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Systematic Review

Who Prefers Regional Products? A Systematic Literature Review of Consumer Characteristics and Attitudes in Short Food Supply Chains

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Abstract: The present work is a selection of empirical studies focusing on the characteristics and attitudes of Short Food Supply Chain (SFSC) consumers. Using a systematic literature review approach (PRISMA), we identified five different aspects of the SFSC within the publications: producer participation, swot, state intervention, attitude and "other". Based on the findings of studies from the academic literature, the results are quite mixed. Though the number of SFSC-related empirical studies has risen in recent years, there is a lack of SFSC-related data, even in the European Union (EU), where a sustainable agriculture and food system must play a crucial role in the implementation of the Green Deal. Overall, it is hard to name those features that, without any doubt, affect the willingness of consumers to purchase from an SFSC. The studies mostly remarked on age and education; however, even these findings cannot be generalized. Therefore, some consumers of non-global food supply chains could be characterized very well, but these observations could differ in diverse cases because of local factors.

Keywords: Short Food Supply Chains; regional products; characteristics of consumers; systematic review

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1. Introduction

In the last few decades, the unsustainable operation of the global food system could be the reason for the rising level of food waste and food safety hazards, and it could also increase environmental pollution. We also must emphasize the vulnerable situation of supply chain members since the distribution of added value is not fair. To mitigate these problems and provide more environmentally friendly and sustainable production, numerous alternative ways have been developed in agriculture. Fisk [1] published the ancestor of sustainable consumption in 1973. It was the concept of responsible consumption. The author defined it as the efficient and rational use of resources with respect to the global human population. This definition concentrated only on the supply side, but the article noted that the production serves the consumers' needs and wants. Nearly twenty years later, one of the first appearances of sustainable consumption was published in 1987 by the Brundtland report [2]. There are various definitions of this idea. One of the most comprehensive was published by Ofstad [3]. He identified sustainable consumption as a lifestyle that focuses on basic needs. At the same time, it minimizes pollution, toxic materials, natural resources and emissions of waste and does not jeopardize the needs of the future generation [4,5]. Some academic researchers emphasize the contrary position and meaning of sustainability and consumption [6,7]. According to Vermeir and Verbeke [8], sustainable consumption involves a decision-making process that accounts not only for the consumer's social responsibility but also for the individual's needs and wants. Nowadays, consumers appreciate trust a great deal, especially in the food sector [9,10]. Many stakeholders can be found in the traditional food supply chain, which could also obstruct the products' effective traceability. One way that traceability and trust could be increased, and the environmental damage decreased, is the application of a Short Food Supply Chain (SFSC). An SFSC embodies an alternative to the standardized industrial food supply, where the distance between consumer and producer is shorter (often face-to-face interaction), and the information flow between the participants is smoother. We can also find environmental, social and economic reasons why this alternative could be favorable, but the SFSC has two main functions: to stress the key position of producers in sustainable agriculture and to emphasize the consumers' role in sustainable consumption [11,12]. Since the supply depends on the consumers' needs in the "food democracy", the new consumption habits could change food supply systems [13].

2. Materials and Methods

To achieve a wide range of articles in line with SFSCs, a comprehensive literature review was conducted using five significant online databases: Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, ProQuest and Science Direct. The keyword used was "short food supply chain". This expression had to be included in the title, abstract or keywords. The involved article had to contain empirical data. The search was restricted to studies in English. We also included reports published by the European Commission, FAO, United Nations and Strength2Food (an EU-funded project). None of the online databases, such as FADN Public Database, Eurostat or OECD, had related information. Our review could not be extended with the articles' references since the involved publications principally identified a particular phenomenon. From the online databases, 496 items fulfilled the above-defined requirements. The procedure for the systematic review was managed by the online platform Rayyan [14], applying the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) approach. PRISMA is a concept used to sum up why the studied review was written, what methodology was used and what the authors found [15]. The original concept was published in 2009 [16]. However, the idea was extended in 2020 [17]. Based on these, the applied multi-round screening can be seen in Figure 1.

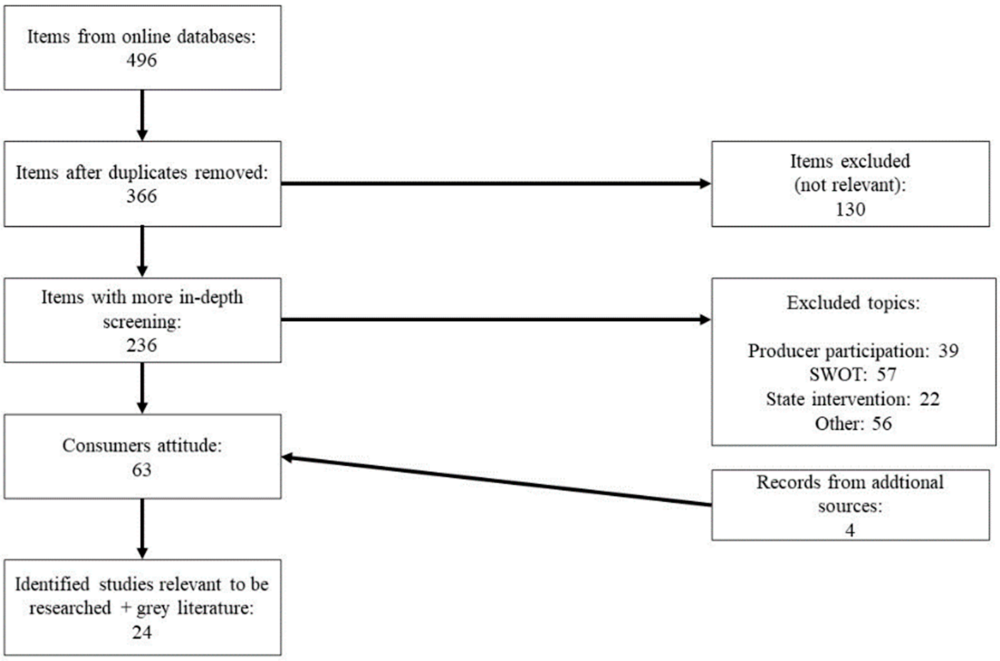

Figure 1. Pathway of the systematic literature review based on the PRISMA concept. Source: Own elaboration.

