figure no.1). This model illustrates the relationships among consumer perception and knowledge of green agro-food products, attitudes toward these products, consumption behaviour, and consumer well-being. The model is based on the premise that consumer perception (H1) and knowledge of green agro-food products (H2) positively and significantly influence their attitudes. In turn, attitudes have a positive and significant effect on consumption behaviour (H3), and consumption behaviour directly impacts consumer well-being (H4). Additionally, demographic factors play a moderating role (H5) in the relationship between consumption behaviour and well-being.

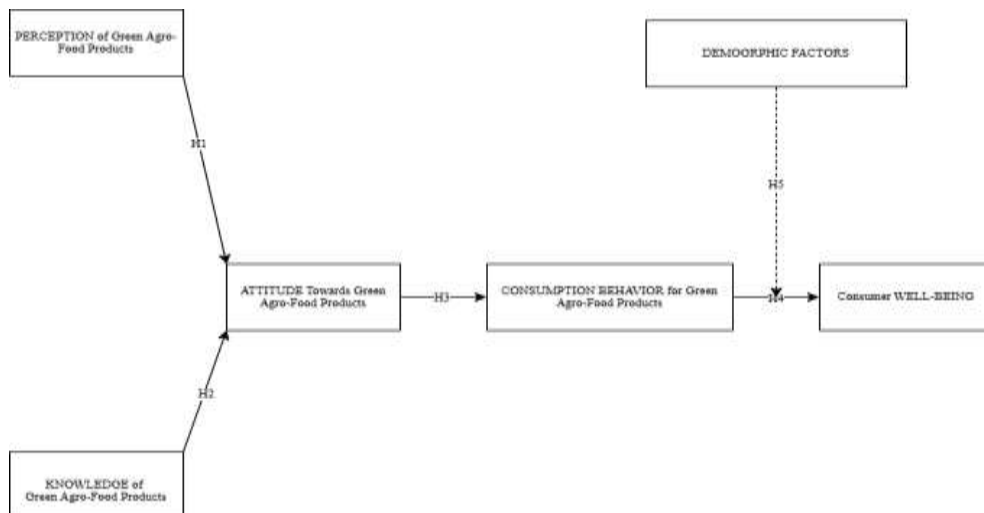


Figure no. 1. Conceptual model

2.2. Description of data collection and analysis methods

For the collection of primary data, a quantitative research method was used, with data gathered through a questionnaire-based survey. In total, 614 fully completed questionnaires were received from respondents across Romania between July and November 2024. The questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms, with all questions being mandatory.

The sample size calculation was based on the classical formula for determining sample size in a statistical survey, using the standardised normal distribution (Z) for a 5% significance level and a maximum margin of error of $e = \pm 4\%$. The sample is relevant for different demographic groups and is fairly representative of the population of Romania. The majority of respondents (73.4%) were aged between 18-25 years, followed by 7.1% in the 26-40 age group, 10.1% in the 41-55 age group, and 8.9% aged over 55. A very small proportion (0.5%) were under 18. Regarding gender distribution, 52.5% of respondents were female, and 47.5% were male. In terms of income, 55.4% earned less than 2,000 RON per month, 18.9% earned between 2,000 and 4,000 RON, 12.2% earned between 4,001 and 6,000 RON, 7.3% earned between 6,001 and 8,000 RON, and 6.1% earned over 8,000 RON per month. Concerning residence, 70.4% of respondents lived in urban areas, while 29.6% resided in rural areas. Marital status was distributed as follows: 22.0% were unmarried, 63.8% were married, 12.1% were divorced, and 2.1% were widowed. Regarding children, 65.0% of respondents reported having one child, 15.1% had two children, and 19.9% had three or more children, while none reported having no children. Occupational status was distributed as follows: students (31.3%), employees (64.0%), pensioners (2.2%), unemployed individuals (0.7%), and entrepreneurs (1.8%). Respondents' fields of activity included technology/IT (20.7%), education (16.0%), medicine/healthcare (4.3%), and other fields such as public administration, trade, and industry in relatively smaller proportions.

The sample consists mainly of young individuals (18-25 years old). This age group is particularly relevant to the study, as they adopt sustainability trends the fastest. For practical purposes, a non-probabilistic sampling method was used (Etikan et al., 2016; Cornesse et al., 2020). Specifically, convenience sampling was applied. As a result, while the findings have limited representativeness, they remain relevant to the phenomenon being studied.

