

PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT – BEHAVIORAL CHANGES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Purpose: The aim of the article was to provide an overview of the phenomenon of the ecologization of consumption in the context of post-pandemic changes in consumer behaviors and attitudes.

Design/methodology/approach: The critical analysis method used in literary research with the use of secondary sources was employed in the study.

Findings: Contemporary consumption is inseparably linked to environmental concern, manifesting in the phenomenon of green consumerism. The trend of ecologizing consumption, stemming from the growing ecological awareness in society, was intensified in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the increasing popularity of green consumerism, the challenge lies in the "green gap" – the disparity between declared pro-environmental attitudes and the actual behaviors of consumers.

Research limitations/implications: The paper is descriptive in nature. Further research should focus on developing a tool for measuring changes in consumer attitudes and behaviors following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Social implications: The study identified significant aspects related to... Increasing the level of ecological awareness and shaping attitudes are only possible through public discourse and extensive information on the state and needs of the environment, as well as necessary pro-environmental actions. The social responsibility of consumers and the level of pro-environmental activities, as an expression of this responsibility, directly determine the quality of life for future generations.

Originality/value: The novelty of the article lies in outlining the possibilities for the development of the concept of sustainable development in the context of the changes that the COVID-19 pandemic induced in the ecological awareness of many consumers.

Keywords: sustainable consumer behavior, green consumerism, ecological awareness, COVID-19.

Category of the paper: General review.

1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, the focus has shifted towards the protection of the planet, personal health, and animal life. Against this backdrop, the concept of sustainable consumption has developed, understood as a process of exchange between humans and the environment, considering economic, ecological, social, psychological, demographic, spatial, and intertemporal aspects. Interest in these aspects is constantly growing and has a significant impact on consumer purchasing behaviors (Roper Organisation, 1990). Green consumerism signifies a concern for environmental protection and a non-invasive lifestyle. Actions that cause minimal harm to the natural environment are preferred, prompting the urgent need for intervention in the post-modern lifestyle and consumer behavior patterns in contemporary society. Environmental organizations advocate for a co-responsible, sustainable, and wise lifestyle. In this context, the consumer plays a primary role, relatively autonomous in their own decisions and market choices (McMeeking, Southerton, 2012).

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic immediately changed our world, which was previously considered safe and predictable. Sustainable development across all layers of human society faced unprecedented challenges. This influenced a transformation in consumer attitudes. Consumer ecological awareness, characteristics, and purchasing choices are changing. Consumer purchasing decisions increasingly focus on environmental concerns. Consumers can play a crucial role by adopting such a lifestyle, where the pursuit of adequacy, voluntary simplicity, sustainable consumption, can become part of a new economy. In a society increasingly aware of the impact of its actions on the planet, green consumerism becomes not only a lifestyle but also a significant tool contributing to global environmental protection.

Numerous works on the pro-ecological behavior of the modern consumer have been published in both scientific journals and popular press. However, there is a lack of works that would show how the greening consumption trend, resulting from the growing ecological awareness of society, has been strengthened as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Against this background, a research gap was identified and the aim of the article was to present the phenomenon of greening consumption in the perspective of post-pandemic changes that have occurred in consumer behavior and attitudes.

The paper is organized as follows. The literature review presented in Section 2 examines green consumerism as a phenomenon reflecting buyers' attitudes toward the environment. In this section the essence of the concept and the most important aspects of greening consumption were explained. Green consumers were characterized and the benefits and barriers of eco-consumption were indicated. Finally the phenomenon of the green gap that accompanies contemporary pro-ecological consumption was presented. In Section 3, in pursuit of the assumed aim of the article, the focus was on specific consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic that may be observed in terms of the consumers' ecological awareness and changes in their

behavior. Finally, the Summary section clearly highlights the lessons learned during the pandemic in terms of shifting consumer awareness towards a more sustainable point of view and a responsible approach to environmental issues.

2. Green Consumerism and Buyers' Attitudes Toward the Environment

2.1. The Phenomenon of Ecologization of Consumption

Ecological consumer behaviors are a form of pro-environmental behavior, defined as a form of consumption causing minimal harm, or even benefiting, the natural environment (Steg, Vlek, 2009). Ecologization of consumption is understood through an interest in natural products and a certain respect for the natural environment (Rogala, 2015). This involves using goods and services that satisfy basic human needs while minimizing the consumption of natural resources. In a broader context, we can speak of sustainable consumption, a form of exchange where something is taken from the environment, and something must be given back, following the principle of conservation of matter. The consumption process cannot rely solely on the consumption of resources to satisfy needs; it must be a certain exchange between humans and the environment (Jedlińska, 2009). In this way, buyers, basing their choices on moral beliefs, become socially responsible.