To exclude duplicates and irrelevant studies, the aforementioned online platform was used. After excluding the duplicates, 366 studies provided the base of our systematic literature review. The initial screening was based on the abstract and performed independently by both authors. The conflicting outcomes were discussed. This first round resulted in 130 items being excluded. Then, the remaining 236 articles were deeply analyzed to identify the different directions within the examined topic since SFSC became a buzzword and many poorly related areas have been linked to the main idea. The share of different directions within the main topics were the following: consumer attitude: 63, SWOT: 57, other: 55, producer participation: 39, state intervention: 22.

These articles were mostly published in high-ranked journals, which confirms the scientific demand on this topic. Before analyzing the chosen primary studies, demographic and sociographic information were sought in the selected articles to obtain those rarely published papers that researched the consumers' attitudes and characteristics. The final set of relevant studies contained 23 academic publications and 1 study from the grey literature to cover all the related publications until 11 April 2022.

As mentioned earlier, in the last few years, the topic of sustainability has been stressed more and more. While global warming and its consequences were mostly researched earlier, the same can be seen with the topic of sustainability nowadays, since many more articles have formulated suggestions for the industry and agriculture in the last few years than before. However, it could also be distorted through the growing number of publications (Figure 2).

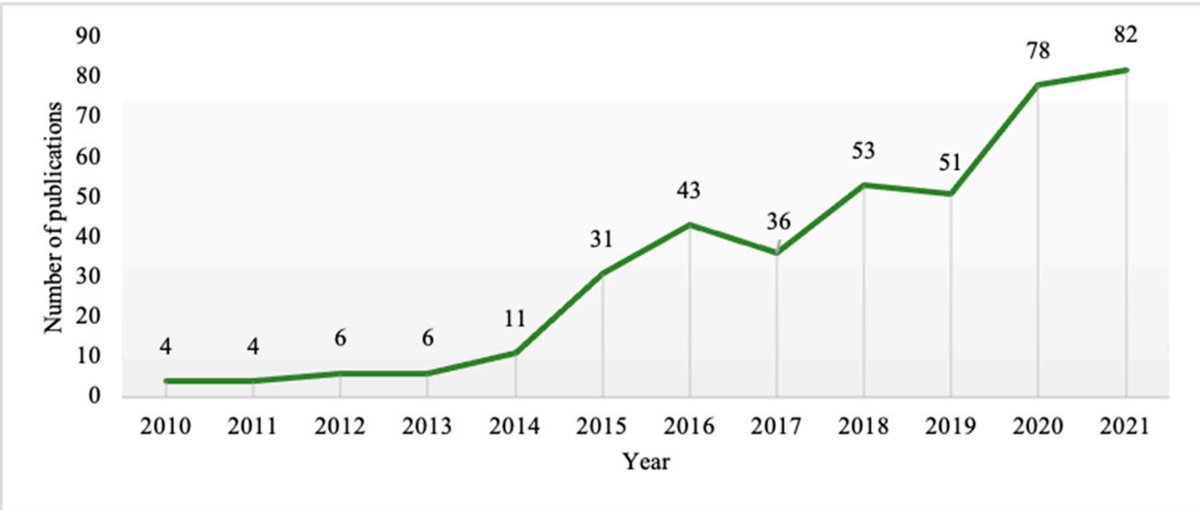

Figure 2. The identified SFSC studies by year of publication (the base of the study without duplications). Source: Own elaboration; the collection covers studies available on 11 April 2022.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Related Reviews

To justify the importance of consumers' attitudes regarding the development of SFCSs, the relevant reviews were analyzed in depth. The searching method was similar to the one explained above, but this time, the authors looked for reviews only. The number of publications did not provide an opportunity for proper classification, so only SFSC-related works were involved. Since the databases of JSTORE and Proquest could not be limited to "review articles", only the databases of Scopus, Web of Science and Science Direct were used for this purpose. Table 1 shows the different issues of the already published papers.

The listed works highlight that the main directions within this topic are related to sustainability, locality, community and development. These reviews foreshadow the stressed role of consumers' personalities and attitudes, which this research studies.

Table 1. Studies reviewing the academic literature on SFSC-related topics.

Article	Issues Reviewed	Key Findings
[18]	The development of Short Food Supply Chains	The Alternative Agri-Food Networks are the result of the "change" from industrialized and standardized systems to the "domestic" world. In terms of food, it means local and trust.
[19]	The benefits of Short Food Supply Chains for the producer, consumer and community	The application of SFSC could be considered as a response to the crisis of modernization. Relocalization supports sustainability. Consumers can not only look for a given product but also have the chance to participate in social life through SFSCs. The producers can improve the added value and quality of the products while they play an important role in the community.
[20]	How competitive and sustainable processing could be realized at a small-scale level in the future	Several principles work at all scales, and their technologies are already available. Transfer time and reaction kinetics constraints should be rethought, especially at different time and length scales to utilize the competitiveness of small-scale technologies.
[21]	To define and characterize the different SFSCs and their sustainability	The authors agree on the social benefits of SFSCs. However, their health and governance dimensions are underexplored. The economic and environmental outcomes of SFSCs are quite heterogeneous.
[22]	The Supply Chain Responsibility (SCR) effect on rural development	By comparing wealth-oriented SCR and community-oriented SCR, this work highlights the lack of literature regarding the connection between community development and the integration of supply chain performance.
[23]	How to effectively improve the Short Food Supply Chain from a logistics perspective	Based on the reviewed articles, the authors think the re-engineering of the supply chain, the application of logistics innovations and new network creation could most improve the sustainability and development of SFSCs. The optimal positioning of critical network nodes is also quite important, but finding the balance between local agriculture values and large supply chain values could mean the real breakthrough.
[24]	Analysis of beliefs about local food systems—from the perspectives of consumers, farmers, communities and environment	The effect of local food systems on the investigated social, economic and environmental factors depends on the supply chain type. Further differences could be found within product types and countries.
[25]	Challenges in Short Food Supply Chains	The focus is on the production and distribution processes in SFSCs, but the ordering, packaging and storage processes are often missing.