The scales used to measure the constructs in the study were adapted from multiple relevant sources in the literature. Specifically, items related to consumer perception of green agro-food products (GAFP) were adapted from Giannelloni (1998) and Zaiem (2005). Items measuring consumer knowledge about these products were taken from Zaiem (2005). The evaluation of consumer attitude was based on scales adapted from Ajzen and Driver (1992) and Giannelloni (1998). Regarding consumption behaviour, the items were inspired by Ajzen (1991), Ajzen and Driver (1992) Giannelloni (1998), and Annunziata and Scarpato (2014). Finally, the measurement of consumer well-being used items adapted from Annunziata and Scarpato (2014). All items within the constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

The main objective of the data analysis was to test the research hypotheses (Figure no. 1). The reliability of the measurement scales was tested using Cronbach's alpha (α) and composite reliability (CR). Factor loadings were calculated for each item. Composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) were used to verify convergent validity. To test discriminant validity, the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations was applied (Henseler et al., 2015). The research hypotheses were tested using structural

equation modelling (SEM). SEM was chosen as the main methodological approach due to its ability to analyse complex models with multiple dependent and independent variables (Chen and Chang, 2012; Kumar Roy et al., 2014; Parasuraman and Colby, 2015). It allows for the exploration of multidimensional relationships between consumer perception and knowledge of GAFP, attitude, consumption behaviour, and well-being. Additionally, SEM enables simultaneous testing of direct and indirect effects. This method was selected because it also accounts for measurement errors and provides a confirmatory analysis of theoretical models. The software used for statistical data processing was SMART PLS 4.

3. Results and discussion

The scales used to measure the dimensions/constructs demonstrated strong reliability (Table no. 1). The values for Cronbach's alpha (α) and composite reliability (CR) significantly exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.700, as recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981). The values of Cronbach's α and composite reliability (CR) exceed the minimum threshold of 0.7, confirming the internal consistency of the constructs used. For example, the perception of green agro-food products (GAFP) has a Cronbach's α of 0.844 and a composite reliability of 0.927, indicating a high measurement stability.

Convergent validity was assessed using composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). All constructs — perception of green agro-food products, attitude towards green agro-food products, consumption behaviour for green agro-food products, and consumer well-being — demonstrated a high degree of convergent validity, with Cronbach's α and CR values exceeding 0.7 and AVE values surpassing 0.5. These results indicate excellent internal consistency and reliability (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Table no. 1. Scale reliability and convergent validity

No.	Constructs/Dimension	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
1.	Perception of Green Agro-Food Products	0.844	0.927	0.865
2.	Attitude Towards Green Agro-Food Products	0.824	0.919	0.850
3.	Consumption Behaviour for Green Agro-Food Products	0.826	0.920	0.852
4.	Consumer Well-Being	0.878	0.925	0.804

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT). All observed values were below the maximum threshold of 0.900 (Table no. 2). Based on these findings, we conclude that the constructs exhibit a high level of discriminant validity (Gold et al., 2001; Teo, Srivastava and Jiang, 2008). Table no. 2 indicates whether the constructs used are distinct from one another. The HTMT ratio values are below the 0.9 threshold, confirming that each construct is well-defined and that there are no significant overlaps between the analysed latent variables. For example, the relationship between attitude and consumption behaviour has an HTMT value of 0.885, indicating a high but distinct correlation, supporting the hypothesis that attitude influences behaviour.

Table no. 2. Discriminant validity (HTMT)

	well-being	attitude	consumption behaviour	perception
well-being	-	0.880	0.830	0.702
attitude	0.880	-	0.885	0.613
consumption behaviour	0.830	0.885	-	0.570
perception	0.702	0.613	0.570	-

The results of the determined indicators for assessing the consistency of the proposed conceptual model are presented below (Table no. 3). The proposed model has a good fit with the empirical data, as indicated by an SRMR of 0.047, which is below the acceptable threshold of 0.08. This suggests that the model successfully explains a significant proportion of the variation in consumer behaviour.

