

Connecting Social Enterprises and Sustainable Consumption: Systematic Review, Bibliometric Analysis, and Conceptual Framework

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to explore the meeting point between social enterprises (SEs) and sustainable consumption, given the proven potential of these hybrid organizations in the achievement of sustainable development. Paradoxically, scholarly attention has been scarce to this field of research, particularly from the perspectives of SE products and (potential) customers. Aiming to shed some light, a systematic literature review was conducted, resulting in 24 scientific publications descriptively and thematically explored based on a bibliometric analysis. The findings show that the link between SEs and sustainable consumption is very recent and that empirical articles using quantitative methodologies prevail focused on the analysis of capabilities and performances of SEs aiming to positively influence customers' response. Nevertheless, the attention to the identification of product attributes and the individual determinants effective enough to press the buy button is still limited. In response to this shortcoming, the originality of this study consists of assembling the findings in this regard into an integrated conceptual framework that paves the way for future analysis in this field of study.

Keywords: social enterprises; sustainable consumption; systematic review; bibliometric analysis; conceptual framework; antecedents; product attributes; customer behavior



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1. Introduction

Current models of production and consumption are at the origin of multiple environmental, social, and economic challenges that stand in the way of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) included in the United Nations 2030 Agenda [1]. Given that sustainable development is a fundamental purpose for 21st century societies [2], different actors (civil society, policy makers, international organizations, and representatives of the business sectors, among others) have intensified the search for alternative approaches to conduct economic activities [3].

In this search for alternative approaches, social enterprises (SEs) have recently gained prominence. An SE is an “operator of the social economy whose main objective is to have a social impact rather than to make a profit for its owners or shareholders. It operates by providing goods and services to the market in an entrepreneurial and innovative way and uses its profits primarily to achieve social objectives. It is managed in an open and responsible manner and, in particular, involves employees, consumers and stakeholders affected by its commercial activities” [4] (p. 2). This definition highlights the hybrid character of these types of organizations in which the purpose is to achieve social value through market interaction. Therefore, the authors must distinguish these companies from non-profit organizations (NPOs) and their social missions. The beneficiaries of SEs may be their clients, employees, partners, or owners, but they also orient value creation activities to have a positive impact on social well-being and on the environment as a whole. However, SEs are similar to commercial companies, since their main source of income comes from commercial or market activities, not from donations or subsidies [5]. Social cooperatives,

WISEs (i.e., Social Employment Centers for Social Initiative, and Employment Integration Enterprises), or new innovative SEs deploying technology-driven solutions to address social needs are examples of SE models [6–8].

Recent literature presents SEs not only as promising vehicles for promoting sustainable development [2,9–13], but also as one of the actors with great potential to solve current social and environmental problems [14–16]. The different dimensions that configure sustainable development (economic, social, environmental, and cultural) are all linked to the daily activities of SEs, whose DNA incorporates an intrinsic ability to contribute to SDGs: “social enterprises are created to foster integrated and holistic approaches to sustainable development, notwithstanding the complexities of managing them, including the various resource types mobilized, the inclusive governance and participation of stakeholders, etc.” [17] (p. 184).

More specifically, the European Commission [17] stresses the importance of companies that adopt a shared value model, commercializing products with a double perspective on value, one internal (financial profitability) and the other external (positive impact for society and the environment). In this manner, SEs are aligned with OSD12 (sustainable production and consumption) by offering innovative goods and services that help alleviate social and/or environmental problems [18]. Following this line of reasoning, Kovač Vujanović et al. [10] (p. 3) concluded that, “[. . .] it is now clear that more and more people are willing to align their economic choices with their values and are searching for ways that would allow them to do so [. . .]. Among the models that have appeared as alternatives to business-as-usual, social entrepreneurship has been one of the most prominent, receiving notable attention from the general public, researchers and policy makers”. Similarly, the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy maintains that “business-as-usual is no longer an option” and focuses on the role of the “innovations and practices at work within the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) as crucial for connecting economic activity and sustainable development” [17] (p. 183); [19].

Despite the importance of their commercial role, most research about SEs has concentrated on organizational issues, analyzing models of innovative services, or operational and managerial variables [20–23]. Only a few studies have focused on the consumer’s perspective [24,25]. Research that incorporates the demand viewpoint is thus needed [26,27] and may provide a better understanding of customer decision-making and its driving forces (personal, situational, or commercial), within the framework of sustainable consumption.

Research on sustainable consumption is increasingly capturing the interest of scholars [28,29] with the characteristics of sustainable products as a central topic [30]. Sustainable products defined as those “that have positive social and/or environmental attributes” [31]. As such, they incorporate more value since they produce a social and/or environmental improvement in addition to satisfying customer needs. The systematic review of the literature carried out by Bangsa and Schlegelmilch [28] highlights that, although literature on sustainable consumption behavior contains valuable findings, there is a persistent gap in terms of sustainable product attributes and their role in consumer decision-making. Therefore, this is a central research topic to contribute to from several perspectives. In the particular case of SE research, the identification of the key sustainability attributes of the products marketed by these companies is of special interest.

With the purpose to fill these gaps, this paper aims to shed light on the unexplored common ground where SEs and sustainable consumption converge, with special attention to both, enhancing the comprehension of SE customers’ behaviors and identifying the attributes of SEs’ sustainable products that customers value when making purchase decisions. Therefore, the authors conducted a systematic review and bibliometric analysis and posed the following three guiding research questions:

RQ 1: *What antecedents of sustainable consumption in SEs does the literature address?* This question aims to identify drivers and barriers of the sustainable consumption of SEs’ products.

RQ 2: *Which types of sustainable products of SEs dominate the literature, and what attributes do customers value the most?* This question seeks to identify the prevailing products of the

SEs' commercial offer within the literature and the set of attributes valued to a greater degree by SEs' customers.

RQ 3: *What are the prevalent individual factors of sustainable customer behavior of SE clients reflected within the literature?* This question aims to identify the customer behavior factors determining their purchase decisions in relation to SEs' sustainable products.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section details methodological aspects of the systematic review of the literature, highlighting the design of the review protocol and the data search process. Section 3 presents the main results from both a descriptive analysis and a keywords analysis, also providing an overview of the main topics of the finally selected publications. An overview of the main findings in relation to research questions posed above is included in Section 4, together with a proposal for a conceptual framework that paves the way for future analysis in this confluent field of research. Finally, conclusions and gaps to be covered through future lines of research are presented in Section 5.