Source: own elaboration.

3.2. Academic Papers

D'Amico et al. [26] examined the direct sales of locally produced wine in Italy. The data were collected from a random sample of 953 consumers and used in a binary logit model to identify the socio-demographic characteristics of local consumers. The following variables were involved in the model: age, sex, income, number of household members, education and profession, the type of purchased wine, and the features of the shopping process (such as frequency). The statistical test strengthened the significant role of all the above-defined perspectives. This paper also characterized the typical consumer, who, based on the collected data, is self-employed, adult, male with a lower income and lives in a larger-than-average household.

The work of Llazo [27] is based on six focus groups, where 42 participants were observed in Albania. However, this research methodology is not the most appropriate, but it could be helpful to establish the main direction of a representative survey. The topics were tested earlier (pilot test) to be clear for all; these focused on the general interest in local products, determination of deciding factors that could lead to the purchase of local products and the role of a short chain. Regarding their residence, the experimental groups differed the most from each other in the case of their interests. Some of them preferred local products because they are fresh and offer higher quality, while others estimated their lower price. In general, the respondents stressed the higher share of profit for local farmers, but food safety was also mentioned as an essential advantage of short chains.

Schifani et al. [28] randomly surveyed 196 consumers to examine local honey purchasing habits in Palermo (Italy). The authors created an econometric model to identify those criteria that affect local food purchasing, where socio-demographic variables, honey attributes and consumer preferences were implemented. According to the statistical tests, civic (trust), institutional (certification) and domestic (quality) conventions influence the purchase; however, from socio-demographic aspects, only income statistically affects it. Age, sex and education level are not deciding factors.

Chinnici, Di Pino and Allegra [29] interviewed 300 consumers in Italy to analyze their attitude toward almond consumption. Principal component analysis was conducted to define the key components that summarize the characteristics of the correspondents. Based on it, the authors defined three homogeneous clusters. The first group indicated one-fifth of the sample, characterized by a higher level of education, and these participants were self-employed. Consumers from this group ate almonds often because they are considered nutritious and healthy. The researchers called this class "healthy person". The biggest group represented nearly 60% of all participants. These consumers were singles who lived alone and had a middle academic qualification. They consumed almonds once a month. This group was named "pragmatics" by the study. The last group embodied a bit more than 20% of the correspondents. These citizens were retired (over 65 years) with an income under EUR 10,000. They ate almonds once a year because of their high price. They created the so-called "distrustful" customers.

Mancini, Marchini and Simeone [30] studied which sustainable attributes have an impact on consumers' behavior. To do so, 240 face-to-face interviews were conducted in Benevento (Italy). The researchers defined the consumer as "virtuous"—as the object of the study—if he met a minimum five of the six requirements from the following aspects: purchases local products, eats only seasonal fruit, prefers products with recyclable packaging, pays attention to the fat content in foods, gives importance to traceability, purchases products only in the place of origin. The results, which were based on constructed binary logistic regression models, showed the following of virtuous behavior does not depend on the presence of children, and it was lower in the case of men and older people than in women and adults. It was particularly so in rural areas since they are eco-conscious and take into consideration the seasonal food cycles more. According to the same study, a higher education level was connected with heightened awareness. The educated correspondents were five times more virtuous than the less qualified consumers. In addition, the probability of being a member of the virtuous group was two times higher if the consumer took care to consider product information, five times higher if the consumer seriously considered the ingredients, and six times more if he bought organic products. Thus, the real virtuous customers did not care about brand and special offers; they looked for quality.

Szabo [31] surveyed 1015 adults in Hungary to examine which consumers prefer SFSC products. The Likert-scale-based study stated that it is important for consumers to support small Hungarian farms, direct sales and production through purchasing local products, but they often doubt their self-produced nature. According to the principal component analysis, five clusters were determined and compared by variance analysis. The author called the first group "Favouring imports and large farms". More than every fifth correspondent belonged to this cluster. These consumers, who were primarily under 25 years old, liked the global food supply systems more than local small farms and enterprises, but they were aware of proper food consumption. The age group of 25–35 years was also significantly represented, but members of the older groups were not. Surprisingly, more than 40% of these consumers were full-time homemakers, and 30% were students. According to their income level, every second consumer had a very high one, which could be explained by the high number of citizens within this group who lived in the capital (over 25%). Nearly the same proportion created the "Favouring small farms" group as the former one. The surveyed promoted only the smallest farms. These consumers usually had a secondary school education background. Within the cluster, a higher share of men than women was measured. The third group was called "Informed and empowered" consumers. These consumers preferred large farms and imports. The share of the oldest participants was nearly two times higher within the group than the youngest, so the dominant role of employed and retired economic status is not surprising. The share of college or university degree owners was the highest here compared to other groups; however, this was one of the "poorest" consumer clusters. According to the survey, nearly every fourth adult belonged to this party, and the share of women was higher within the group. The most significant cluster was called "Universally positive". More than one-fourth of the correspondents created this group. Similar to the former defined party, the dominant role of the older correspondents within the cluster was seen, but here, there also appears in parallel a high proportion of correspondents with vocational school education level. The members of this cluster earned less compared to other groups. The authors could not identify one dominant place of residence since one-third of these consumers lived in the countryside but one-fifth in the capital. These retired consumers thought it important to develop local food, but supporting global food security was also crucial for them. The last and smallest group (8%) was called "Unconcerned". These men, who were principally under 25 years old with primary school education, dominated the higher share of this party, but the oldest group (50+ years) also represented itself here. These consumers did not agree with any of the earlier defined principal component statements. According to the same study, the outlets (hyper-supermarket, discounters) were the most often visited by the group of "Favouring imports and large farms", "Universally positive" and "Informed and empowered" consumers. However, the members of the last two clusters also regularly visited smaller grocery stores and public markets.