According to Tarapata (2015), sustainable consumption is often manifested in frugal use of consumer goods, limiting the consumption of goods generating hazardous post-consumption waste, consuming ecological goods (i.e., not supplemented with imitations such as artificial protein, leather, or wood imitation), and consuming goods that do not come from inhumane animal farming or slave labor. Sustainable consumption is characterized by traits such as durability, balance, and maintenance. It is a process of using goods and services where meeting needs improves the quality of life in two dimensions. Firstly, achieving goals involves reducing the consumption of natural resources while ceasing the use of toxic substances. Secondly, satisfying the needs of current generations does not become an obstacle for future generations (Janoś-Kresło, 2006).

Kielczewski (2008) points out the following aspects of sustainable consumption:

- **Economic aspect:** a fixed proportion exists between current and future consumption that does not contribute to economic imbalance.
- **Ecological aspect:** the utility of consumption is maximized while maintaining the quality of natural resources, meaning consumption of goods least burdensome to the environment.
- **Social aspect:** consumption is relatively evenly distributed, accessible to all people regardless of time and place, regarding socially desirable goods.

- Psychological aspect: the consumption process contributes to an increase in the quality of life, achieving an optimal balance between material consumption and satisfying non-material needs.
- Demographic aspect: demographic conditions do not create a barrier to consumption growth.
- Spatial aspect: ways of satisfying needs do not violate spatial order.
- Intertemporal aspect: these assumptions are achievable over an unlimited time perspective.

Green consumerism refers to a state in which consumers demand products and services that have undergone environmentally safe production processes or processes in which the planet's resources are protected and recycled. In other words, green consumerism relates to the production, promotion, and use of goods and services based on their environmental benefits. In this context, green consumerism creates a balance between consumer behavior and organizational profit goals, as it largely relies on sustainable and environmentally friendly consumer behaviors. Modern consumers are increasingly interested in the conditions under which products are manufactured, significantly influencing the market. Consumers are becoming more aware of the consequences of their purchases and dietary choices, leading to qualitative and quantitative changes in consumed products (Rogala, 2015).

2.2. Characteristics of Green Consumers and Benefits and Barriers of Eco-Consumption

The foundation of green consumerism lies in social and cultural factors; however, it's essential to note that economic and marketing factors also influence pro-environmental consumer behavior. Economic factors, such as income, often form the basis for consumption decisions along with price. Marketing factors, especially promotion and its tools, similarly influence consumer behavior by drawing attention to specific products, informing about the benefits of their purchase, and identifying environmentally friendly products of a company (Mańkowska-Wróbel, 2014). The demand for "green" products among societies is influenced by the level of ecological awareness, income level, knowledge, and applied marketing actions. Increased consumer demands, lifestyle changes, competitive business actions, and environmental pollution ultimately shape the market for eco-friendly products.

In the literature, various proposals characterize consumers in the market for organic products. Environmentally active consumers are described as individuals recognizing the need for change and adjusting their purchasing, consumption, and disposal behaviors. They are often well-educated, more affluent, and more politically and socially active. For these individuals, ecological awareness is not a periodic action but a way of life. They are also willing to pay more for environmentally friendly products (Roper Organization, 1990). Education can be a determinant of pro-environmental consumer behaviors since individuals with higher education tend to exhibit the highest levels of ecological awareness (Kiełczewski, 2008).

Budget also plays a fundamental role in consumer behavior. Individuals with low incomes may focus on meeting basic needs without analyzing the product's quality or considering its ecological and social consequences (Kielczewski, 2008).

For green consumers, the state of their health and the planet is equally important and clearly reflected in their behavior. They are not only active consumers of environmentally friendly products but also have a significant influence on other buyers. Eco-consumers prioritize ecological and natural food without artificial ingredients, physical activity, and eco-friendly recreation (Astakhova et al., 2020). They often act as bio-activists, driven by health and environmental motivations. The "bio" prefix is an additional value for them, an advantage of eco-products, representing their competitive value and guarantee of quality (Cichocka, Grabiński, 2009).