2. Methodology

In order to obtain comprehensive insights into the scholarly literature merging SEs and sustainable consumption to date, the authors conducted a systematic literature review. The practicality of this review method lies in synthesizing the existing evidence within a particular topic or field of knowledge, boosting the codification and analysis of literature results, and, consequently, identifying gaps for further research [32–34]. This systematic approach builds on the delimitation of a research question(s), the clear definition of the inclusion criteria to accurately select the target publications, and the analysis of the resulting outputs, reducing potential bias risks [35].

Review Protocol and Data Search

To conduct a precise systematic review, a review protocol was designed [36,37], including information on the inclusion criteria delimiting the search of publications, the selected databases, the extraction process, the search settings, and the screening constraint guidelines.

The inclusion criteria resulted from a three-fold delimitation:

- (i) Publication type-based constraint: peer-reviewed scholarly articles and proceedings published in academic journals;
- (ii) Thematic approach-based constraint: papers directly addressing the relation between SEs and sustainable/responsible/ethical consumption, regardless of the type of SEs and the category of product; and
- (iii) Research and methodology types-based constraint: theoretical/conceptual and empirical papers with quantitative, qualitative, mixed, or hybrid methodologies.

Considering the novel and interdisciplinary nature of a topic like SEs and sustainable consumption, the target literature was selected from the ISI Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus databases, respectively. WoS and Scopus provide the most comprehensive compilation of documents published in indexed, peer-reviewed multidisciplinary academic journals, reducing the bias produced from searching specific databases. In addition, both databases allowed the fulfilment of the mentioned inclusion criteria, in response to a systematic review aiming at robustness and rigor, and the effective application of a searching discrimination process by type of publication, indexing range, scientific fields, or peer-reviewed scientific journals. This decision allowed the method to skip the random blending from academic and grey literature outputs in which (no) peer-reviewed publications are mixed with (no) indexed journals, among other types of publications like sectorial reports, dissertations, or policy statements [38–40].

For the sake of covering the scope of SEs and sustainable consumption field of research, an algorithm-based Boolean search equation is applied in the topic, title, abstract, and author-provided keywords of publications written in English, limited by neither any time specification nor any specific subject area (Figure 1).

Main Topic	Keywords	Resulting from	Search Settings
SOCIAL ENTERPRISE — AND —	"social enterpris*" OR "social business*"	WoS	TS= Topic* WOS Core Collection SCI-EXPANDED, SSCI, CPCI-S, CPCI-SSH, ESCI (Indexes) Advanced Search Journals and Proceedings Article and Conference paper English
SUSTAINABLE — AND —	"sustainab*" OR "responsib*" OR "ethic*"		
PRODUCT — AND —	"product*"	Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY Advanced Search Journals and Proceedings Article and Conference paper English
CONSUMPTION	"consum*"	Snowballing	TIT-ABS-KEY

* WoS searches title, abstract, author keywords, and Keywords Plus.

Figure 1. Boolean search equation and search settings of the literature extraction. Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The combination of words and connectors (AND; OR) employed proved to be the most effective within a hitherto unexplored field of study, bringing together, first, the use of wide-ranged but specific terminology related to topics of interest (i.e., social enterprise; sustainable; product; consumption) and, second, the gathering of sufficient publications to conduct a systematic review with assurance of robustness. In the same line, previous theoretical delimitations of main terms were useful to identify similar and/or complementary words and concepts to be finally included in the equation in order to amplify the search boundaries. SEs, for instance, are regularly accepted within the previous literature as "social businesses", since they develop business activities for a social purpose or mission [8]. Similar is the case of "responsibility" and "ethics" with regard to "sustainability", as specific studies on sustainable consumption, social responsibility, and (corporate) management regularly approach these terms as related, even interconnected [41–46].

Aiming to refine but also to complete the final output as precisely as possible, a snowball search was conducted among WoS results. This database provided the largest variety of effectively valid publications between the initially extracted potential ones. A total of 77 potential documents were initially identified (Figure 2).

After the identification of duplicates considering the title and/or abstracts, 22 publications were removed (77.2% of those extracted from Scopus), and 55 documents followed into the screening phase in which off-topic documents were removed considering the title and abstracts. The volume of off-topic results was not negligible ($n = 31$, 56.6% of the total), and the main reasons behind the drop were (1) publications that revolved around entities erroneously referred to as SEs when in fact they were non-governmental organizations (NGOs), nonprofits (NPOs), or simply for-profit businesses practicing cause-related marketing campaigns; (2) publications that addressed (corporate) social responsibility-based policies/measures in private businesses; (3) publications that dealt with SEs but not in relation to sustainable consumption; and (4) publications that included "social enterprises" and/or "sustainability" in the title and/or abstract but that did not directly address these issues in the rest of the work. Once discarding the off-topic results identified, the authors obtained 24 papers for final review.

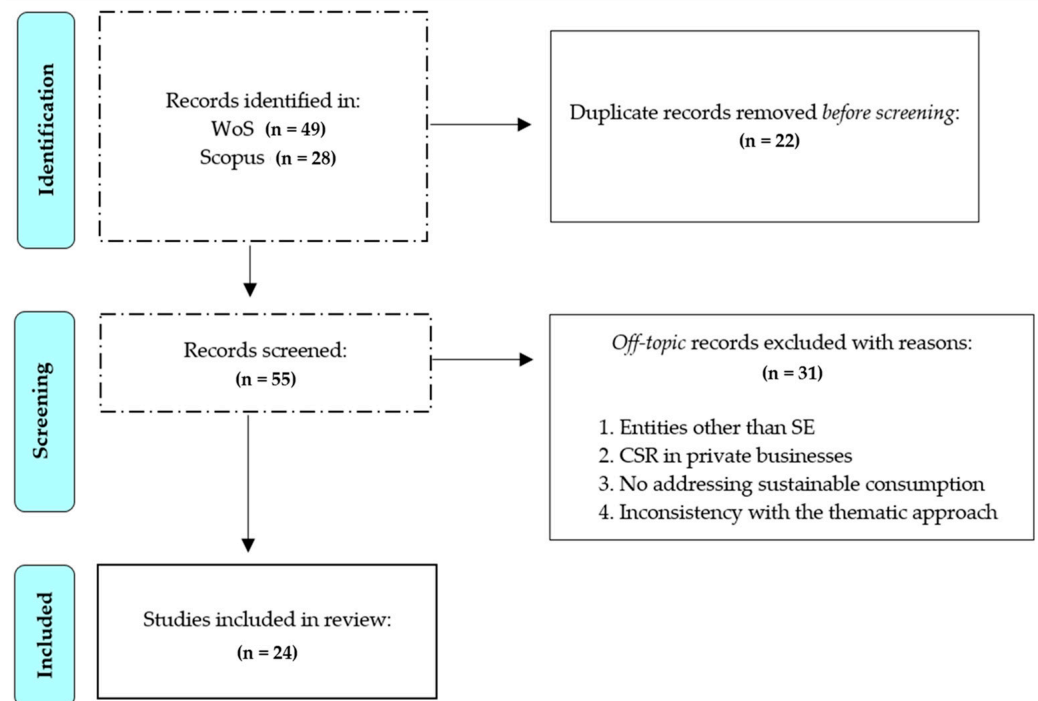


Figure 2. Flow diagram, PRISMA. Source: Authors' own elaboration based on [47].

