



Review

# Consumers' Perspectives on Circular Economy: Main Tendencies for Market Valorization

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Abstract: The Circular Economy (CE) concept has acquired a prominent role in both the academic and political fields, accelerated by the realization of a need to change the current pathway of economic development towards a more sustainable one. This transition depends upon a transformation in production and industrial processes, but also in consumption practices. Consumer behaviors and perceptions of circular solutions have been overlooked in the literature and in policy measures, often limited to eco-labelling and information campaigns. This paper argues for a greater definition and centrality of the role of consumption within the CE. Based on a systematic literature review covering the years 2012–2023, the article offers an overview of the main tendencies and challenges of market valorization in the CE, showing a greater concentration of papers at the macro level and micro levels (47% and 35%, respectively) and a lower concentration at the meso level (18%). Results show a steady number of publications regarding consumption in the CE over the years. The mapping of keywords shows greater clustering between terms such as policies, sustainable development and the CE and a lesser focus on the practices that support it. The article concludes that consumption dynamics in the CE must take into account the balance between individual agency, institutional structures, and normative values and develop a paradigm that comprehends sectorial boundaries.

**Keywords:** circular economy; consumer behavior; circular consumption; market valorization; literature review

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# 1. Introduction

The notion of Circular Economy (CE) is gaining traction, as awareness is raised for the need of a shift from a linear economic model to a more balanced one in terms of resource management and waste production. The CE model is generally represented in the literature as a viable alternative for economic development that can counteract environmental damages caused by the linear economy [1–9]. Although the definition of the CE is not stable [10–12], it is usually referred to as "an industrial system that is restorative or regenerative by intention and design" [13]. The goal is to move away from the "take–make–use–dispose" model, reintroducing waste into the production cycle through redesigning, recycling and reusing [10,14].

Focusing on the reality of the European Union (EU), CE business models have been implemented throughout most countries, mainly due to the EU's agenda focus on environmental and developmental sustainability, confirming that support from governing bodies and institutions is still essential to CE implementation [15]. Most of this support, materialized as financial and tax incentives or as regulatory laws and procedures, refers to production cycles, supply chains, recycling and waste management. Despite the recent proposal for a European Directive on empowering consumers for the green transition [16], which mainly focuses on informing consumers about warranty issues, software updates,

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product repairability, among others, considerably less attention is paid to consumer acceptance and behavior [14,17]. However, this acceptance is key to achieving a concrete transformation in consumption patterns [18]. If the CE refers to a structural and paradigmatic shift in economic and societal development, its policies and guidelines must account for the essential role of the consumer as an active and informed actor in that very shift, rather than a passive recipient of circular products and services [15].

This article offers a discussion on the role of consumption within the CE and the key challenges to its study. The aim of this review is to provide a systematic account of the evolution of the research linking consumption and the CE, of which works such as [19]'s or [20]'s are prime examples. This review differs from these works as it aims to present a relatively broad and brief overview of the research on this matter in the last decade, considering three levels of market valorization, and offer a reflection on the place occupied by consumption within the CE. Thus, the main objectives of this review are (1) to investigate the multifaceted dynamics of consumption within the context of the CE; (2) to explore the relationships and imbalances between micro, meso, and macro levels of action in driving market valorization within the CE; and (3) to examine the interplay between individual agency and institutional structures in CE realization. The main theoretical contributions of this discussion are related to a reframing of the role of the consumer, who must necessarily be framed as an active and informed actor, rather than a passive one, in the structural and paradigmatic shift towards CE. Another important contribution is the introduction of the notion of circular consumption, used as an encompassing term for different modes of consumption within a circular economic model. In terms of practical contributions, it is hoped that the article may aid in the orientation and definition of political and sectorial measures to effectively implement the CE, which must take into account the role of the consumer, the need for stakeholder engagement as well as the importance of the institutional context.

The article is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the theoretical and methodological approach to the literature review, as well as the most immediate interpretations of the relationships between the selected articles. The results are presented and discussed in Section 3, which is divided in a number of subsections that begin by offering a brief contextualization of the principal determining factors for market valorization of CE solutions based on three levels (macro, meso and micro), followed by a reflection on the place and role of consumption within these trends. Due to the ambivalence that often characterizes consumption in the CE, the development of a definition of "circular consumption" is proposed, presenting some of the practices that may support it, as well as its main motivating factors and constraints to its adoption. Consumers' perspectives and practices and the influence of the institutional context are also analyzed in this section. The main limitations, conclusions and avenues for further research are presented in Section 4.

#### 2. Materials and Methods

#### 2.1. Theoretical Framework

This systematic literature review uses a deductive framework for its methodology, using previous articles to conduct its analysis and draw its conclusions. The systematic review is conducted against a theoretical backdrop that combines elements of critical theory and behavioral economics [21–23]. This combination allows for the simultaneous observation of (1) how dominant structures, institutions and ideologies help maintain or disrupt the status quo, and (2) how individual beliefs and biases can influence consumer behavior. Drawing inspiration from these combined theories will hopefully help bridge debates and further the analysis of the mutual influences between individual agency, everyday practices and the institutional environments in which they take place [22].