It is important to note that sustainable consumption is not necessarily tied to belonging to a specific social group but rather to exhibiting health-conscious eating habits (Rogala, 2015). Green consumers are characterized by motives guiding their choices and purchases. They are sensible consumers who buy goods based on reliable knowledge and information (Klimczyk-Bryk, 2000). Concerned about their own health or the health of their families, green consumers limit purchases of new goods, intentionally opting for used products. These buyers often boycott mass production, natural fur, or cosmetics tested on animals. These actions lead to changes in dietary habits and the abandonment of goods that involve animal suffering (Kielczewski, 2015). These actions belong to two forms of so-called ethical consumption. The first is positive buying, involving purchases from trusted sellers guided by long-term societal and environmental well-being. The second is moral boycott, involving abstaining from buying products from companies acting unethically (Zalejski, 2012).

Environmentally active customers, as mentioned, are interested in improving their own health and that of their families. Therefore, they often purchase natural and organic products that enhance health and physical fitness, ranging from food to personal hygiene products. When buying food products, these customers trust information from friends or the media. They also frequently purchase dietary supplements, engage in regular physical activity, and consume functional food, offering health benefits beyond their nutritional value. In addition to nutrient-rich products like fruits and vegetables, this category also includes food enriched with vitamins, minerals, probiotics, and fiber (Choi, Feinberg, 2021). Eco-consumers' pro-environmental purchases go beyond healthy food. Solar panels, interior furnishings made from eco-friendly materials, ecotourism, and integrative medicine, which combines conventional and traditional medicine in a personalized treatment model, are gaining significant interest (Mróz, Sadowska, 2015). By purchasing energy-efficient devices or products with a long life cycle, green consumers support pro-environmental attitudes and contribute to positive social change (Witek, 2014), reaping numerous benefits simultaneously.

The most important and significant benefit of eco-consumption is the improvement of consumers' health. Consuming organic products, which are healthier due to the absence of artificial fertilizers, antibiotics, hormones, or pesticides in their cultivation and production, contributes to public health improvement, leading to an extended average lifespan (Lin, Lin, 2015).

Undoubtedly, an advantage of eco-consumption is the increased awareness of consumers regarding critical environmental and social issues. Depletion of green areas and the impact of pollution on the natural environment can have irreversible consequences in the near future. Excessive deforestation, overfishing, air pollution, fires, genetically modified food, and many other threats significantly affect the environment and the life of contemporary humans (Zalejski, 2012). Therefore, a change in thinking about environmental protection and awareness of the danger of environmental degradation is crucial. By using eco-friendly products, segregating waste, buying local and organic food, eco-consumers make a real contribution to environmental protection by reducing the carbon footprint of transportation and limiting the use of pesticides and artificial fertilizers (Zulfiqar, 2015).

The third benefit is cost savings, thanks to the use of renewable energy sources (e.g., solar panels) and reusable products. Utilizing products and solutions based on solar energy, rather than electricity, is one of the primary ways to prevent environmental destruction. Initially, some of these products may seem more expensive than traditional ones, but in the longer term, they enable savings. These products are environmentally friendly and more durable, as they harness natural energy. With the option for multiple uses, eco-friendly products allow consumers to make smaller purchases, help reduce costs, and enjoy savings in terms of time and convenience (Lin, Lin, 2015).

Despite the observed growth in eco-friendly consumption, there are still barriers that consumers identify as reasons for not buying such products. In most cases, these barriers include the lack of eco-friendly products in the stores where they shop and ignorance of stores selling eco-friendly products. Limited consumer income compared to the high prices of eco-friendly products can also be a limitation (Witek, 2011). Moreover, the limited access to information related to sales locations and the availability of organic food can be a barrier as well (Żakowska-Biemans, 2011). Another significant obstacle to purchasing organic products is the difficulty in distinguishing them from other products, which is linked to consumers' low ecological awareness, limited knowledge about organic products, and their labeling. Regarding the consumption of organic food, the most common difficulties are associated with reducing meat consumption, changing daily habits (e.g., forgetting one's shopping bag), and a lack of knowledge about waste segregation or where to dispose of electronic waste (Green Generation, 2020).