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive Analysis of the Literature on SEs and Sustainable Consumption

SEs and sustainable consumption are very recently connected topics within a still sparse literature, according to the distribution of publications over time (Figure 3). This being said, it is important to point out a remarkable increase of the scholarly literature (+87.5%) since 2015. Not accidentally, this increase of literature coincided with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the corresponding publication of the 17 SDGs, and it amplified the wake of previous literature anticipating the potential of social economy—and SEs in particular—to achieve a more sustainable development [10–16,18,19].

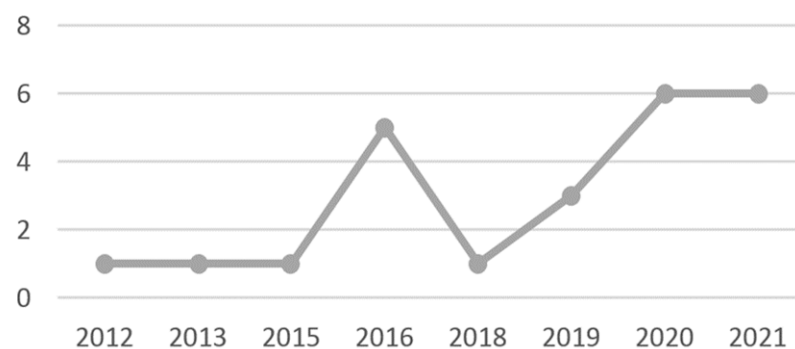


Figure 3. Time distribution of publications. Source: Authors' own elaboration.

According to the type of source from which the documents were extracted (Figure 4), a vast majority are peer-reviewed, indexed journals contributing 22 papers versus only two conference proceedings (see Appendix A for more details).

Title of Journal	No. Papers	%
Journal of Social Entrepreneurship	2	9.5%
European Integration Studies	2	9.5%
Entrepreneurial Venturing	1	4.5%
Service Business	1	4.5%
Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing	1	4.5%
Business Process Management Journal	1	4.5%
California Management Review	1	4.5%
PLoS Neglected Tropical Diseases	1	4.5%
Journal of Cleaner Production	1	4.5%
Waste Management	1	4.5%
Sustainability	1	4.5%
Journal of Business Research	1	4.5%
Marketing Intelligence & Planning	1	4.5%
European Journal of International Management	1	4.5%
Management Decision	1	4.5%
Journal of Islamic Marketing	1	4.5%
Social Enterprise Journal	1	4.5%
Journal of Global Scholars of Marketing Science	1	4.5%
International Journal of Smart Home	1	4.5%
Journal of Human Rights Practice	1	4.5%
Total	22	100%

Figure 4. Relation of peer-reviewed, indexed journals. Source: Authors’ own elaboration.

Regarding the geographical distribution, at least eight countries produced 82% of the 73 authors involved in the literature reviewed (Figure 5). Three geographical poles could be distinguished: Asian affiliation represented 30% of the total, followed by American affiliation, with 28% of the documents (with the USA leading by a wide margin), and authors belonging to European institutions, with 24% of the results.

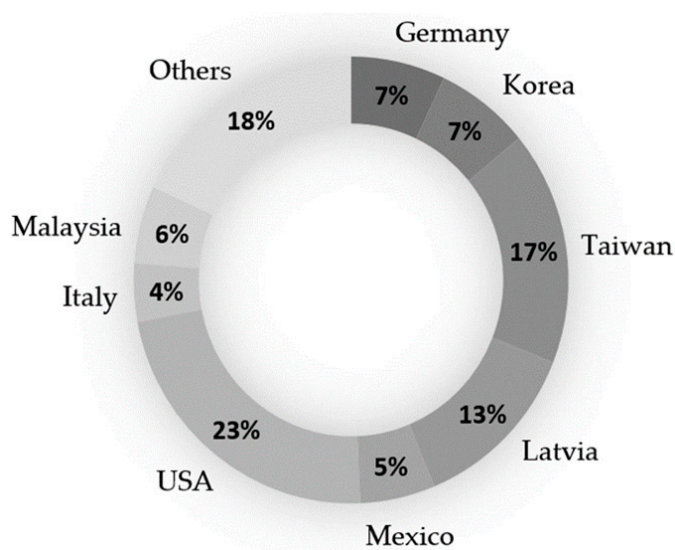


Figure 5. Geographical distribution of authors’ affiliation. Source: Authors’ own elaboration.

Within the Asian pole, (South) East Asia affiliations prevailed; among these, Taiwanese institutions provided more than half (17%) of the total Asian contributions, followed by South Korea and Malaysia. In the case of Taiwan, SEs are flourishing in recent years with the objective to solve working exclusion and poverty effects of vulnerable social groups. The SEs generally come from family businesses moving to self-help groups that scale up to institutional collectivism forms, even becoming influential in the country's social and political issues [48,49]. In this context, the announcement of the Social Enterprise Action Plan by the Taiwan Government in 2014 marked an important turning point, boosting the establishment and progress of SEs in the country for the following three years. In 2018, the Taiwanese SE ecosystem was formed by nearly 400 SEs and more than 11,000 potential ones, most of which are cooperatives and associations for local development [50].

Regarding the research approaches and methodologies within the literature, the most prevalent were empirical articles ($n = 22$, 91.6%) using quantitative methodologies (Figure 6).

Methods and tools	No. Papers	%
Survey	15	68.2%
Case study	3	13.6%
Experimentation	2	9.2%
In-depth interviews	1	4.5%
Mathematical model	1	4.5%
Total	22	100%

Figure 6. Empirical research distribution per methods and tools used. Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Among these, the use of surveys was prominent in combination with different statistical techniques: structural equation model (SEM) ($n = 7$); multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) ($n = 1$); multivariate logistic regression ($n = 1$); combination of *factor analysis* and correlation analysis ($n = 1$); combination of SEM and regression ($n = 1$); hierarchical linear model ($n = 1$); descriptive analysis ($n = 1$); multiple regression ($n = 1$); and *T*-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA) ($n = 1$). Only 8% of publications reviewed were of a theoretical/conceptual approach, including one literature review.