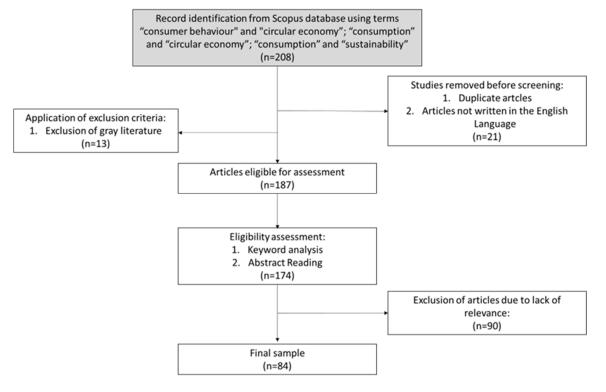
#### 2.2. Methodology

With the aim of identifying the major contributions to the relationship between CE and consumption in the last ten years, a search on Scopus was conducted with the terms

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"consumer behavior" and "circular economy"; "consumption" and "circular economy"; and "consumption" and "sustainability", which resulted 208 articles for the period between the 2012 and 2022. The search did not include other specific terms, such as "green behavior", "eco conscious behavior", "environmental behavior", because the primary focus was in examining the particular relationship between sustainability, CE and consumer behavior. While it is recognized that this option may have resulted in a limited search scope and results, it was found that the use of the mentioned search terms was indeed broad enough to include specific types, attitudes, and postures towards consumption and sustainability, as will be presented in the following sections.

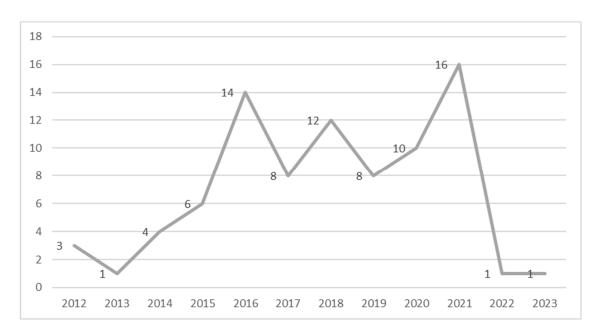
The analysis was limited to scientific literature, excluding contributions from the "grey literature" ("white papers", European Commission studies, policies and legislation, among others), as well as articles not written in the English language. After applying these exclusion criteria and eliminating duplicate articles, abstracts and keywords were manually analyzed in order to determine their relevance to this study (Figure 1). This filtering resulted in a total of 84 relevant articles.



**Figure 1.** Methodological structure for the systematic literature review (made by the authors).

From this selection, it was possible to map the evolution of the number of publications relevant to the theme of this review, with a higher number for the years of 2016 and 2021, with 14 and 16 articles, respectively (Figure 2). The reduced number of articles for the most recent year (2022) does not translate into a deficiency in valuable contributions to the field of circular economy, consumption dynamics or sustainability. Rather, it is attributed to the filtering and screening process. The manual reading of the abstracts and articles determined that those that appeared in the original search in these years were not particularly relevant to the analysis' goals.

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**Figure 2.** Graphical representation of the evolution of the literature on consumption and the Circular Economy (made by the authors).

Overall, the articles are distributed across a total of 45 different journals, with varying disciplinary fields, including psychology, sociology, marketing studies, and environment, presenting a higher concentration in journals such as Sustainability (12), Journal of Cleaner Production (11), and Business Strategy and the Environment (5), as can be seen in Figure 3. The remaining articles are scattered across the remaining journals, available for consultation in the Supplementary Data that accompanies this article.

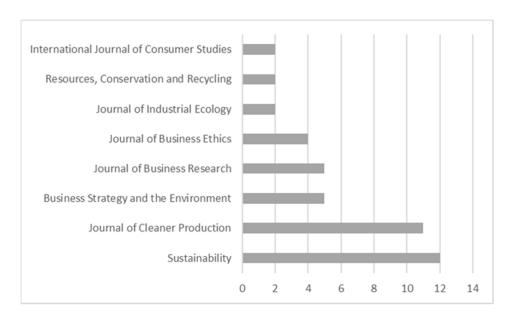


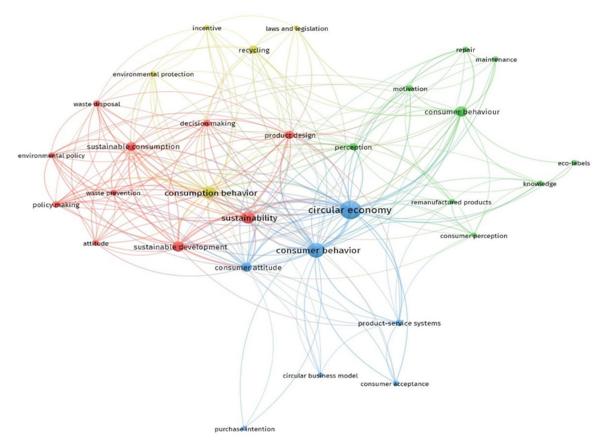
Figure 3. Main journals in which the articles are distributed (made by the authors).

#### 2.3. Bibliometric Mapping

Using VOSViewer, a mapping of keywords relationships was carried out (Figure 4). Despite the fact that bibliometric analysis is usually used to tackle larger datasets (Donthu et al., 2021) [24], a visualization of the linkages between the articles' keywords is useful to determine the ground in which the relationship between consumer behavior and the CE is built. Subsequently, the selected articles were thoroughly read in order to establish a state

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of the art regarding consumer behavior towards circular products, services and practices. The main findings of this analysis are structured in the discussion of results where, from a brief overview of the main trends of market valorization for the CE, a reflection is made on the role and place occupied by consumption, its motivating factors and the challenges to its broad implementation.



**Figure 4.** Mapping of keywords from the analyzed literature (made by the authors using VOSViewer version 1.6.19).

The clustering and mapping of the keywords of the selected articles allow for the conclusion that the major interconnections are found between terms such as circular economy, consumer behavior and attitudes, sustainability and sustainable development (Figure 4). This analysis also demonstrates that, while there is a clear concentration on topics such as consumer behavior and attitudes (for example, [1,14,25–27]), there is a lesser focus on the consumption and production practices that support the CE, such as remanufacture, repair or maintenance (for example, [28–31]). There is also a noticeable prevalence of subjects such as policy making, environmental policy, incentives, and laws and legislations, closely related to matters of consumer behavior (for example, [18,32–35]), which suggests that policies, regulations and institutions have a decisive role in orienting and determining consumer behavior.