Table no. 3. Fit indices for the conceptual research model

	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.047	0.084
d_ULS	0.712	2.277
d_G	0.335	0.429
Chi-square	1277.397	1466.063
NFI	0.866	0.846

The model demonstrates a good fit, as evidenced by an SRMR of 0.047 for the saturated model, which indicates an excellent fit according to the 0.08 threshold. Although the SRMR value for the estimated model is 0.084, it remains within the acceptable limit, suggesting that the model performs well overall. The d_ULS value (0.712 for the saturated model) and d_G value (0.335 for the saturated model) indicate a low level of discrepancy between the theoretical model and the empirical data, underscoring the robustness of the model. Furthermore, the NFI value of 0.866 for the saturated model is close to the 0.90 threshold, indicating an acceptable fit and suggesting that the proposed conceptual model effectively captures the relationships among the variables. These results point to a solid conceptual structure.

The results of hypothesis testing (table no. 4) indicate that consumers' perception of green agro-food products has a direct, positive, and significant influence on their attitude toward these products ($\beta = 0.292$; $p = 0.000 < 0.050$). Similarly, consumers' knowledge about green agro-food products also exerts a direct, positive, and significant influence on their attitude ($\beta = 0.404$; $p = 0.000 < 0.050$). Therefore, research hypotheses H1 and H2 are accepted. Furthermore, hypothesis H3 is also supported, as consumers' attitudes toward green agro-food products have a direct, positive, and significant influence on their consumption behaviour ($\beta = 0.739$; $p = 0.000 < 0.050$). Additionally, hypothesis H4 is confirmed, with consumption behaviour of green agro-food products having a direct, positive, and significant influence on consumer well-being ($\beta = 0.680$; $p = 0.000 < 0.050$). In contrast, hypothesis H5 is rejected, as demographic factors (children, income, age) do not exert a significant moderating role in the relationship between green agro-food consumption behaviour and consumer well-being ($\beta = 0.032$; $p = 0.337 > 0.050$). In conclusion, hypotheses H1, H2, H3, and H4 are accepted, confirming the significant relationships between the variables included in the conceptual model. However, H5 is not supported by the data.

Table no. 4. Results of hypothesis testing

Hypotheses	β	p	Results
H1: Perception \rightarrow Attitude	0.292	0.000	Accepted
H2: Knowledge \rightarrow Attitude	0.404	0.000	Accepted
H3: Attitude \rightarrow Behaviour	0.739	0.000	Accepted
H4: Behaviour \rightarrow Well-Being	0.680	0.000	Accepted
H5: Demographic Factors (Moderators) Consumption Behaviour \rightarrow Well-Being	0.032	0.337	Rejected

The study's findings confirm that consumer perception and knowledge about green agro-food products play a significant role in shaping attitudes toward these products (H1: $\beta = 0.292$, $p < 0.001$; H2: $\beta = 0.404$, $p < 0.001$), as evidenced by previous research (Chen and Chang, 2013; Boca, 2021).

Consistent with the results of Liu, Teng and Han (2020), attitudes toward green agro-food products were found to be strong predictors of sustainable consumption behaviour, significantly influencing consumption behaviour (H3: $\beta = 0.739$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, consumption behaviour positively impacts consumer well-being (H4: $\beta = 0.680$, $p < 0.001$), a hypothesis validated in previous studies, such as Tian and Henseler (2024).

However, the moderating role of demographic factors (different consumer generations, their children, and income levels) in the relationship between green agro-food consumption and well-being was not supported (H5: $\beta = 0.032$, $p = 0.337$). The lack of support for H5 contrasts with earlier studies that suggested demographic factors such as income or the presence of children are significant moderators (Halicka et al., 2021; Baumann et al., 2019). These discrepancies may be attributed to the socio-economic context of Romania, an emerging market for these products, and its unique cultural characteristics. For instance, Romania lacks widespread education on sustainable consumption and has a tradition of adhering to religious fasting periods, during which most green products are consumed.

The study results support the initially formulated hypotheses by confirming the significant relationships between the analysed variables. Consumer perception and knowledge positively influence their attitude toward green agro-food products (H1: $\beta = 0.292$, $p < 0.001$; H2: $\beta = 0.404$, $p < 0.001$). Attitude directly determines consumption behaviour (H3: $\beta = 0.739$, $p < 0.001$), which in turn positively impacts consumer well-being (H4: $\beta = 0.680$, $p < 0.001$). The only unsupported hypothesis (H5: $\beta = 0.032$, $p = 0.337$) indicates that demographic factors do not play a significant moderating role, suggesting that other variables may have a greater influence on the relationship between behaviour and well-being.