3.2. Keyword Analysis of the Literature on SEs and Sustainable Consumption

In order to identify the most common terms within the 24 final publications reviewed, bibliometric or scientific mapping was employed. Bibliometric analyses are helpful to statistically calculate the literature on a specific topic from scholarly publications [51,52]. Among the different computerized methods for treating data, bibliometric mapping has been gaining relevance in recent years to conduct bibliometric analysis.

In the case of literature on SEs and sustainable consumption, a bibliometric map allows for the visualization of a range of bibliometric networks, such as networks of citation, of co-authorship, or of co-occurrent keywords from the title, abstract, and list of author(s)-provided keywords [53,54]. Considering all of the valid approaches available, the co-occurrence of keywords within the text data reviewed was selected. This specific co-occurrence analysis is useful to delimitate the topics of research and how the scholarly literature is structured based on links among the prevalent keywords [55].

The authors employed VOSviewer, a bibliometric software that provided a relevance score-based automatic selection of the 23 most co-occurrent keywords via 91 links. The resulting bibliometric map (Figure 7) allowed us to graphically visualize the strength of the co-occurrence through colored networks, distributed in four clusters. In this figure, nodes' size indicates the importance of an item, and network relationships indicate the most closely related topics. This representation allows getting a sense of the keywords

most used by the authors of the extracted publications, as well as the links between the topics analyzed in the papers.

As expected, the most used keyword is “social enterprise”, a field of study on which this literature review is focused (red node). From this central keyword, numerous categories of analysis are born, which advance the subsequent study of the main themes (social entrepreneurship, sustainability, and behavior, among others). Keyword co-occurrence analysis identifies four clusters in which keywords associate. In each cluster, there are one or more items related to behavior and sustainability (i.e., sustainable development, purchase behavior, sustainability), so that the main themes can be visualized, which will be analyzed in detail in the following section.

Cluster 1 (red color), which is the most studied of all (see Figure 8), is mainly composed of keywords such as “social enterprise”, “social entrepreneurship”, “entrepreneurship”, “sustainable development”, “marketing research” and “customer satisfaction”. In cluster 2 (purple color), keywords such as “purchase intention”, “perceived value”, “credibility”, “responsibility”, “attitude”, “intention”, “behavior” and “performance” are identified. Cluster 3 (green color) is made up of keywords such as “consumers”, “consumption”, “sustainability”, “strategies”, and “impact”. Finally, cluster 4 (yellow color) -that contains the least number of keywords-, is related to “consumer behavior”, “planned behavior”, “decomposed theory”, and “governance”. This cluster analysis allows us to see the recurrence of the consumer theme, as will be detailed below.

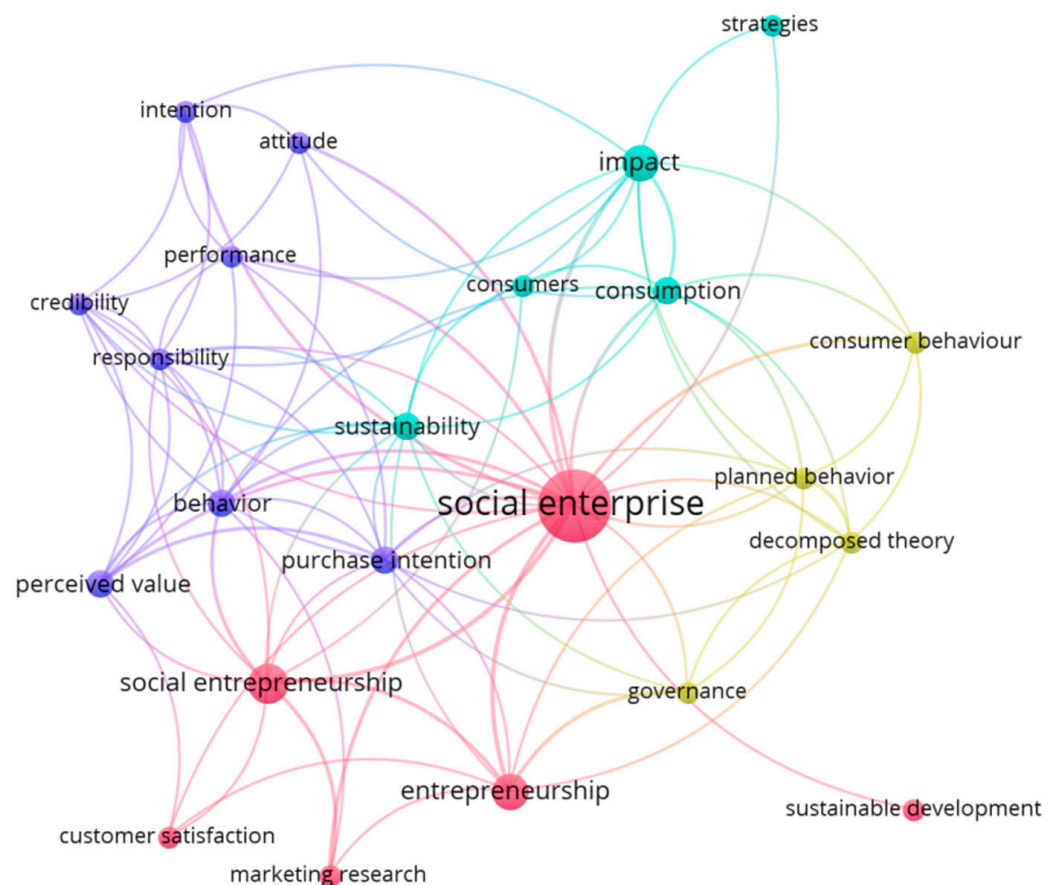


Figure 7. Co-occurrence based bibliometric map of keywords. Source: Authors’ own elaboration with VOSviewer.

Clusters	Topic	No.	References
1	Social Enterprise	18	[57,58,59,60,61,62,63,64,65,66,67,68,70,71,72,76,77,78]
	Entrepreneurship	7	[2,57,58,62,63,66,73]
	Sustainable development	3	[56,59,60]
	Marketing research	3	[58,62,66]
	Customer satisfaction	2	[59,72]
2	Purchase intention	4	[2,69,70,72]
	Perceived value	1	[72]
	Credibility	1	[71]
	Responsibility	1	[68]
	Attitude	1	[69]
3	Intention	1	[69]
	Consumers	3	[2,63,73]
	Sustainability	3	[2,75,79]
4	Strategies	2	[73,74]
	Consumer behavior	5	[64,76,77,78,79]
	Planned behaviour	1	[77]

Figure 8. Prevalent topics within the literature on SEs and sustainable consumption. Source: Authors' own elaboration.