Consensus among the consulted articles lies in the notion that, although there are important contributions in the area of consumption, it is not the subject that receives the most attention within CE studies [36]. Much of the literature focuses its analysis on circularity measures adopted in companies and industrial sectors [37–40], on their application to business models [5,41–44], as well as on the definition of public policies to facilitate the transition to a CE [6,19,45].

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#### 3. Results and Discussion

# 3.1. Tendencies and Challenges of Market Valorization in the CE

In the CE context, market valorization implies creating economic value from sustainable and circular practices, which will, in turn, drive the adoption of those same practices in the market and encourage businesses to rethink production and consumption models in order to align them with principles of sustainability, resource efficiency and waste reduction. Essentially, it involves assigning economic value to sustainable and circular practices and products. It includes a broad range of measures at different levels, such as regulatory support, synergies and collaborations between stakeholders in terms of resource efficiency and waste reduction, as well as innovation, and patterns of consumption dynamics. Often, the increase in economic value of sustainable and circular products is assumed by the final consumer. One can establish the same kind of comparison between biological and nonbiological agriculture, where the price of a biological apple has more market value than an apple produced with intensive agriculture practices. Similarly, the final consumer will generally have to pay more for a CE product than for a linear product of the same characteristics, which can be a challenge to its widespread adoption.

Nevertheless, the CE is increasingly attractive for companies and stakeholders, representing a potential global economic output of \$4.5 trillion by 2030 [46]. The engagement in circularity strategies has moved beyond market niches and contaminates business models and public policies at regional, national and international levels. Basing the discussion on [19]'s systematic literature review on CE implementation for the EU, an exploration of three different trend-defining levels of market valorization for the CE is presented, as well as some challenges they currently face (Figure 5).

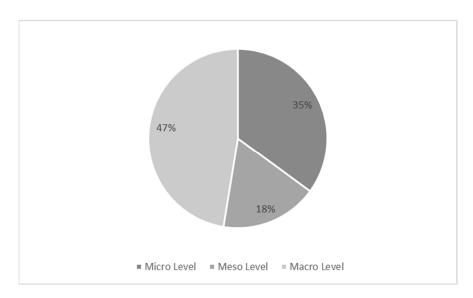


Figure 5. Levels of market valorization of the analyzed articles (made by the authors).

The analysis allows for the conclusion that, out of the 84 articles, the majority of the studies (47%) refer to the micro level (pertaining to businesses and consumption), 35% refer to the macro level (referring to public policy), and 18% refer to the meso level (concerning sectorial collaboration). Out of these, 41 articles referred to the macro level, 6 referred to the meso, and 23 referred to the micro level. Some studies applied a combination of levels in their approach to the subject: one combined macro and meso levels, three combined micro and macro levels, seven combined micro and meso levels, and three combined all three levels. Table 1 presents a succinct overview of the main factors and barriers found at each level, as well as the main definitions for consumption used. Despite the diversity of barriers and drivers found, it is clear that political and economic pressure are key to implementing circularity measures at the macro and meso levels, be it in the form of taxation and financial incentives, or of the promotion of partnerships and stakeholder en-

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gagement [32,47,48]. Actions such as green taxes, eco-labeling and information campaigns are also important at the micro level, but the prevailing drivers here are mostly related to sociodemographic factors which affect levels of environmental concern, as well as with the building of self-image and senses of community and everyday practices [49–51]. However, sociodemographic aspects may simultaneously act as barriers, seeing as how income and education can impede the adoption of circularity practices. At the macro level, the main barriers found are the contextual dependency of policy measures, as well as institutional inertia and bureaucratic processes. These aspects also hinder the implementation of circular practices at the meso level, where geographical constraints and the linear lock-in appear as significant limitations. Overall, the literature analysis made clear that all three levels are interdependently related, as policies, regulations and institutions affect consumption, and societal norms and individual motivations and values affect macro aspects. A more detailed analysis of the barriers and constraints found in the conducted analysis is presented in the following subsections.

**Table 1.** Main determining factors, barriers and definitions at the different levels of market valorization (made by the authors).

Level	Main Determining Factors	Main Barriers	Main Definition of Consumption Used	References
Macro	Policy mixes and synergies Perception of economic and environmental benefits Sociodemographic factors Coercive pressure by law Information disclosure Engagement and collaboration between stakeholders and levels of governance Funding Organizational support Education and information campaigns Green taxes and fees Corporate responsibility Eco-labeling Consumer engagement and consideration of social values and norms Competitiveness and security	Sociodemographic factors Context dependency Institutional inertia Failure to appreciate the integral role of social and structural contexts in shaping and delimiting behavior Quality of alternatives and rebound effects Higher costs and liability Coercive pressure does not guarantee results Social heterogeneity, inequalities and disparities Lack of adequate assessment approaches Lack of stakeholder engagement Lack of CE awareness Bureaucratic processes Lack of information disclosure Insufficient environmental responsibility	Collaborative consumption Sustainable consumption	[1,3–7,11,14,17,26,30,32–34,42,47,48,52–72]
Meso	Access to supply chain relationships Structural flexibility Closer collaboration within and beyond immediate industry boundaries and public and private procurement in the service industry Stakeholder engagement. Sharing of resource flows Cooperation with government bodies Environmentally sustainable business practices	Lack of collective knowledge and social capital Barriers between design and development Linear lock-in and geographical barriers Restrictive laws	Sharing economy	[28,37,38,41,43,73]

 Table 1. Cont.