Giampietri et al. [10] involved 260 consumers (online) to study consumer trust towards purchasing at short chains based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). According to the statistical tests, perceived behavioral control has the biggest impact on intention, but trust also plays a significant role. Easier access to SFSC shops and higher trust lead to greater intention, but a better consumer attitude and better understanding (social referents) can also cause more consumer intention. The authors stated that the consumer behavior antecedents are the intention and the perceived behavioral control, so trust does not directly affect it. The study also determined that buying fair-trade food and living in the countryside are two points that positively affect behavior.

Oñederra-Aramendi, Begiristain-Zubillaga and Malagón-Zaldua [32] studied Spain with Cluster Analysis to examine what encourages producers and consumers to attend food markets. From the 396 correspondents, 159 created the first and most prominent cluster. Almost 99% of them only had instrumentalist reasons to purchase food at the market. They did not look for quality based on the organic source or label, and these consumers evaluated the social and cultural context of the products more. The authors called them "instrumentalist consumers". The typical member of this cluster was between 35 and 50 years old. They looked for quality, healthy food and seasonal fresh food; in addition, convenience was also essential for them. Half of them did the shopping once a week and spent less than 10 min and EUR 16.6 in the market. The members of the "community consumers" group were highly motivated by social reasons (82.8%) and a bit more by collective reasons (85%). The members were characteristically under 35 years old, used to buying fresh and processed products and also looked for local and/or ecological food through which to support smaller producers. Compared to the former class, they spent more time and money at the market. These consumers had more personal relationships with the sellers and liked the atmosphere and the pleasant experience of purchasing there. The last identified cluster was called "cultural consumers". They did not have any instrumentalist or social motivations, and they purchased food at the market because of cultural inspiration. These purchasers were typically over 50 years old and retired. Even if they went to the market the most often (two or three times a week) and spent a great deal of time there, they spent less money. It would be a rational hypothesis that they had social reasons to buy there; however, the statistics proved it was only one habit. Based on this observation, the authors stated that cultural and social motivations are strongly connected.

Chinnici, Di Grusa and D'amico [33] examined the attitudes of fresh-cut vegetable consumers based on 250 Italian (Sicily) respondents. Based on the closed questions (binary or multiple selections), the research stated that six out of ten consumers were interested in the consumption of fresh-cut products. The majority of these consumers were between 18 and 35 years old. More than half of them regularly (once a week) consumed at home products bought in the supermarket. The authors found that the involved consumers did not know a lot about the quality control of fresh-cut vegetables.

Stanco et al. [34] studied the socio-demographical characteristics of farmers' market consumers based on sixty face-to-face interviews. The answers of the involved Italian consumers were evaluated on a seven-point Likert scale. The interviewed consumers purchased weekly at farmers' markets. They enjoyed keeping in touch with the producers; however, they did not like to buy directly from them. The surveyed consumers purchased certified organic products earlier because they considered environmental protection, support of local producers through remuneration, and the importance of rights (all these aspects reached more than six points out of seven). The authors stated that, based on the above-measured phenomenon, the interviewed consumers thought about sustainability as a multidimensional idea. According to the Food-Related Lifestyle (FRL) scale used, the market cannot be characterized by convenience and novelty. Cooking and specialty shops belong to the disinterested range, too. These could be explained by the lack of ready-to-eat and international foods since the traditional market is built on local, fresh and unprocessed products. Based on the same scale, the price/quality relationship, organic product, price criterion, freshness, health and importance of product information belong to the farmers' market's main features.

Bakos and Khademi-Vidraa [35] analyzed a "buying group" in Hungary. This research aimed to discover the sociometrics and lifestyles of these consumers. The author worked with a representative database of 297 respondents. The surveyed consumers answered with the help of the Likert scale (one to six), and their responses were evaluated with principal component analysis and cluster analysis. In general, we can state that, for six out of ten consumers, it was crucial to buy locally produced food. More than 70% of the surveyed consumers had higher education degrees and incomes higher than HUF 250,000. The members of the buying groups preferred to purchase fresh and healthy products from a trusted source. The researchers stated that social responsibility was stressed in their purchasing decisions since local producers and economy were essential for them. To act in an environmentally friendly manner was also important; however, even those consumers with higher incomes seemed price-sensitive. According to the lifestyle characteristics, health, family and a calm, balanced life were the main reasons behind this functional consumer behavior. This means there was no symbolic motivation to purchase these goods; they looked for their well-being. The author divided the analyzed buying group to identify the different clusters within the whole group. Three clusters were determined based on the Principal Component Analysis. The first factor included health consciousness, environmentally friendly packaging, bio-origin, the recommendation of friends and family and quality. The second contained the following points: everything should be available in one place, price and the fame of the food brand. The last factor consisted of Hungarian origin, locally produced food and the fame of the shop. Based on these main components, the following clusters were identified. "Conscious-locational patriotic" cluster: 33 surveyed consumers belonged to this group. The third factor was dominant in this case, which meant these consumers appreciated Hungarian, healthy and good-quality products. Nearly the same proportion (34 consumers) created the "Convenient and Price Sensitive Brand Loyal" cluster. The first factor dominated this group. The members of this class considered the shop's brand a lot, but for them, it was not essential that all the products be available in one place. They were loyal to their brands and products and were price-sensitive. Price, for them, was even more important than quality and health preference. They did not know a lot about local food, so they did not have any special preference in line with it. The biggest cluster was the so-called "Hybrid" created by 81 consumers. In this case, one dominant principal component could not be found. As the name shows, this group was a mix of the two former ones. These surveyed consumers wanted to buy Hungarian, healthy and environmentally friendly products, but all in one place. They stuck to certain brands and products; however, the price/value ratio was also considered by them.