3.3. Main Topics Addressed in the Literature on SEs and Sustainable Consumption

The next level of analysis focuses on the topics studied. The detailed reading of the 24 papers, combined with the results of the previous analysis of keywords (see Section 3.2), allow us to identify major research topics.

The first cluster is the one with the most weight of the total number of papers analyzed. Fifty percent of the selected papers are related to topics that belong to this cluster [56–67] (Figure 9).

Clusters	Publications	%	References
1	12	50%	[56,57,58,59,60,61,62,63,64,65,66,67]
2	5	21%	[68,69,70,71,72]
3	4	16.5%	[73,74,75,76]
4	3	12.5%	[77,78,79]

Figure 9. Distribution of publications by cluster. Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The study of “social enterprise” represents the cornerstone of this cluster (18 of the 24 papers analyzed have this topic as a keyword). Since it is the unit of analysis of this bibliometric study, the word “social enterprise” is related to the rest of the clusters. However, the links are stronger with the words from the first cluster.

Social entrepreneurship (7 papers of the 24 papers reviewed) is recognized as a promising vehicle for solving social and environmental challenges and fostering sustainable development. In this respect, the documents highlight the importance of sustainable development (3 papers of the 24 papers analyzed) as a central objective of 21st century societies. The papers related to this topic deal in some cases with certifications, highlighting their important role as an instrument to foster more sustainable habits among consumers. The use of certifications by SEs affects the evaluation that consumers make of their products and, consequently, their consumption behavior. The next topic identified in this cluster is “marketing research” (3 papers of the 24 papers reviewed). This topic focuses on the communication actions carried out by companies. Some examples are information provided on the website or social networks, advertising, or the messages that can be transmitted by the salesperson. In addition, some papers are linked to usual marketing practices, which focus on addressing the challenges that SEs face in comparison with the marketing practices adopted by conventional companies. In addition, they also study how an SE can grow

through new distribution channels and differentiate itself through a reliable product. The last relevant topic in this cluster is customer satisfaction. In this topic, the papers analyzed focused on studying expectations and perceived value as antecedents of satisfaction in the field of SE.

The authors found that 21% of the papers selected in this bibliometric analysis belong to the second thematic cluster [68–72]. The most important topic studied in this cluster was purchase intentions, contained in 4 of the 24 selected papers. Some authors focus their studies on the social mission with which an SE may be born, because it can affect the competitiveness of the enterprise and consumer behavior. The second of the topics highlights the importance of perceived value as a key factor in determining consumer behavior in SEs. These consumers especially appreciate the social value of their products, but also consider their utilitarian and emotional value. Credibility and responsibility are other topics identified. These studies analyze whether SEs have greater credibility than traditional enterprises or whether the image of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and credibility of both the SE and the social entrepreneur can be a determinant of consumer behavior. Additionally, consumers' intention to purchase social products is related to attitudes.

The third thematic cluster is related to 16.5% of the analyzed papers [73–76]. The first topic is the consumer, with 3 of the 8 papers in this cluster. In this cluster, a topic as important as the information or knowledge that consumers have has been studied, given the lack of knowledge they have in the relationship between SE and sustainability. In this regard, comparisons have been made between the consumer behavior of SEs and traditional businesses. Although it seems that SEs have better perceptions in terms of social responsibility and credibility, this does not translate into higher sales, with all the risks that this entails for an SE. Another theme of this cluster is sustainability (3 of the 8 papers). This is closely linked to the previous topic, since it is studied whether, for example, meta-sustainability labels help reduce consumer confusion and provide valuable information in these terms. The last of the topics in this cluster is strategies (2 of the 8 papers), related to aspects which a company can influence in order to achieve its objectives and improve its results. Research in this area is related to the achievement of a competitive advantage, obtained through factors such as product, price, quality, and distribution.

Finally, 12.5% of the reviewed papers are linked to the fourth cluster [77–79]. In this cluster, the main topic is the consumer behavior (5 of the 6 papers deal with this topic). The studies highlight insufficient attention given to understanding the behaviors of consumers, which are a key stakeholder of SEs. To do this, at least one of the papers relied on Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to examine consumer behavior when purchasing SE products.

4. Overview of Findings on Sustainable Consumption of SE Products

To shed light on the unexplored common ground where SEs and sustainable consumption converge—with special orientation to enhance the comprehension of customers' behaviors as well as the identification of product attributes influencing customers' decision making—the results obtained allow for some initial considerations guided by the aforementioned research questions to be stated.

4.1. Antecedents of Sustainable Consumption Addressed in the Literature (RQ 1)

In relation to the antecedents of sustainable consumption, the literature presents a symmetric coverage between *drivers* and *barriers*. Whereas 12 papers pay attention to those factors prompting sustainable consumption of SE products, 11 are the sources from which specific obstacles emerge in this regard.

Drivers of sustainable consumption of SEs' commercial offers *at a macro level* mainly have institutional, social, and market natures. *Institutional-based drivers* relate to the *potential of public (municipal) awareness-raising campaigns* communicating the advantages and benefits of participating in sustainable consumption models boosted by SEs through, for instance,

the collection and treatment of wastes to amplify their life cycle, as in the case of Prepared-for-Reuse items [61]. The *utility of public authorities' incentives* also works as a driver when intermingling the meeting of customers' (basic) needs and appealing to their playfulness through the stimulus to learn [60]. The *existence of institutional support programs* within the public procurement strategies for the provision of sustainable food items in public schools also plays a relevant role propelling the sustainable consumption of this type of hybrid organization.

From the side of *social-based drivers*, the *social awareness* of the existence of sustainable (and affordable) solutions for meeting common good causes emerged as a relevant starting point, also for the shape of the *subjective norm* (i.e., opinions of friends and relatives), which, in turn, determines potential customers' intentions to a great extent [69,73].

Market-based drivers, from the other side, refer to the positive influence of effective *cross-sectoral partnerships* through which actors involved—for-profits, public authorities, third-sector organizations, civil society organizations (e.g., customer associations), and SEs, among others—interact to adopt solutions in the form of effective tools and schemes like sustainable labels and certifications [73,75].