Level	Main Determining Factors	Main Barriers	Main Definition of Consumption Used	References
Micro	Sense of community	High costs of purchasing sustainable products  Fragmented overall understanding of the sustainability concept Lack of awareness and competence Wrong positioning of sustainable products in the market Greenwashing Unregulated market Lack of knowledge and trust Failure to take into account the psychological aspects and benefits of consuming sustainably Larger responsibility and lack of ownership Perceived inconvenience Social and cultural norms	Sustainable consumption Access-based consumption Sustainable consumer behavior Ethical consumption Consumption work Collaborative consumption Sharing economy	[25,31,49–51,74–88]
Macro + Meso	Profit	Regulatory challenges Consumer information	Collaborative consumption	[89]
Micro + Meso	Social influence and community building Habit formation Tangibility Customization Technological development and digital literacy Economic factors Environmental concerns Shared risks and responsibilities Profitable business concepts	Lack of legal, fiscal and labor regulation Risk of exclusion due to strong focus on technology Sustainable actions viewed as effortful, time-consuming, or difficult to carry out Belief that sustainable attributes can have negative implications for aesthetics, functional performance, or affordability	Sustainable consumption Sharing economy Collaborative consumption	[90–96]

 Table 1. Cont.

Level	Main Determining Factors	Main Barriers	Main Definition of Consumption Used	References
Micro + Macro	Norms and institutions at the macro and micro levels Perceived behavioral control Information availability Government incentives and nudges Defaults in product design and product characteristics Social and self-identification	Uncertainty avoidant behaviors Cognitive barriers Need for social proof and implicit recommendation	Sustainable consumption	[97–99]
Macro + Meso + Micro	Sociodemographic factors, such as income and education level General trust in other individuals, and post-materialist values Questioning of social norms New regulations	Multiple levels of decision-making Failure to meet consumers' expectations Low financial benefits Lack of trust Insufficient partnerships and cooperation among businesses Inappropriate product design Lack of support from governmental/regulatory system Social norms not compatible Lack of knowledge/skills; presence of uncertainty	Sustainable consumption Access-based consumption	[100–102]

#### 3.1.1. Macro Level

The macro level is the most often found in the literature (47%) and refers to the field of public policy; it underlies the aforementioned changes in businesses' organizational model and collaboration strategies, as well as consumer behaviors [45]. At this level, the most prevalent notion of consumption is sustainable and collaborative consumption, and most articles refer not to the particular behavior of the individual consumer, but to the policies and institutions which may help model and motivate sustainable consumption.

Despite the rising interest in the implementation of CE strategies, there is a relative inertia that keeps most societies dependent on a linear economy model. As an example, the global economy is still only 9% circular, and it is only 12% circular in the specific case of the EU [11]. This scenario justifies the significance of the role of public policy in aiding the transition towards a CE. Accordingly, studies regarding the role and impact of public policy in implementing circularity measures make up for 52% of the articles found in [19]'s literature review.

The CE has become a prominent theme in EU policy, motivating a set of regulations and strategies for its implementation across member states [103]. Aside from measures pertaining to the ban of single-use plastic and legislation on waste management, the EU implemented the Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP) in 2015. This document introduces regulations aimed at reducing energy and raw materials consumption and managing waste, as well as a specific legal framework in which investments in circular strategies are encouraged [67]. The benefits of this transition are estimated to amount to 630 million EUR in savings across European countries, increasing the EU's GDP by 3.9% by 2030 [4].

Although the interaction between both levels of government does not occur without constraints [4], European policy has contaminated the national policies of member states, and many European countries have implemented their own circular economy action plans. Together with institutions and civil society partners, the role of public policy is defining in implementing circular strategies, whether by establishing partnerships between stakeholders, by proving tax incentives to production and consumption of CE products and services, or by regulating management of resource exploitation and waste generation [4].

Notwithstanding, there is still difficulty in moving from the CE as an aspirational model to an established practice. Firstly, there is a matter of focus. Due to its systemic nature, the CE calls for a wide policy perimeter. However, most policy measures focus on niche levels or specific industries, such as recycling, energy consumption and waste management [40], construction industry [104], the agriculture and forestry sector and public administration [48]. Meanwhile, actions focused on eco-design or consumption are given less attention by governing bodies and stakeholders.

There is also a matter of coherence. Often, policy measures and plans lack consistency between them, leading to the fragmentation of actions and, ultimately, to their dissolution. There is a need for consistency across policies and plans, across circular projects, across different levels of government, and even in terms of funding. This matter is also related to a lack of CE assessment tools. According to [6], the absence of assessment tools is related to (1) the lack of political interest and pressure and (2) the lack of role models for a potential peer review between decision makers.

Finally, there is the matter of culture [12]. The CE calls for a broad approach, capable of leading to changes in societal behavior as a whole. In this sense, policies should have a wide enough scope to include maintainable policies, the institution of adequate assessment tools, as well as the involvement of citizens, local stakeholders and consumers. However, there is limited consideration of social aspects in the implementation of the CE [36]. The literature suggests that the resolution to this problem lies in the implementation of a package of symbiotic policies that are capable of promoting complementarities between different socioeconomic and sociocultural factors, encompassing national, regional and local governments, industry sectors and consumers.

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#### 3.1.2. Meso Level

This is the level least considered in the literature, making up only 18% of the analyzed articles. Here, the most used definition of consumption is the sharing economy, mostly referring to the need for businesses and industrial sectors to collaborate and share responsibilities regarding resource flows and waste streams, as well as engaging stakeholders. Indeed, the establishment of a CE requires collaboration among companies, industries and sectors to achieve closed material loops [39]. Closed loops facilitate minimum waste generation, ensuring a lesser environmental footprint. Collaboration strategies mainly focus on the creation of functioning industrial ecosystems, where waste from one industrial process is used in another [38]. These ecosystems can result from both a top-down and bottom-up approach, where the former refers to preventive planning and the latter to more or less spontaneous agreements between firms [102].