2.3. Green Gap and Determinants of Pro-Environmental Consumption

Over the last few decades, the increase in wealth and the development of the middle class have resulted in an increased interest in the quality of life (Senik, 2014). High level of economic prosperity and material abundance have led people to adopt a more philosophical and conscious approach to life (Mostafa, 2013). According to research, these consumers differ from traditionalists in values such as authenticity, harmony with the environment, social awareness and ecological and human well-being (Ray, Anderson, 2000; Choi, Feinberg, 2021). These values, perceived as an important new trend in the society life (Veenhoven, 2010), fit into the idea of green consumption, which translates into specific market decisions but also changes in consumer attitudes (Zaremba-Warnke, 2009):

- Limiting the constant growth of acquiring goods, taking into account environmental needs.
- Reducing the purchase of non-eco-friendly products.
- Efficient and economical behaviors in households.
- Social participation - creating ecological awareness, changing value systems, and transforming sales processes to meet needs.

However, it should be noted that some consumers, although expressing eco-friendly attitudes, do not act consistently with them. For example, despite the increase in the cultivation of organic food and numerous studies examining factors influencing the intentions of buying organic food, the share of organic food and beverages in the consumer goods market remains relatively low in many countries (Belz, Ken, 2009). In this context, the term "green gap" is used due to the disparity between consumers' statements or expressions and their actual behavior (Hansmann et al., 2020; Chekima, 2018). This means that, in reality, the number of customers who identify themselves as environmentally friendly may be much higher than the number of actual eco-consumers. This could result from the widespread use of a consumer's attitude toward the environment in the context of projecting their overall ecological behavior.

According to Vermeir & Verbeke (2008), a favorable attitude toward sustainable products is an excellent starting point for implementing sustainable consumption. It was established that the closer the attitude toward a specific product, which fits, reflects, or corresponds to behavior, the more predictive the attitude becomes. Interpreting the relationships between pro-environmental attitudes and consumer behaviors, some researchers emphasize the occurrence of a pro-environmental attitude in an individual as a necessary condition for pro-environmental behaviors to occur (Zrałek, 2018). However, other studies have shown that a general attitude toward the environment does not necessarily translate into other environmentally friendly contexts (Oreg, Katz-Gerro, 2006). According to Rodríguez-Barreiro et al. (2013), the impact of attitude on the intention to purchase organic food is ambiguous, as some results showed a modest connection while others detected a non-significant relationship (Gupta, Ogden, 2009; Moser, 2015).

According to Marchand & Walker (2008), people desire a more environmentally friendly lifestyle not only because they care about the environment and understand their role in the ecosystem but also because they anticipate personal benefits. Personal benefits are associated with the product and can only be obtained through consumption or use, resulting in a favorable attitude toward the product. Therefore, the more positive the attitude toward a particular product, which fits, reflects, or corresponds to the attitude toward action, the more predictive that attitude will be.

Milfont (2012) expresses environmental attitudes as positive or unfavorable psychological orientations toward the environment. In light of available research results, pro-environmental attitudes manifest in individuals who openly advocate for environmental protection. On the other hand, environmental indifference may be exhibited by individuals uninterested in the topic, not demonstrating pro-environmental attitudes, considering it's not yet time to address environmental issues or consciously ignoring the protection of the natural environment (Kłos, 2015). Meanwhile, the greening of consumption may result from consumer fatigue with an excess of goods and services, growing environmental awareness, social activism, or negative experiences (Kielczewski, 2015). In the case of increased water fees or waste disposal, part of society will undoubtedly slow down its spending and start meticulously segregating waste. Purchasing behaviors are also influenced by the development of the green product market, the level of customer wealth, or the state's environmental policy (Łuczka-Bakuła, 2011).

Declared attitudes somewhat differ from actual consumer behaviors and are influenced by views, values, and beliefs about the natural environment. Revealing true consumer preferences can determine decision-making (Janoś-Kresło, 2006). On the other hand, the state of environmental awareness, especially awareness of environmental degradation threats, influences consumers' motivation systems, becoming a causal factor in pro-environmental actions.

It is also worth considering whether market behaviors are limited only to the purchase of eco-friendly products or whether they also involve a series of actions taken for the sake of the environment. The results of available studies demonstrate that the motivation for buying organic food may be concern for one's health and family, a preference for a healthy lifestyle, an increase in health risks, or health problems, and to a lesser extent, concern for the natural environment (Łuczka-Bakuła, 2011). Therefore, it is advisable to consider that some consumers are individuals who are more guided by selfish motives than altruistic ones. Their motivations will be more dominated by individual good than the common good, which is the natural environment. It would be worthwhile to delve into the issue of individual environmental awareness.