These findings offer critical insights into the behavioural mechanisms underpinning sustainable consumption. The results highlight the essential role of perception and knowledge in promoting attitudes toward sustainable agro-food products. The strong relationship between attitudes, behaviour, and well-being underscores the need for strategies and programs aimed at raising awareness and enhancing credibility regarding the environmental, resource-based, community, cultural, and economic impacts of food (Sánchez-Bravo et al., 2020). Such initiatives could contribute to achieving goals associated with sustainable production and consumption, while also enhancing overall well-being through the adoption of green agro-food practices. Furthermore, the strong connection between consumption patterns and well-being — particularly the adverse effects of unhealthy eating, which carry both social and environmental consequences (Telese et al., 2016) highlights the potential for

promoting sustainable behaviours to deliver dual advantages: benefiting the environment as well as society and individuals. The lack of a significant influence from demographic factors suggests that the positive effects of sustainable consumption on well-being extend across all demographic groups.

From a practical perspective, this research opens new perspectives for decision-makers and marketing specialists in agro-food systems, allowing for the further exploration of purchasing decision-making processes for GAFP, providing recommendations for expanding GAFP adoption, and shaping agro-food consumption patterns.

Conclusions

The study confirms the applicability of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) in the context of sustainable development and contributes to a deeper understanding of sustainable consumption concepts in food behaviours.

The research provides conceptual clarifications regarding green agro-food products (GAFP) and identifies a novel model of sustainable food consumption behaviour. Given that Romanian consumers have limited familiarity with GAFP, this model highlights the importance of consumer knowledge and perception in positively influencing attitudes and consumption behaviour. This study led to the development of a mediator model that examines the role of age, income, and children's presence and involvement in the relationship between consumption behaviour and consumer well-being. However, these factors do not moderate this relationship, which aligns with building a sustainable world.

The implementation of educational programs on sustainable food consumption from an early age could improve consumer knowledge and enhance the perceived value of GAFP. These education programs should also involve producers and distributors by launching public awareness campaigns on the benefits of sustainable consumption and improving GAFP accessibility by reducing costs.

Since sustainable development is about building businesses that not only withstand shocks but also transform, retail companies (especially hypermarkets – formats that offer large shelf spaces) and online food commerce platforms could use the conclusions of this study to design policies aimed at preventing food waste. This is particularly important for organic products, fruits, and vegetables, as well as for strategies to repurpose expired or unsold food for agricultural purposes or social responsibility initiatives. Instead of targeting specific demographic groups, these initiatives should appeal to universal pro-environmental and pro-social values.

Although this study offers valuable insights, it also has certain limitations that must be considered. First, it relies on a specific sample and a non-probabilistic sampling method, which may limit the generalisability of the results to the general population. For instance, the predominance of young and urban respondents could influence the identified trends. Second, while the model examines perception, knowledge, and consumption behaviour, it does not account for factors such as socio-cultural, educational, or economic influences, which may also affect the decision to purchase green products. Third, the study was conducted at a single point in time, preventing an assessment of long-term changes in consumer behaviour. Finally, although the measurement instrument was adapted from previous studies, its further validation through qualitative methods (focus groups, interviews) could enhance the

robustness of the conclusions. All these limitations could be addressed in future research by using more diverse samples, integrating mixed data collection methods, and conducting longitudinal analyses to better understand the dynamics of GAFP adoption.

Comparative studies across different countries could also help clarify the role of contextual factors in shaping consumer behaviour.

The study results reflect the specific characteristics of the Romanian context, where awareness of sustainability is growing but remains less embedded compared to Western European countries. This calls for targeted programs and strategies to enhance knowledge and perception, paving the way for broader adoption of sustainable practices in Romania and beyond. The relatively weak moderating role of demographic factors suggests that sustainable food consumption is perceived as a universal responsibility, rather than a privilege of higher-income groups. Additionally, cultural values that emphasise family and community well-being may explain the strong link between consumption and well-being.

Thus, the research highlights the importance of changing consumption behaviour to ensure environmental sustainability and the well-being of current and future generations. This study represents a significant step forward in researching sustainable behaviour related to green agro-food products in Romania, offering a replicable model that could be applied to other emerging markets.

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