In a closed loop and collaborative industrial model, companies rely on each other, making joint decisions in order to achieve growth objectives and milestones, and achieving benefits in three different dimensions [38]: (1) economically, companies avoid disposal costs and gain profit from the selling of by-products; (2) environmentally, both resource consumption and waste production are reduced; and (3) socially, industrial symbiosis could potentially strengthen relationships between companies, government bodies and the community [37].

However, in [19]'s analysis, the meso level makes up for only 17% of the cases found in the scientific literature, which could indicate a lack of effective synergies between industries. This is mainly due to the risks, uncertainties and feelings of mistrust associated with cooperation between traditionally competitive industries, creating dynamics of "coopetition" [40]. One of the main issues permeating these dynamics is the imbalance that often characterizes relationships between companies. Indeed, although the sharing of benefits and risks underlies collaborative relations, companies may not share them equally. In the same way, companies do not depend upon each other to the same degree. Both these scenarios could potentially lead to asymmetries and conflicts between companies and hinder the implementation of circularity at the meso level.

# 3.1.3. Micro Level

This level is the one most often found in the literature on CE. In [19]'s review, this level is dedicated to businesses and firms, which play a key role in the implementation of the CE. However, in this study, consumption is included at the micro level, seeing as how it is at the level of everyday practice that consumption takes place. An overview of the business aspect is presented, followed by a discussion of consumption at the micro level.

Business is often seen as the heart of the transition towards the CE. Accordingly, and referring to [19], this level makes up to 34% of the cases addressed in the scientific literature (35% in this review). Many companies are embedding sustainability principles into their business models, rather than just introducing or updating products to be more sustainable. These practices include an effective update or adoption of production and distribution systems that are more sustainable and oriented towards material consumption reduction. Some of the most prevalent practices are virtualization [5,41,44,105], recycling, remanufacture and reuse across industry sectors, eco-design [28,42], eco-labeling [106], cascading, or the embedded extraction of resources [29,107], as well as the implementation of circular supply chains [43]. The motivation for the adoption of greater circularity in their business models can be seen as either stemming from an environmentally conscious vision, from a perspective of market opportunity and economic benefits, or as resulting from the conformity to policy frameworks and directives, as well as some combination of the three [19]. However, some companies may face setbacks while implementing circular business models and strategies. It is often not easy for established companies to shift and adapt to the CE due to organizational inertia and resistance [39].

Most of the academic literature focusing on the micro level centers its analysis on the circularity measures adopted by individual companies and industry sectors. However,

consumption should also be considered in this level of market valorization as an essential component [90,108]. This refers to "the willingness of consumers to pay for products produced based on the CE and sustainability principles" [36]. This willingness rests upon a number of factors, including economic (e.g., obtaining financial gains) and hedonistic factors (e.g., engaging in circular consumption practices for pure enjoyment) [94,95]. It is also motivated by social aspects, such as community building, sense of belonging [91,93] and social influence [90], as well as on the development of technologies and platforms which allow for the growth of these forms of consumption [92,93]. However, the embedded nature of consumption, which is rooted in everyday practice, makes its contribution to sustainability and to the CE highly context-dependent, as it is mediated by societal norms and values, and individual habits and intentions. Perceptions of consumption in the CE point to avoidance of risk taking, as sustainable products can be seen as having negative implications for aesthetics, functional performance, effort, or affordability [90], as well as risk avoidance and mistrust due to frequent cases of greenwashing.

#### 3.2. Where Does Consumption Stand in the CE?

Traditionally, consumption is viewed as the final purpose of any economic activity. However, in a CE, consumption can be thought of as one of the phases of the production cycle. This does not imply that consumption in a CE has lost its economic, social and cultural significance. On the contrary, the ways in which we consume are connected to patterns and tendencies at a larger scale. Therefore, the field of consumption should not be neglected when it comes to identifying the main trends and challenges of the implementation of CE systems and solutions. Still, less than 20% of the definitions found for the CE include consumption as a key factor [12,65,109]. Furthermore, the definitions which include consumption do not always decouple it from production.

Most approaches surrounding consumption are currently dominated by theories of practice [65], which expands acts of consumption beyond themselves to include moments not traditionally associated with it, such as "getting rid of" things [65,70]. In a linear economy, consumption is seen as subordinate to production [70] and consumer behavior as a mere result of marketing and placement strategies. Indeed, it must not be assumed that consumers have no agency or that acts of calculation and decision are not mobilized during moments of consumption [61]. Consumption in the CE is motivated by a set of different factors, such as value (not just economic, but symbolic), connections (relationships of reciprocity, sociability and interaction), and even politics (e.g., resistance to massified consumption) [17]. It is these factors, and the meanings they hold for different individuals and groups, which ultimately dictate the patterns and variations in consumption practices.

# 3.3. From Sustainable to Circular Consumption

CE implementation processes must account for all the dimensions of sustainable development, including environmental, economic and social [14], and consider all levels of market valorization discussed above. Although framed at the micro level, consumption has a pivotal role in the successful establishment of a CE. However, at both these levels, consumption has not been unequivocally defined, and most research denotates a degree of impreciseness and ambivalence in its definition [17], which becomes apparent in the designations used in the scientific literature (Table 2). Different terms are often used equivalently, and the idea of sustainable consumption appears to be mostly coupled with production, with no clear distinction of the term within designations such as "sustainable consumption and production".

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**Table 2.** Different definitions of consumption found in the analyzed literature (made by the authors).