De Bernardi et al. [36] studied the role of social capital and transparency in the performance of purchases from alternative food networks. The research involved 2115 consumers from the Italian food assemblies (FAs). These FAs are a mix of online and offline farmer shops. The consumers order from the platform of the farmer, and they receive the goods at the weekly farmers' market. According to the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, the typical consumer is a middle-aged woman with a higher education, and according to her salary, she belongs to the middle class. Based on the regression analysis used, the authors stated that both social capital and transparency had a positive and significant effect on the quantity and the frequency of shopping. The same study explored the positive impact of age, duration and income on the quantity, and a similar impact could be measured in the case of age and income on the frequency of purchasing. Based on these findings, the article stated that older and wealthier consumers buy more often.

April-Lalonde et al. [37] examined why consumers use direct purchasing channels and how these people could be characterized. A representative sample of 2914 households from Ecuador (Ibarra, Quito and Riobamba) was used. The direct market consumers (DMCs) created 12% and the agroecological consumers (ACs) 11% of the sample. The paper first analyzed the features of the surveyed consumers. Consumers with a lower probability were young adults and were more likely to live in Riobamba with two or more adults together. In line with education, employment, diet-related chronic diseases and eating habits, differences were measured between these two types of consumers. The DMC consumers had two times higher probability of being affected by diet-related chronic disease. Nearly the same likelihood was measured (1.9 times) for those who had no educational degree and did not eat fruits or vegetables daily compared to the other surveyed consumers. ACs had a lower chance to be unemployed; however, the probability of having a higher education was 3.5 times higher, controlling the used quantity of salt was 3.9 times higher, having excellent knowledge about food label information was 2.5 times higher, often eating traditional dishes was 2.3 times higher, eating fruits or vegetables everyday was 1.9 times higher, and never or almost never eating industrially processed foods was 1.9 times higher compared the rest of the population. The researchers also studied the motivation of the different groups. The AC and non-AC consumers group connected quality, freshness and nutritional balance with these marketing channels, which help them to be healthy. The members of the AC group stressed the importance of taste and pesticide-less products. For them, the offered transparency and security meant a lot, since they were interested in where products come from and how they are made and are ready to pay more for this information. Naturally, saving money on food was crucial for both groups. The study also stated that the ACs had higher environmental motivations for direct purchasing than others.

Kiss et al. [38] studied the characteristics of consumers who prefer local food. This research involved 1034 respondents from the North Hungarian region. Based on the online survey, the authors stated that one-third of the sample spent less than EUR 16 at local producers monthly. The same share paid between EUR 16 and 31, and the rest of the consumers spent more. The main products sold by small producers are honey, eggs, fruits and vegetables. The statistical tests did not measure any correlation between the gender and the monthly expenditure, and the same could be said about the marital status and expenses. Living in a single household was positively correlated with expenditure on local goods, and the same could be stated about a higher level of education, age and financial status. The type of residence and the monthly expenditure on local products were also correlated positively. The researchers also studied the willingness to pay a premium price for local products, and the findings stated that there was a positive correlation between the current expenses and the above-defined extra fee. However, the willingness to pay was lower in the bigger cities than in the villages and small towns. In reality, consumers in the countryside spent more on local products than consumers in cities with a population above 20,000 people. Based on the monthly expenditure on local goods, the authors classified the respondents and examined their decision-making factors. The cluster with the highest income was less price-sensitive. These consumers preferred Hungarian products with high quality and uniqueness. Actual demand for organic products was not measured. The groups with higher expenditures stressed the role of family traditions, personal contact and environmental awareness. The same respondents were asked about their favorite place to purchase food. According to the five-point Likert scale used, supermarkets and discount stores were the most often visited. The conventional markets were less popular, and hypermarkets owned the third place in this comparison. Based on the earlier defined findings, the authors stated the dominant position of smaller-scale commercial channels in the villages. It was statistically proven that consumers in villages purchased vegetables and fruits, meat and meat products, and honey from the producers in a bigger proportion than the others surveyed.

A paper by Fogarassy et al. [39] focused on consumers' characteristics and attitudes towards purchasing food in Hungary. The authors first applied factor analyses to 842 respondents' answers. The following main components were identified: food components, tracking, consciousness and market purchase vs. store purchase. According to the factor analyses, four clusters were identified and examined. All 194 consumers in Cluster 1 were called "Information dependent" since they cared a lot about the health impact of ingredients. Hungarian origin was most important for them, but the label and trustworthy products were also sought. These consumers who regularly visited the market were usually highly qualified and had higher incomes. The 195 members of cluster 2 were called "careless" since they took less consideration of the health impact of the food. They trusted food stores and did not mind the label and origin of food. Cluster 3 was created by 249 respondents. They were called "Direct purchasers" since they often purchased directly and preferred organic products. They were middle-aged employees who tried to avoid harmful ingredients, but the label, for them, was not most crucial even though, compared to the other groups, the origin and label influenced their decision. The preferred Hungarian food was purchased in the market directly from the producer since they evaluated this source to be safer and also liked to keep in contact with the farmers. The authors stated these criteria had the most enormous effect on their attitudes. Cluster 4 was called "Food store fans". The 190 consumers within the group trusted food stores more than markets. These highly qualified citizens did not consider the brand but focused on the ingredients.