Ecological awareness can also be defined as reflection on the relationships between humans and the natural environment (Biela, 1993). According to Hartmann and Ibanez (2006), "environmental awareness" refers to the cognitive dimension of ecological attitudes,

i.e. ecological behavior. Ideal ecological awareness can be perceived in a holistic dimension (as the perception of the world as a whole, exhibiting characteristics typical of living organisms), referential (expressing respect for everything that exists), and as participatory awareness (accepting the assumption that people are participants in the world, not just observers). Achieving these dimensions of ecological awareness can be considered equivalent to a return to the original symbiosis between humans and nature and the realization of a socio-biosphere partnership, resulting in an elevation to a higher level of evolutionary development (Gawor, 2012).

One of the stages of ecological awareness development is ideological awareness. It is primarily built on pre-existing assumptions and is often characterized by representatives of environmental movements. Another type of ecological awareness is a common, scientific awareness, which has its foundations in acquired knowledge and education. As a result of developing ecological awareness, individuals form pro-environmental attitudes. The shaping of pro-environmental attitudes is a responsible approach to the ecosystem, involving adherence to the principles of ethical nature. These principles arise not only from the fear of punishment but, above all, from basing one's actions on a professed system of values. Ecologically conscious attitudes determine the individual's valuation of the surrounding world, as well as sensitivity to beauty and the willingness to engage in activities that collaborate with the natural environment, including those of an economic nature (Zuzek, 2017). Therefore, attitudes resulting from the development of ecological awareness reflect a predisposition to act with pro-environmental intent, i.e., the occurrence of pro-environmental behaviors in individuals.

The results of the earliest studies (Kinnear et al., 1974) confirm the relationship between consumer behavior and his concern for the environment, understood as an attitude related to the consequences for the environment (Antonides, van Raaij, 1998). The results of research by Antil (1984) and Roberts (1996) indicate the relationship between concern for the environment and environmentally friendly behavior. Mostafa (2013) created segments combining environmental concern with purchase intention, and Vining and Ebreo (1990) and Chan (1999) identified consumers' ecological knowledge, or "ecoliteracy", as a determinant of environmentally friendly behavior. The research of Chase (1991) and Peattie (2001) also indicate the connection between ecological awareness and environmentally friendly behavior, proving that people who care about the environment often changed their purchasing behavior in favor of more ecological. At the same time, according to Straughan and Roberts (1999), consumers who felt that their actions would solve environmental problems behaved more proactively.

According to these interpretation, existing tendencies toward positive perceptions of pro-environmental behaviors directly determine consumers' greater inclination to act in an ecological manner (Ertz et al., 2016), and therefore are a factor contributing to limiting the occurrence of the green gap.

3. Changes in Consumer Behavior in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic

In 2020, the emergence of the COVID-19 virus had a significant impact on virtually all aspects of human life. The outbreak of the pandemic brought about social and economic changes, the need to manage risk, and various government responses to the unforeseen situation, such as mobility and travel restrictions, strict control, and social distancing, etc. (Pató et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic radically revolutionized daily life (telecommuting, online education, social distancing, a drastic decrease in mobility, the necessity of mobile payments, and virtual bills), greatly influencing the prices of goods and services and the functioning of the entire economy (Monge, Lazcano, 2022). Significant changes also occurred in consumption and leisure habits (Chi et al., 2022; Billore, Anisimova, 2021; Davies, 2020).

The context of COVID-19 also conditioned an environmental revolution and changes involving a shift in the focus towards strengthening the internal potential of environmental opportunities and sustainable development initiatives (Hutte et al., 2022; Pató et al., 2022; Amar et al., 2021). Sustainable development has become a managerial trend and has been incorporated into contemporary organizational strategies (Amui et al., 2017). The crisis triggered by the pandemic and the associated economic challenges forced numerous organizations to redefine themselves, rethink their mission, and prepare for the unexpected.

During this period, consumer attitudes and expectations also changed. The pandemic led to an increased respect for the natural environment and the need for even more conscious consumption (Chi et al., 2022; Ye et al., 2020). In addition to physical well-being (healthcare, safety, food security, etc.), social and psychological well-being became more crucial (entertainment, relaxation, magical moments of joy and pleasure, moments of nostalgia, etc.) (Kang, James, 2007). From a market perspective, this means seeking solutions that will have value for the consumer while simultaneously favoring the minimization of the negative impact of business on the natural (Wilczak, 2019) and social environment (Kozar, Oleksiak, 2022).