Description	Definition	Source
Sustainable consumption	Purchase of environmentally sustainable products, with a view to reduce the environmental footprint in	[49,51,75,90,97]
Sustainable consumer behavior	favor of ecological protection and integrity.  Actions taken by consumers that contribute to the achievement of sustainability objectives.	[51,76,90,98–100]
Access-based consumption	Transactions that may be market mediated, but where there is no transfer of ownership.	[77,91,101]
Green consumption	Consumers adhere to environmentally friendly modes of consumption because they intrinsically believe it is the right thing to do.	[78,79]
Ethical consumption	Incorporates considerations of ecological and human welfare issues. Also referred to as pro-social consumption.	[27,75,110]
Sharing economy	It enables a shift from a culture where consumers own goods to one where they share access to goods.  This shift is driven by platforms that connect consumers and enable them to make more efficient use of underutilized goods.	[73,80–82,92,93,111]
Collaborative consumption	Resource circulation system that allows consumers to obtain and provide, temporarily or permanently, resources or services through direct interaction with other consumers or through a mediator.	[52–54,83,89,94,95]

Some of the most common terms used to define consumption in the CE are "sustainable consumption" or "sustainable consumer behavior" (White et al., 2019) [90], "access-based consumption" (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012) [77], "green consumption" (Barbarossa & De Pelsmacker, 2016) [78], "ethical consumption" (Zane et al., 2016) [27] and "responsible consumption" (Gunawan et al., 2020) [69], terms which often overlap in the scientific literature and in policy.

The imprecisions associated with the idea of sustainable consumption and the frequent misalignment of different modes of consumption with a CE model lead to the proposal of a notion of "circular consumption". Like concepts such as sustainable consumption, circular consumption sits within the broader context of sustainability and sustainable development. The United Nations has defined sustainable development as how we must live today if we want a better tomorrow, by meeting present needs without compromising the chances of future generations to meet their needs. The survival of our societies and our shared planet depends on a more sustainable world (https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2023/08/what-is-sustainabledevelopment/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIn7rUoM6-gQMVCDgGAB1k4wdqEAAYASAAEgLCA D\_BwE' (accessed on 22 September 2023)). It has defined a 2023 Agenda for Sustainable Development made up of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The European Commission, for its part, states that Sustainable development was defined in the World Commission on Environment and Development's 1987 Brundtland report 'Our Common Future' as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. It seeks to reconcile economic development with the protection of social and environmental balance (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/sustainabledevelopment.html (accessed on 22 September 2023)). Thus, in 2001, the EU adapted the Sustainable Development Strategy, revised in 2006, providing a long-term vision for sustainability in which economic growth, social cohesion and environmental protection go hand in hand and are mutually supporting.

In terms of a critical analysis of the definitions and scopes, sustainable development is defined and aims to ensure the future of the next generations and the planet in different objectives, focused on the needs of the future, with an impact on three main dimensions (environment, economy and social). To this end, 17 sustainable development goals have been created. The Circular Economy is focused on minimizing waste generation, increasing

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the lifetime of resource use, and reducing the extraction and use of natural resources. The Circular Economy is complementary to Sustainable Development, but it is not a guarantee that a circularly designed product is a sustainable product. Likewise, a sustainable product may not be circular.

Only some of the targets for sustainable development are directly related to part of the Circular Economy concept, namely: 6.2 (water-use efficiency); 7.3 (double global rate of improving energy efficiency); 8.4 (global resource efficiency in consumption/production and decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation); 9.4 (increase resourceuse efficiency and resilient industrial processes); 12.2 (achieve sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources); 12.3 (halve per cap global food waste and reduce food losses); 12.4 (achieve sound management of chemicals and waste through the life cycle); 12.5 (substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse); Targets 15.1 (ensure conservation, restoration and sustainable use of freshwater); and 15.4 (ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity). A product, material, project, action, activity, among others, can be sustainable and not be a Circular Economy concept. For example, the production and replacement of synthetic textile fibers with forest biomass fibers using bio-based textile surface finish coatings to replace those derived from fossil resources represent a sustainable product, which will give rise to "Sustainable Consumption", but does not represent "Circular Consumption". Conversely, a Circular Economy project may not constitute a sustainable one.

Circular Consumption is an emerging dimension that is defined as the consumption of products, raw materials and/or services that involves sharing, leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing and recycling existing materials and products as long as possible, where the life cycle of raw materials and products are extended, reducing waste and natural resources consumption to a minimum.

Circular consumption can be seen as a subset of sustainable consumption that specifically emphasizes the circular economy model, which aims to keep products and materials in use for as long as possible and minimize waste. It goes beyond the shift to a greater consideration for the environment and involves an actual shifting and broadening of consumption practices to include and promote reusing, recycling, refurbishing, remanufacturing, sharing products to extend their lifespan and prevent them from becoming waste, and even the reduction or refusal of consumption. Circular consumption encourages consumers to choose products designed for durability, repairability and recyclability, and to participate in systems that promote resource efficiency. The main difference between sustainable consumption and circular consumption is their focus and scope. Sustainable consumption encompasses a wider range of responsible choices and behaviors related to consumption, including considerations of ethical and environmental impacts. Circular consumption, on the other hand, is a more specific approach within sustainable consumption that centers on the principles of the circular economy, with a primary focus on reducing waste and extending the life of products and materials through various circular practices. Both concepts contribute to overall sustainability goals but emphasize different aspects of responsible consumption.

Based on [65]'s model for phases of consumption and on the idea of "consumption work" [109], the notion of circular consumption can be stabilized as a general disposition or inclination towards sustainable consumption patterns and practices, without it necessarily translating into or stemming from a preoccupation with specifically environmental concerns. Although there could be a spillover effect in environment-friendly behavior, it is dependent upon each individual person's value priorities and can be motivated by economic or social reasons, or even by forms of institutional regulations or incentives. Whatever the motivational factor or type of participation in circular consumption, this notion assumes that economic growth is no longer primarily nor solely defined by production, but rather sits firmly within consumption patterns and practices.