With respect to the antecedents acting as barriers at a macro level to the adoption of sustainable consumption, scholarly literature raises *institutional obstacles* with implications for the market ecosystem. In particular, the *lack of governmental funding support*, *data access*, and a *specific regulative framework* weakens the position of SEs to overcome the resistance of competitors (i.e., private enterprises) to develop sustainable schemes or tools based on verifiable third-party standards or certification (e.g., the case of the Traffic Light Index in the food sector) [61,75]. *Social barriers* involve *cultural obstacles when persuading potential customers* to be actively engaged in sustainable consumption through the purchase or the alternative uses of sustainable products provided by SEs, as Gelbmann and Hammerl claim to be the case of re-use ECO-WISEs products [60]. From an entirely *market perspective*, *tensions generated along the supply chains* when SE products experience fast-growing demand emerge in the literature as an important barrier to be considered in the particular case of the food distribution sector [73].

Drivers and barriers at a *meso level* also attracted academic attention, albeit to varying degrees. Several antecedents are boosting or impeding sustainable consumption under the umbrella of SEs' organizational performance and capabilities. From the side of drivers, scholarly literature shows the pivotal role of *communicational capabilities* of SEs through visual graphic-based advertising actions appealing to positive emotions of customers (e.g., pride and joy), rather than a narrative on complex information about social impact [61] to increase consumers' awareness and retention. In addition, and as part of SEs' marketing activities, the literature shows that *effective communication investment on dissemination* of central aspects such as social mission—if congruently aligned to customers' needs—has benefits on intangible assets like brand image and product competitiveness, positively determining the perceptions of purchase intentions of potential customers [63,70]. The potential role of *brands and products* leveraging sustainable consumption of SEs' commercial offer is of great relevance when these organizations are capable to position them as trust-to-go alternatives, in the sense of brands and products with strong identity and image (i.e., reputed brands or products) [68,69,73]. Other effective dimensions driving sustainable consumption relate to the capability of SEs when *transmitting to potential customers favorable attributes* on quality [58,72], competitiveness [70], uniqueness [58], price [58], quality certification (e.g., displaying social certification logos on product labels) [65], or the meaningfulness and superiority of products [64], positively affecting purchase intentions. The potential of meso-level drivers also falls on the capacity of SEs to *enrich the shopping experience* in order to increase customer loyalty through the provision of incentives [60], the assistance of trained salespersons and a friendly customer service [58,61], the pleasant atmosphere of the SEs, and/or a convenient location [58]. Finally, optimal *management of the stakeholder relationship* by SEs also emerges as a driver of sustainable consumption, in the sense of promoting valued-based and close relationships with local communities to

enhance social cohesion or collaborating in cross-sector partnerships with other reputed actors [61].

The prominence of barriers to the adoption of sustainable consumption at a meso level is, however, scarcer within the literature. They relate specifically to i) *SEs' malpractices*, behaving irresponsibly on competence and effectiveness through the use of *social washing-based advertising strategies* [2,61]; ii) the *dependence on public funding* in the work integration organizations and on an *exclusive customer perspective* (instead of a multistakeholder perspective) [75]; and 3) the lack of reliable and verifiable *third-party standards and certifications* [61].

Finally, the scholarly attention on antecedents of sustainable consumption at a *micro level* is limited and unequal, with drivers having a larger presence within the literature than the antecedents acting as barriers. A significant majority of drivers are *perception-based antecedents* acting at a micro (customer) level, so much so that these drivers relate specifically to the *perceived contribution* of a purchase to the common good, increasing the customer motivation to consume in a more sustainable way [77]; the *perception of quality*, positively affecting the perception of functional, emotional, and social value [72]; the *perception of satisfying personal needs* through sustainable consumption [61]; the *perception of SEs' effectiveness* [76]; and the *perception of SEs' social responsibility, credibility, and competence* [75]. Other drivers emerging from the literature are the *identification with the brand* [68] and the *customer attitude, intention, and behavior* towards sustainable consumption in the context of SEs [69,76,77]. Antecedents impeding the sustainable consumption at a micro level hardly have presence within the literature, being reduced to the *perception of (product) risk* [69,77], the risk arising from *possible information saturation* [63], and the *low confidence of customers in product quality* [77].

4.2. Sustainable Products and Product Attributes Valued by SE Customers (RQ 2)

SEs' commercial offer within the literature is predominantly based on *physical products* that belong to a set of distinctive categories, among which the grocery category prevails. Some studies revolving around SEs' supplying–manufacturing–distribution–commercialization activities in the food sector refer in particular to *organic food items* [68], *coffee* [59,70], *grab-and-go snacks, breakfast, meal kits, raw ingredients* [73], *cookies, cakes, and frozen food* [69]. Other products and categories are *smartphones* made from recyclable materials [77] in the tech category; different *electric and electronic devices and appliances, furniture pieces, and other decorative stuff* in the cases of product multicategory studies [60,61,69,77]; *art pieces* [56]; *salt*, in the context of mineral extraction with medical purposes [74]; *traditional clothing, craft-made fabrics, bags, and shoes* in the textile, apparel, fashion complements, and footwear product categories [60,64,67,69,77]; and *cosmetic items* for personal use [65,77].

Valued product attributes in the eye of SE customers coexist within the literature in relation to the utilitarian–hedonic–ethical benefits perceived. Previous literature highlights the *assortment, ease of seeking, price comparison, information attainment and availability, quality, functionality, reputed or well-known brand, packaging easy to open/use, use of recycled materials* in the products; *ready availability* in the stores; and *easiness to buy* as valued attributes built on utilitarian benefits perceived [62,64,67,68,73,77]. From the side of attributes resulting from hedonic benefits perceived, the literature addresses *being trendy among the members of the reference group, product attractiveness* appealing to customers' sense of style, *visual appearance, stimulation, stress relief, and social interaction* [61,67,68,73]. Finally, ethical benefits perceived gather valued attributes underlying the social engagement and orientation of SEs, brands, and products, such as the *image of CSR performance* in relation to ethics, law, and economic dimensions [68]; *trust* in social performance; and the attainment of *certifications and information* on socially vulnerable groups [65].

4.3. Individual Factors Determining Sustainable Customer Behavior (RQ 3)

Specialized literature shows evidence of a range of *socio-demographic*, *psychographic*, and *sociographic* factors determining customers' behavior referring to purchase decisions regarding SEs' sustainable products. In regard to *socio-demographics* influencing favorable customer behavior towards SE products, studies pay attention to the potentiality of consumers' *level of income*, the strengthened relationship between consumers' intention and behaviors [76], and the role of *genre*, since, in correspondence with their traditional caring nature, women regularly have more information on SEs, positively affecting their willingness to buy from SEs. In the same line, *age* and *educational level* also appear as relevant socio-demographics, as customers between 16 and 25 and between 26 and 35 years old tend to have less information on SEs, a trait shared with those with secondary education. The *informative level* seems to also play a remarkable role. Studies have confirmed the positive relation between information and willingness to buy, meaning that the more information on SEs customers have, the greater their willingness to conduct frequent purchases [63].