According to research, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increasing number of consumers believing that a brand's sustainable development efforts are a significant decision-making factor when making a purchase. Furthermore, consumer interest in this area continues to grow steadily. According to NielsenIQ (2022), 66% of respondents now consider sustainable development more important than it was two years earlier. Polonsky et al. (2014) suggest that consumers' motivation to consume healthy food has increased because they perceive it as something beneficial (a positive attitude towards the product) and helpful in maintaining good health in the long term (with a focus on the future). The pandemic should therefore naturally strengthen this motivation.

During the pandemic crisis, creating positive consumer attitudes towards the environment has become crucial. Green consumption, as a phenomenon related to avoiding products that cause significant environmental damage during their production, thereby posing risks to the health of consumers and their surroundings (Witek, 2014; Bylok, 2016), has become a significant part of the consumer movement aiming to halt processes that harm the natural environment, worsen the quality of life, and affect human health. The prevalent pre-pandemic model of unsustainable consumption in the form of consumerism was a cause of continuous and intensive environmental degradation and a significant reduction in the size of natural resources. Consumerism was, therefore, one of the major contributors to the ecological imbalance in the world (Kryk, 2011). The responses in the post-pandemic era emphasize the demands expressed by pro-environmental consumer movements regarding the adoption of attitudes and behaviors that correlate with environmental protection principles (shifting from ego-rational to eco-rational approaches). In addition to the most common and widely popularized pro-environmental demands in mass culture, there are also other more proactive actions associated with the eco-friendly behavior of consumers, requiring even greater engagement on their part. These actions include deepening knowledge about environmental protection and involvement in the activities of social environmental movements. According to Cachero-Martínez (2020), the pandemic caused by Covid-19 changed the mindset of many consumers. People became more aware of the dangers resulting from neglecting the planet. Before the pandemic, there was a noticeable increase in collective concern for the environment and sustainable development. However, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this process, and many people are determined to act in a more responsible manner. Although opinions from the supply side of the market regarding efforts for sustainable development may be divided (on the one hand, they may be pushed into the background because, in terms of economic survival during a crisis and the associated cost reduction, everything else becomes irrelevant), it is essential to remember that the market orientation area is always linked to understanding buyers' preferences and the reasons for their behaviors and opinions, which can influence their attitude towards products or services (Gregor, Kalińska-Kula, 2016). In this context, consumers' pro-environmental efforts prompt a reflection that the time has finally come to rethink everything, including sustainable development.

4. Summary

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic was undoubtedly an exceptional situation that impacted all aspects of people's daily lives worldwide. The pandemic caused significant challenges in public health, economic and financial security, quality of life, and global food security. The global health crisis profoundly affected all aspects of daily life for populations,

specifically influencing consumer dietary habits and lifestyles. The necessity for isolation and separation from the rest of society disrupted consumption habits across entire societies, and consumers found themselves in a new situation where most individuals began prioritizing their personal safety and the well-being of their families.

Although the era of COVID-19 brought devastating effects worldwide, attention should also be drawn to certain positive aspects derived from the pandemic period, setting the future direction for modern consumption. Trend of the greening consumption, resulting from the growing ecological awareness of society already observed before the pandemic, was strengthened as a result. The further expected result should therefore also be to reduce the green gap - the discrepancy between declared pro-ecological attitudes and actual consumer behavior. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the development of the phenomenon known as green consumerism, and more people are now determined to act in a more responsible way. In times of pandemic crisis, it has become more important to support positive consumer attitudes towards the environment. Therefore marketers should also present products in terms of their future benefits for the consumer and the environment, thus increasing the awareness of current and future consumers about the long-term benefits of ecological consumption.

Concerning future ecological aspirations, undoubtedly, there is a need for a profound reflection on socio-environmental criteria for sustainable development. Numerous researchers emphasize that in the post-pandemic era, emphasis should be placed on the necessity of adhering to personal and social norms and shaping individual pro-social behaviors. In challenging times of dynamic environmental changes, pandemic conditions, and wars, it is particularly crucial to develop a responsible approach to environmental issues. Extracting lessons from the pandemic involves shifting consumer awareness towards a more sustainable perspective and further developing existing methods to prevent the degradation of the natural environment.

The paper is descriptive in nature and the contained considerations are based only on the analysis of secondary sources, which is a limitation of the study. It is therefore necessary to undertake further research based on primary sources. This research should primarily focus on developing a tool for measuring changes in consumer pro-ecological attitudes and behaviors following the COVID-19 pandemic.

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