Therefore, circular consumption serves as an encompassing notion that includes both practical and symbolic aspects of consumption. This framework expands the idea of

consumption to include moments that would not traditionally be associated with it. Based on the three dimensions of consumption proposed by [70] (acquisition, appropriation and appreciation), [65] proposes another three dimensions: devaluation, divestment and discarding. This combination constitutes a cycle in which consumers evaluate the goods, services and experiences through processes of exchange. They attribute meaning to those goods and gain satisfaction through consumption, which is related to broader moral, social and aesthetic contexts [70]. Afterwards, there is a loss of economic, as well as cultural value through use, which leads to a loss in symbolic value. The meanings and attributes ascribed to the acquired good are eroded and it is then discarded, without it necessarily turning into waste [65]. The inclusion of moments of acquisition and disposal; appropriation and divestment; and appreciation and devaluation allow for a more comprehensive notion of what circular consumption is; it also accounts for social and cultural manifestations. Circular consumption manifests itself through practice and is socially, culturally and institutionally embedded. It is also not independent from circular production, understood as a set of production practices that cover product design and manufacture to minimize waste. They are both interconnected elements of a CE that reinforce each other.

# Modes of Circular Consumption

The CE motivates different modes of circular consumption, associated with distinct rationales that can vary in type (economic, environmental and social reasons) and according to demographic and social groups [58]. This text focuses on two specific modes of consumption, which have been widely addressed in the scientific literature: the sharing economy and collaborative consumption. The focus on these two particular modes of consumption owes to its prevalence in the analyzed literature. Indeed, aside from sustainable consumption, which is a relatively stable concept across articles, referring to consumers' sustainability-related attitudes and behaviors, collaborative consumption and sharing economy are the two most prevalent terms to refer to consumption in the CE, appearing 8 and 7 times in the articles' keywords, respectively, and appearing as themes in 16 and 18 of the articles, respectively (Figure 6). While often referred to as equivalent terms [55,81], they have their own specific characteristics.

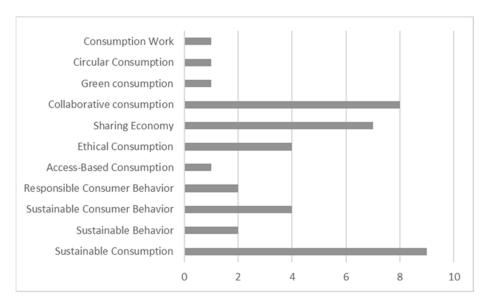


Figure 6. Modes of consumption found in the analyzed literature (made by the authors).

Both the sharing economy and collaborative consumption differ from traditional market exchanges, which are based on the purchase of a service or product, with transfer of ownership and some form of material compensation. However, there are some differentiating factors between both modes of consumption (Table 3). But, before, it is necessary

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to establish a distinction between the sharing economy as an umbrella concept, which encompasses modes of consumption such as renting, leasing, bartering or pooling [55,92] and the sharing economy as a practice and consumption mode in its own right [82], on which this discussion will focus.

**Table 3.** Main differences and similarities between collaborative consumption and the sharing economy (made by the authors).

Collaborative Consumption	Sharing Economy
Access over ownership	Access over ownership
Reliance on online platforms	Reliance on online platforms
No transfer of ownership	Transfer of ownership can occur through acts of giving
Mediated by market mechanisms, as well as social ones	Not mediated by market mechanisms
Emphasizes social connections and belonging	Emphasizes social connections and belonging
Admits forms of material compensation	No material compensation, but can activate values of reciprocity

According to [96], sharing is the "act and process of distributing what is ours to others for their use and/or the act and process of receiving or taking something from others for our use" [96]. Traditionally taking place within close members of a community, the sharing economy has recently taken on a global dimension due to the rise of online sharing platforms. Unlike traditional forms of exchange and consumption, the sharing economy is not mediated through market mechanisms, but rather by social ones, driven mostly by notions of community and belonging [82]. Collaborative consumption, on the other hand, admits the existence of forms of compensation [94] and is therefore mediated by market mechanisms [82]. Just like in the sharing economy, collaborative consumption privileges access over ownership. However, while transfer of ownership can occur in the former through the act of giving, it does not occur in the latter. In a similar manner to the sharing economy, it can take place locally or globally, enabled by the advancement of communication technologies. Collaborative consumption can thus be defined as a system of resource circulation that enables the consumer to obtain and provide products and services through direct interaction with other consumers, or through a platform provider [54,82]. In this sense, collaborative consumption can be placed somewhere between traditional sharing in a proximity context and regular market exchanges.

Underlying both consumption modes is the framing of consumers as active subjects, rather than passive ones [54,96]. However, some platforms communicated as employing sharing or collaborative modes of consumption are often misclassified as such, as they do not enable the consumer to take on a more participant role, both as obtainer and provider [54,77]. Furthermore, one can question the actual circularity of these modes of consumption. While they foster more sustainable consumption practices, they do not necessarily challenge the linear economy patterns enough in order to produce significant changes [57].

### 3.4. Consumers' Perspectives and Practices

Circular consumption is no longer confined to market niches and instead represents a great potential of economic growth [95]. However, not much is known about consumers' perspectives and practices of consumption in the CE, or why there is still a considerable degree of resistance registered in many studies [112]. This is partly due to impreciseness in definitions, but also due to the considerable complexity of consumption processes and practices, due to their embeddedness in social, cultural, economic and material systems and institutions [95,112].