Szegedyné Fricz et al. [40] studied which factors make the food local according to the consumers' point of view. The research was based on a representative survey, where the data of the involved 1000 Hungarian consumers were analyzed by cluster analysis. To obtain a general overview of respondents' interests, a five-point Likert scale was used. Food purchasing was dominated by quality (4.64), but safety (4.46), a readable label (4.24) and detailed product information (4.11) were also crucial for the customers. The brand, whether the product fit into a healthy diet and the lack of additives in the product were also considered (above 3.9); however, consumers were conscious since the recommendation, package and price did not affect their decision too much. According to the surveyed consumers, those goods could be called local that were produced and sold in the same geographical area. Compared to other products, these taste more natural and delicious. The participants prized when producers directly sell their goods and when the town or region of origin of their goods is also identifiable. The ingredients' traditional production and processing method were also mentioned as advantages of local products. During the classification, five clusters were determined. Four of these had a positive attitude towards local products, which meant 90% of the consumers. The authors defined the first group as "Fan", who appreciated local and buy it. These independent females over 40 years old bought local for their consumption since it meant quality for them. They frequently bought all the examined product categories (vegetables, cheese, jam and syrup) directly from the farmer. In addition, they tried to get to know more about food safety and quality, even if they had already learned about it from the family. The second cluster was called "Marketgoer". These females appreciated local but only bought fresh vegetables; that was the main difference compared to the previous cluster. They did not purchase jam and syrup at all; rather, they prepared them by themselves. In line with cheese, they regularly bought it in larger shops and only rarely from the producer. These consumers were also over 40 years old, but this group had the highest share of retired people. The next group was named "Indecisive". These consumers did not have a definitive opinion on local goods. They tended to see the higher quality of them compared to others. The ladies who had the highest percentage of the five clusters regularly bought vegetables at the market, but the other two products were only seldom bought. The average member of "Indecisive" was above 30 years old, but the age group of 40 to 59 years represented the highest share here. The consumers who appreciated local but did not buy were called "Theoretical fan". These men were around 30 years old (late 20s and early 30s) and bought vegetables and cheese exclusively only at larger stores. The authors supposed they had a high probability of becoming fans since they will earn more over the years. Those respondents who disagreed with the better quality of local food and did not purchase it were called "Rejective". Based on the survey, mostly male students created this group, who will be future consumers. Not surprisingly, the low price was the most important factor within this cluster, but the label and the product's fit in a healthy diet were also considered.

Kallas et al. [41] examined consumers' opinions about SFSCs and their willingness to pay for local honey in Argentina. Based on 210 face-to-face interviews and the Likert scale used, the authors stated that having an opportunity to buy fresher products was evaluated the most, but supporting the local economy (with fair prices) and the traceability of the products were also crucial according to the respondents. The exploratory factor analysis used described that all studied items (freshness, quality, traceability, fair price, environmentally friendly, support the local economy) were related to one latent factor that explains 54.5% of the total variance. The surveyed women agreed more with the role of the created SFSC model than men, and similar differences could be measured between pensioners and students too. The older generation (above 65 years) also evaluated it more positively than younger consumers (18–31 years), and unipersonal households could agree with it more than households with more than three members. The same study also highlighted that the higher agreement with the created SFSC, the higher willingness to pay for the local product.

Oliveira et al. [42] studied how Brazilian organic street market characteristics influence consumers. Based on 389 interviews, the authors stated that consumers in these places were mostly between 21 and 50 years old, and they used their cars to transport the purchased fruits and vegetables. Half of the respondents bought these goods only at the market because they received better quality compared to the supermarket for the same price. The customers believed that the accessibility and the location of the market were associated with the quality, price and selection of products.

Khuziakhmetov [43] examined how socio-economic characteristics affect consumers' behavior in Russia (Western Siberia). Based on 1610 interviews, the authors stated that the respondents trusted direct sellers the most (above 60%), big stores next (51%), and entrepreneurs the least (29%). The researchers observed a significant difference between groups with diverse incomes. A higher income was connected to higher trust in food. The study states that income, gender, age and settlement type significantly affected the decision when consumers choose an outlet. However, only income and gender affected the attitude toward markets. Social status and education seemed to be less decisive factors. With regard to gender and trust, a significant relation was not measured; even the difference among rural residents compared to the citizens was more outstanding. While elders preferred the convenience of stores, younger consumers preferred to do their shopping in retail chains. Online grocery shopping belonged to the privilege of the "rich" social class. Within this cluster, 21% was its share, while among urban residents and citizens between 25–44 years, it reached only 5–6%. The study identified products that were purchased with a higher probability (and more frequently) in stores near the consumers' home/work. Not surprisingly, bakery, dairy and grocery products belonged to this group, and almost anything else was usually bought in large stores at once. At the same time, food markets, fairs and food bases also have their consumers. Their share also has to be mentioned since meat and meat products, poultry and vegetables are often sold through these channels, especially in rural areas, but the citizens also visit these places. The surveyed Russian consumers focused the most on price, freshness, expiration date and taste, but they cared less about the place of production, presence of GMO and preservatives. (The topic of GMO was especially interesting for the middle-aged woman in the cities.) The classical marketing tools, such as the package and brand, were irrelevant for the surveyed consumers (however, the social classes with a higher income paid more attention to it). The research stated that the freshness and expiration date were nearly similarly important for all social groups. When the role of price was investigated, the key position of it was measured in the case of pensioners (over 65 years) who lived in small towns and younger consumers (under 24) and, in addition, in the social group “poor” people.

The research of Kovács, Lendvai and Beke [44] studied which food attributes and motivational factors influence the purchasing of local food products. The analysis was based on the answers of 1756 Hungarian respondents between 18 and 45 years old. In this database, the authors placed factor analysis, then identified three groups with the K-means cluster analysis. They called “trend-follower” the 405 people who created the first cluster. Two-thirds of this group were composed by women who had high school degrees and lived in small towns and villages. Regarding age, a similar share (37%, 38%) could be identified between the 18–24 and 25–34 age groups. These respondents thought local products were nutritious and healthy and had better taste. They preferred local, traditional and national food products; however, they are not committed to choosing local products. Easy access to food purchasing played an important role in their case. This group’s members’ main motivations were health and credibility. The second cluster was named “distrustful”. Less than 20% belonged to this group, where the members were between 18 and 24 years old with a high school degree. The share of sexes was quite similar within the cluster (women, 46.10% and men, 52.10%). As the name suggests, these consumers did not trust local products, and according to them, these were even less nutritious and healthy. In their case, the importance of national or local products was lower, but convenience shopping was as relevant as in the case of cluster one. The last cluster, “value-creator”, involved the sample’s majority (57%). This group was created by women between 35 and 39 years with a university degree who lived in the capital and the city. These respondents trusted local products and considered them nutritious and healthy. They were committed to purchasing them, not just because they preferred them, but because their price was favorable. The easy access to shopping was necessary for the members of this cluster, too.

The appearance of COVID-19 affected purchasing, too. It reshaped consumers’ opportunities and habits. The new situation caused by the lockdown also opened up the opportunity for alternative solutions, and the various consumers’ groups responded in different ways [45].