Scholarly literature also echoes the pivotal role of *psychographics*, in regards to those personality traits, attitudes, interests, values, beliefs, ideology, and expectations being the backbone of customers' lifestyle. In this respect, previous research proved the role of customers' *political ideology* [76]; their *common-good orientation*, being the main purchasing goal beyond products' performance; and their *ethical self-identity* and *moral identity* [77]. *Attitude towards SE products* also influences purchase intentions [69,77]. A positive attitude is conditioned, in turn, by a high compatibility to customer values towards the support of individual/common-good causes, by low quality or safety perceived risk, and by a favorable brand perception towards SEs' commercial offer [69]. *Perceived behavioral control* and *self-efficacy* are positively associated with intention to purchase SEs' products [69]. Customers *trust* in the scheme also influences the decision-making; for instance, eco-labels are perceived as trustworthy tools by customers when endorsed by NGOs and consumer organizations, as far as consumers prefer these entities as a trusted and independent source of environmental information [75,76]. Information on consumers' behavioral factors affecting, in particular, the repurchase of SEs' products is lacking in the scholarly literature, being reduced to the potential of *brand trust* for repurchasing intentions and the role of *utilitarian benefits* positively influencing costumers' brand trust [68].

Finally, *sociographics* gather the set of relations, trends, risks, needs, profiles, and experiences of individuals, understood as part of social groups or targets. Sociographics that emerged from the literature refer to the SE customers' *sense of belonging* and *involvement in social causes* supported through purchases [58] and to the relevance of *reference groups' perception-based subjective norms* (i.e., the opinions of friends and relatives) influencing customer behavior [69,77].

5. A Proposal for a Conceptual Framework

Based on the aforementioned findings, a conceptual model is proposed (Figure 10) on sustainable consumption of SEs' commercial offers. This conceptual framework reflects significant relationships between antecedents in the form of drivers and barriers, individual determinants of sustainable customer behavior, and valued product attributes in the eyes of SE customers. Antecedents at the macro, meso, and micro levels of analysis may influence customers' sustainable behavior, which, in turn, is modeled by individual factors of sociodemographic, psychographic, and sociographic natures. At the same time, customers' sustainable behavior and (valued) product attributes perceived can be mutually conditioned.

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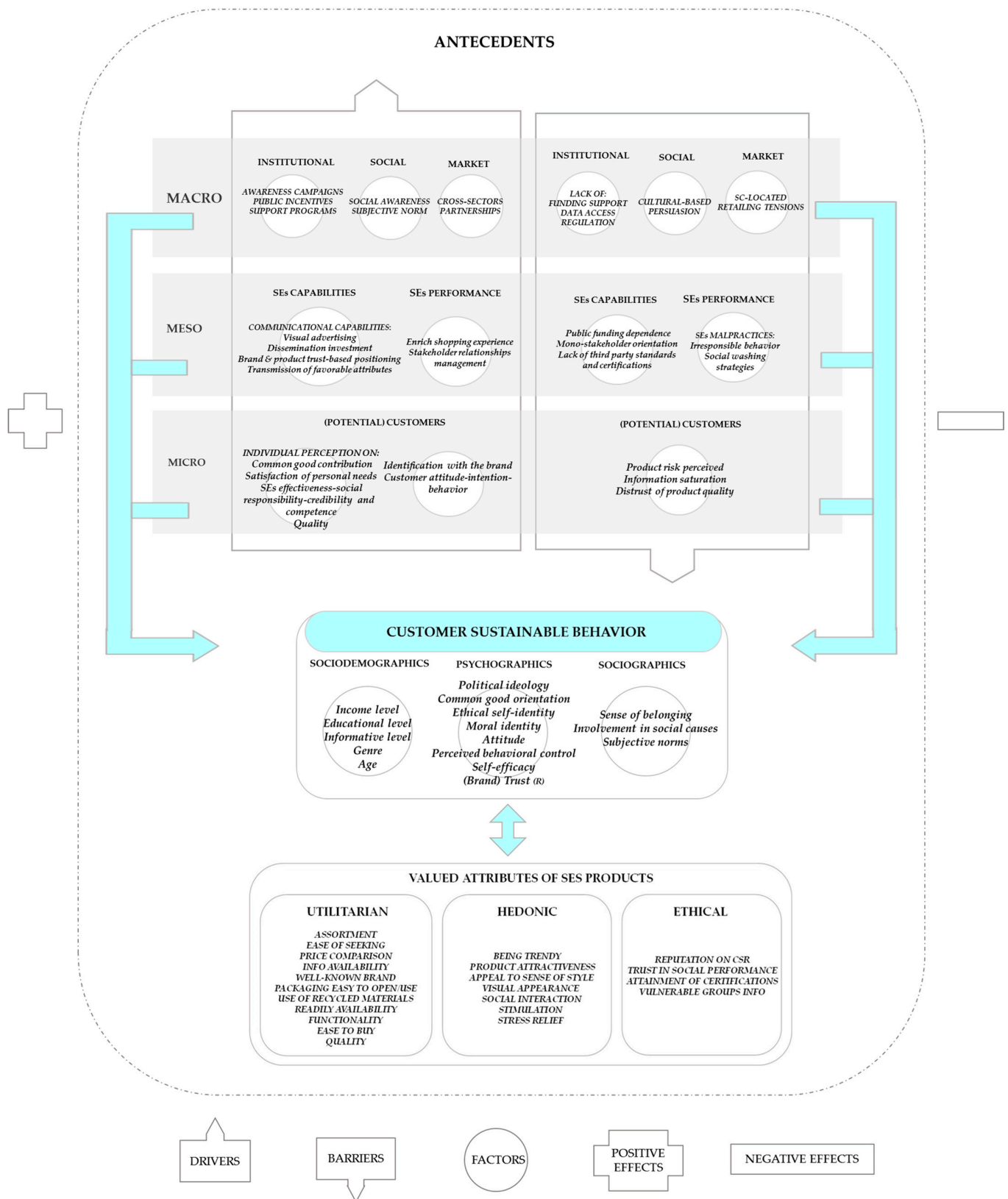


Figure 10. Conceptual framework on sustainable consumption of SEs' products. Source: Authors' own elaboration.