Butu et al. [46] analyzed the effect of the pandemic on the fresh vegetable buying behavior of consumers in Romania. The research is based on the answers of 257 consumers. Based on the biplot analysis, most consumers (both women and men) from the 35–49-year-old age group with a big household (4–6 people) and mixed education background did not buy fresh vegetables directly from producers before 16 March (lockdown). The same can be said about those males between 35 and 49 years who lived together with four or five people in a household and were Ph.D. fellows. In contrast, women from the 20–34 and 50–64 age categories with a master’s degree and two or three household members purchased these goods. The researchers studied the ordering habits of the surveyed consumers. Nearly 90% of the surveyed consumers had never ordered before the lockdown; around 60% had been ordering since the lockdown; and 81% planned to continue ordering after the lockdown. If we divide this further according to age groups, we can see that the group of 20–34-year-old consumers increased the number of orders the most since the lockdown; a bit weaker but similar increase was measured in the case of the 35–49 age group, too. Weekly purchasing had the highest share in each age group. The researchers also studied the source of information channels regarding the fresh vegetables offered. The surveyed consumers preferred to use Facebook, but specialized sites and online platforms were also often visited. The domination of Facebook could be seen very well, especially in the case of the 20–34 and 35–49 age groups. The orders were placed mostly through order forms and online platforms. The defeated position of the vendor's basket was also clearly seen in this study since more than 95% of the surveyed consumers preferred to order according to "chose alone the products and quantities". The consumers preferred to pay in cash before the lockdown; however, during the highly regulated period, the share of debit card payments increased. It seems that more Romanians planned to keep this new habit after the pandemic. According to the biplot analysis used, different groups could be identified. Those consumers who ordered fresh vegetables from the farmer before the lockdown did so once or twice a week and planned to do the same after the crisis. They paid with cash and were between 35 and 49 years old. Those correspondents between 50 and 64 years who ordered monthly before preferred to pay by bank transfer, but since the lockdown, they did not order. The third class was created from those consumers over 65 years old who did not order earlier and did not plan it later. The younger generation (20–34 years old) ordered once a week since the lockdown, paid with a card and planned to do so after the crisis, too.

Brumă et al. [47] studied how the pandemic influenced consumers' behavior in line with dairy products delivered directly from producers. The data are based on the answers of 447 Romanian consumers who were interested in home delivery. The surveyed consumers preferred to choose the ordered product and quantity themselves rather than buy monthly subscription boxes. In general, they ordered once a week or once every second week. The payment was regularly made with cash. Less than every fourth of the respondents ordered before the lockdown; their share increased a bit during the pandemic, and a great proportion of purchasers planned to keep/have this new habit. Online shopping was dominated by dairy products, and the needed information was collected mostly from Facebook or the website of the shop. Surprisingly, calls were the most popular way to order, followed by online platforms and online forms. The authors also analyzed how family status affected online shopping. The statistic proved that married consumers bought (once–twice a week) directly from the producer more often than unmarried ones. The study involved more variables in parallel to investigate in a biplot how the examined characteristics were connected. Based on the above-defined methodology, the singles and the families of two ordered directly from the producer when their need arose. In the case of families of three, four or five members, regular (once or twice a week) orders were characteristic. Based on these findings, the authors concluded that the presence of children increased the frequency of ordering. Comparing single and married consumers according to their preferred channels to order dairy products directly from producers highlighted that these consumers' behavior is similar.

Nchanji and Lutomia [48] examined the impact of the pandemic on sustainable production and consumption. This paper was concerned primarily with the consumption of fruits and vegetables in Eastern and Southern African countries. This work differs markedly from the previous ones since the sources of the data are developing countries. Up to this point, in the studies presented earlier, the consumption depended on the demand (the distribution of the consumers' resources) because the supply was stable. However, this paper instead presented how vulnerabilities in the agriculture and food systems multiply the impact of a global crisis on developing countries. The authors studied from different points of view the collected data and stated that those families who did home gardening increased their resilience to foodstuff shortfalls. The most crucial part of the work was the formulated suggestions to shorten the food supply chains in rural and urban areas and to enhance resilience to coming crises.

3.3. Grey Literature

The number of papers that were published in this section is really slight (includes documents not controlled by commercial publishing organizations). Generally, all these works rather give an overview of the phenomenon of SFSCs. The examination of consumers' attitudes is not even addressed by them. The only work of Vittersø et al. [49] (financed by the EU) was the only grey literature that deserved to be mentioned. Short Food Supply Chains as drivers of sustainable development divide the effect of SFSCs into three pillars. These are the economic, social and environmental aspects. The authors more or less try to convince the readers about the advantages of alternative food networks. The only insightful and thought-provoking Figure in this strategy guide is the one about the different sizes of the diverse supply chains' carbon footprint. Within the nine compared chains, internet sales and sales to intermediaries cause the smallest aggregated (producer and consumer) pollution, so a suggestion for the future preferences of environmentally friendly consumers is formulated. Consequently, from this weakly related work, environmental awareness appears as a socio-demographic characteristic that could affect consumption.

The most often analyzed variables from the above reviewed work are summarized in Table 2. The selected papers reveal that the different studies mostly focus on different factors, which causes difficulties in a comprehensive analysis.

Table 2. The most often studied socio-demographic variables and their effect in the reviewed papers.

	Age	Sex	Income	Household Size	Education	Profession	Residence	Children	Social and Cultural Context	Marital Status
[26]	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	?	?	?
[27]	?	?	?	?	?	?	✓	?	?	?
[28]	×	×	✓	?	×	?	?	?	?	?
[29]	?	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	?	?	?
[30]	✓	✓	?	?	✓	?	?	✓	?	?
[31]	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	✓	?	?	?
[10]	?	?	?	?	?	?	✓	?	?	?
[32]	✓	?	?	?	?	✓	?	?	✓	?
[33]	✓	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
[34]	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	✓	?
[35]	?	?	✓	?	✓	?	?	?	?	?
[36]	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	?	?	?	?	?
[37]	✓	?	?	?	?	?	✓	?	?	?
[38]	✓	?	✓	✓	✓	?	?	✓	?	×
[39]	✓	?	✓	?	✓	?	✓	?	✓	?
[40]	✓	✓	?	?	✓	?	?	?	?	?
[41]	✓	✓	?	✓	?	✓	?	?	?	?
[42]	✓	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
[43]	✓	✓	✓	?	?	?	✓	?	?	?
[44]	✓	✓	?	?	✓	?	✓	?	?	?
[46]	✓	?	?	✓	✓	?	?	?	?	✓
[47]	?	?	?	✓	?	?	?	✓	?	✓
[48]	?	?	?	?	?	?	✓	?	?	?

Source: own elaboration. Note: ✓ positive impact, × negative impact, ? not studied.

If we investigate the connections between the publications' abstracts, we can observe three clusters that are created by the VOSviewer. The green keywords are settled around "information" and are linked strongly together (as the thickness of the lines shows). This group is mostly connected through "behaviour" to "importance", which plays a central role in this model. With it, those "features" and "needs" could be defined that could be satisfied by the "producer". This latter keyword is dominant within the red group. It affects the products' features (blue) and consumers' behavior (green), too. This linkage confirms that direct communication (information, knowledge) can influence the perceived product quality. Although only a few works are related to the pandemic, even its effect can be seen in Figure 3. In essence, the local products' features are important for the consumers, but the "story" of them has to be told by the producers.

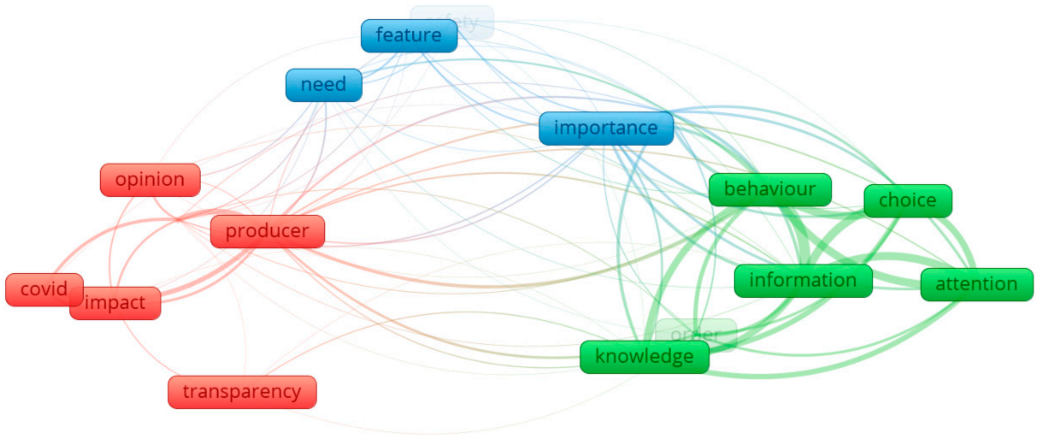

Figure 3. The relationship between behavior, product feature and producer through the studied abstracts. Source: own elaboration. Note: "safety" in the blue and "order" in the green clusters are pale because, even though they are relevant, they did not have sufficient connections.

4. Conclusions

Sustainable and environmentally friendly development is a hot topic nowadays. In agriculture, repetitive environmental disasters and food safety problems encourage more and more consumers to strive to ensure their purchase comes from a reliable source. The alternatives to the Global/Long Food Supply Chains have existed for years, but the current pandemic situation highlighted more of these advantages. At the same time, this research reflects the fact that there are only very limited relevant empirical economic data available about consumers' characteristics and attitudes that determine their intention to purchase through SFSCs. This aspect of the topic is not widely studied. From many points of view, studies were published, but international databases have not collected information about these channels. The reviewed papers differed widely in their directions. Over the years, the number of publications has increased, and different aspects of the studies have also increased. Many works analyzed producer participation in the SFSC, and various studies were made about the potential advantages/disadvantages, weaknesses and threats of SFSCs, too. The role of state intervention was also a popular direction, especially in developing countries, and many slightly related ideas were brought out, too. The number of the involved studies is relatively low, and even these were mostly done in Italy and Hungary; however, the western European countries would be more interested. German and Austrian consumers' green purchasing behavior is well-known, but relevant research from these countries was not published. One of the fundamental issues in the reviewed consumers' attitude studies is the lack of trust. The used additives, low quality, missing traceability and sometimes high prices drive customers to change. The published studies analyze the same product features regularly, but the authors rarely apply a more complicated methodology than mean or percentage calculation. The studied socio-demographic characteristics offer a relatively good base of comparison; however, the results of these could often rather be handled as case studies. Because of the special form of local SFSCs, randomly (without representativity) chosen consumers cannot provide any chance to statistically and correctly reproduce the same study results in another location. Despite this criticism, the involved publications and their primary data provided an insight into the features most often stressed by consumers that affect their decision making. Obviously, age is one of the most crucial demographical factors in many publications independently of the country, and education also plays an essential role according to numerous studies. On the other hand, sociological reasons could also be identified behind the formerly mentioned characteristics. A higher social class, which could be connected to a higher income or even a higher educational background, necessitates better, more expensive products, but old habits (from childhood), new trends (order directly online from the producer) or even the desire for social contact also can drive people to purchase from SFSCs. Gender also can affect the purchasing channel used, because some of the studies found that women would rather choose this opportunity (especially in a given age group). Naturally, the gender roles within the country of the study can also strengthen or weaken its effect. The residence is also often studied as a demographic factor, but like earlier, many social explanations could be related to this point, too. Recently, family status, number of households and even the presence of a baby have been examined, which reflects the need to refer the studies' socio-demographical features to all the formerly defined variables. Representative studies are barely published, and the proper exploration and examination of sociological contexts are also often missing. However, next to the above-defined main socio-demographical factors, an adequate presentation of the general economic/well-being situation is highly recommended to facilitate a real comparison between studies.

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