6. Conclusions

This study compiles the main findings in the field of academic research on SEs and sustainable consumption, given the scholarly prominence of SEs in the pursuit of sustainable development. A systematic literature review was conducted, resulting in 24 scientific publications analyzed. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first literature review shedding light on the crossroads between SEs and sustainable consumption with special orientation to customer behavior and attributes of SE products, a domain that remained largely obscure.

The incipient literature with a majority of publications from 2015 onward in the form of empirical articles using quantitative methodologies is mainly focused on the antecedents of sustainable consumption at the macro and meso levels, in which institutional drivers (and to a lesser degree, barriers) and organizational capabilities of SEs prevail, respectively. The literature on sustainable consumption of SE products at a micro level mainly explored the individual perceptions towards the social causes supported and the organizational performances of SEs' commercial activities in terms of effectiveness, credibility, or competence.

In order to fill the persistent gap within the literature on the influence of sustainable product attributes on SE consumers' decision-making and behavior [28], this research provides an integrative conceptual framework. This framework, susceptible to being empirically proved in future research, reflects significant relationships between antecedents—in the form of drivers and barriers—at different levels, individual determinants of sustainable customer behavior, and valued product attributes in the eyes of SE customers. In particular, antecedents may influence customers' sustainable behavior, which in turn, is modeled by individual factors of sociodemographic, psychographic, and sociographic natures. Simultaneously, customers' sustainable behavior and (valued) product attributes perceived can be mutually conditioned.

Moreover, this framework may pave the way for future analysis in this field of research, where several gaps and weaknesses emerged after systematically reviewing the literature. Further research would deepen the knowledge about the influence of product attributes on SE customers' behavior in the pre- and post-purchase phases. Similarly, it is necessary to shed light on the influence of product attributes on customer behavior in the context of the economic, social, or environmental dimensions featuring SEs' commercial activity, especially after the pandemic. The exploration of actors, enablers, and effects of the sustainable consumption of SE products from a multistakeholder perspective, together with those acting as obstacles to its adoption at the micro (individual) level, are lines of research needing scholarly attention.

Some methodological limitations can be drawn from this study. Firstly, in light of the results and despite of having used WoS and Scopus as databases, it would be interesting to expand the body of literature searching in more geographically and/or sectoral specialized databases. This would contribute to a better understanding of the implications of sustainable consumption of SE products in regions where the literature in this regard is profuse (e.g., SEs in specific Asian countries). Secondly, and in relation to the keyword co-occurrence analysis conducted through the software VOSviewer, only those keywords included in the extracted publications have been considered to determine nodes and connections, forming the thematic clusters analyzed. This could limit the accurate description of the SEs and sustainable consumption landscape for two reasons: first, due to the novel and emergent dimension of this topic within the scholarly literature and, secondly, due to the still vague conceptual arena of an emergent and evolving topic like SEs, where civil society organizational profiles like NGOs or NPOs, or even for-profit businesses implementing CSR practices, are confused with SEs in the literature.

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Appendix A

Title of publication	(co)Authorship	Source
The effects of customer socialization on customer behavior in social enterprises: role of organizational legitimacy in the eyes of customers.	Chen et al. (2021)	Management Decision
Multi-Stakeholder Perspective on Food Labelling for Environmental Sustainability: Attitudes, Perceived Barriers, and Solution Approaches towards the “Traffic Light Index”	Gröfke et al.(2021)	Sustainability
Determinants of Customer Intention to Purchase Social Enterprise Products: A Structural Model Analysis	Lee et al.(2021)	Journal of Social Entrepreneurship
Consumer Behavior and Social Entrepreneurship: The Case of South Korea	Lee et al.(2021)	Journal of Social Entrepreneurship
A study on the consumer’s intention to purchase a social enterprise’s product	Lin et al.(2021)	European Journal of International Management
Driving forces of repurchasing social enterprise products	Wu et al.(2021)	Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing
Social enterprise marketing: review of literature and future research agenda	Bandyopadhyay & Ray (2020)	Marketing Intelligence & Planning
Marketing Communications of Latvian Social Enterprises from a Consumer Perspective: Practical Suggestions for Improvement	Casno et al. (2020)	European Integration Studies
The power of information: a key component for the successful performance of Latvian social enterprises	Casno et al. (2020)	<i>Proceedings of 12th International Scientific Conference New Challenges in Economic and Business Development</i>
The new competitive environment of social enterprises: an experimental study on perceptions and consumer intentions for social vs. traditional enterprises	Lin-Hi et al. (2020)	Int. Journal of Entrepreneurial Venturing
How to meet reuse and preparation for reuse targets? Shape advertising strategies but be aware of “social washing”	Rizzi et al. (2020)	Waste Management
In pursuit of goodwill? The cross-level effects of social enterprise consumer behaviors.	Tsai et al.(2020)	Journal of Business Research
Factors that motivate Latvian consumers to purchase products and services from social enterprises in Latvia: The case of socially responsible consumption.	Casno et al. (2019)	European Integration Studies
The role of leader vs organizational credibility in Islamic social enterprise marketing communication	Hati & Idris (2019)	Journal of Islamic Marketing
Economic performance and cost-effectiveness of using a DEC-salt social enterprise for eliminating the major neglected tropical disease, lymphatic filariasis	Sharma et al. (2019)	PLoS Neglected Tropical Diseases
Social and solidarity economy and sustainable development in Morocco: Case of “ au grain de sesame” social business	Daghri & Boushaba (2018)	<i>Proceedings of 35th International Scientific Conference on Economic and Social Development</i>
Effects of displaying social enterprise certification information on consumers’ product evaluations and purchase intentions	Choi & Kim (2016)	Journal of Global Scholars of Marketing Science
User expectancies for green products: A case study on the internal customers of a social enterprise	Lin & Chen (2016)	Social Enterprise Journal
Development and testing of an assessment model for social enterprises: The case of Capeltic in Mexico	Lobato-Callero et al. (2016)	Business Process Management Journal
Revolution Foods: expansion into the CPG market	Tyson & Walske (2016)	California Management Review
The study of the impact of perceived quality and value of social enterprises on customer satisfaction and re-purchase intention	Kingston & Guellil (2016)	Journal of Human Rights Practice
Integrative re-use systems as innovative business models for devising sustainable product-service-systems	Gelbmann & Hammerl (2015)	Journal of Cleaner Production
The study of the impact of perceived quality and value of social enterprises on customer satisfaction and re-purchase intention	Choi & Kim (2013)	International Journal of Smart Home
Social enterprises and social markets: models and new trends	Díaz-Foncea & Marcuello (2012)	Service Business

Figure A1. Relation of final reviewed publications.

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