#### Factors and Drivers of Consumption in the CE

Motivations for participating in the CE cannot be unequivocally enunciated, nor presented as transferrable to all societal segments. All consumption practices are deeply anchored in decision-making processes which, while related to individual motivations and rationales, are embedded in social practices which determine the set of values and meanings underlying those same practices of consumption.

Notwithstanding the scarcity of scientific literature on this matter, it is possible to establish a consensus regarding the sets of variables influencing consumption, which are divided as (a) sociodemographic factors, (b) drivers and motivations and (c) role played and product characteristics.

# (a) Sociodemographic factors

Despite the difficulty of identifying a profile of the sustainable and circular consumer [85], some sociodemographic indicators allow for the establishment of some stability in defining intentions, concerns and behaviors across different social segments. For instance, [58] finds a correlation between gender and environmental awareness, stating that women are more inclined towards circular consumption practices and adopting explicit circular consumption behaviors [25,59].

Age is also in important factor: while younger generations are more aware and conscious of environmental issues, older individuals are more likely to adhere to forms of consumption such as sharing and collaborating, mainly due to their proximity basis. Ref. [59] finds differences between generations: Baby Boomers and Generation X tend to exhibit materialistic consumption practices, whereas Generation Z and Y are more idealistic and tend to take their environmental footprint into consideration.

Regarding social class, there is a general correlation between a higher level of education and household income and environment-friendly behaviors [1]. It is simultaneously observed that individuals and households with less disposable income are more likely to adhere to sharing economy practices, as it represents economic benefits [80]. Notwithstanding, higher classes are usually the ones who consume more, due to having more disposable income [64]. Indeed, according to [84], climate change and resource depletion can be linked to the growth of the middle class across western consumer societies.

There is also a matter of culture. Western societies are typically more individualistic, while non-western ones have a higher regard for collectivist values [58], leading to a greater tendency of the latter to engage in sharing economy and collaborative consumption practices, as opposed to the former. Ref. [97] also establishes a relationship between a positive attitude towards circular consumption and national values. This explains why, even with similar policy and financial regulation, some countries differ greatly in circular consumption practices.

#### (b) Drivers and motivations

Factors such as motivation and the meanings ascribed to acts of consumption must be taken into account. Motivations can be specific to a certain behavior, or be associated with more broad, comprehensive and, therefore, more complex concepts, such as norms and values. Therefore, in order to promote environmentally responsible behaviors among consumers, it is essential to understand what motivates and what it means for consumers to act in a sustainable and circular manner.

Authors like [51,58,75] draw on self-determination theory (SDT) to analyze types of motivation and the degree to which they are self-determined. SDT suggests that people are motivated by three universal needs: autonomy (one's capacity to make an informed decision), competence (adding a sense of efficiency to one's actions) and relatedness (referring to social connections and belonging) [113]. This theory is particularly concerned with how contextual and social factors support or hinder the fulfilment of these needs. According to SDT, motivations can be extrinsic (associated with the external results of a behavior) and intrinsic (owing to both the enjoyment of an action and the internalized value of adhering to the norm).

Ref [58] differentiates between economic, environmental and social drivers of circular consumption. These are influenced by the aforementioned sociodemographic factors, but they also coincide with the needs underlying motivation. The need for competence can be linked to both economic and environmental drivers. The first category refers to the perceived economic benefits one gains through consumption. Competence can also be associated with environmental drivers, as consumers may be persuaded by an increase in efficiency and smaller costs.

The need for autonomy underlies environmental drivers. However, its influence on sustainable consumption is not as straightforward as it may initially appear. If autonomy refers to one's ability to make informed and noncoerced decisions, it depends, on the one hand, upon one's degree of self-determination and, on the other hand, on the information provided by product makers and providers. Regarding the degree of self-determination, autonomy involves a sense of willingness and choice. Ref [51] found that some consumers engage in circular consumption as a way of asserting distinctiveness. The sense of autonomy is also dependent upon access to information provided by brands and labels regarding the circularity of a product [63]. Although eco-labeling has been positively correlated to circular consumption [86,114], greenwashing can cause distrust among consumers, leading to skepticism regarding products marketed as green or sustainable. There is also a distinction in perceptions of eco-labeling according to who ascribes the label: government-certified eco-labels are the most highly trusted compared to corporate-certified eco-labels [115].

Social drivers also play an important role, revealing the importance of relatedness. New relationships of reciprocity and interaction are forged between consumers, users and providers, often becoming a common basis of circular consumption [51,112,116].

These motivations manifest at every stage of circular consumption. Consumers interpret sustainability as a concept that affects not only their choices of products, but also how they dispose of them [51]. Motivation at the buying stage is mainly constituted by external factors. These also drive motivations at the use stage, since extending product use can also be related to saving money, as well as to intrinsic motivation rooted in social or personal values and meanings. At the disposal stage, consumers are motivated by social drivers (e.g., donating to those in need), economic drivers (e.g., re-selling items, returning to seller for credit) and environmental drivers (e.g., reducing consumption of new products).

#### (c) Role played and product characteristics

Motivations and drivers also differ according to variations in forms of consumption and participation, due to the fact that consumption goods are asymmetrical in terms of economic value, environmental impact and degree of social interaction. Economic motivations may differ between users and providers of the same good, and economic benefits are usually greater for the former than for the latter [58]. This variation also manifests according to the usability of the product.

There is also a dissonance between social and environmental drivers that underlies the role of user and provider. While also engaging in circular consumption for monetary reasons, providers often put a greater emphasis on idealistic values. Users, on the other hand, are more motivated by value and convenience [87].

Variations in motivation are what explains the significant growth of circular consumption. Users and providers engage in it according to a panoply of reasons, from personal values and beliefs, reinforced by cultural and social norms or, contrastingly, by a desire for distinctiveness and self-affirmation, to economic and convenience reasons, to needs for social connection.

#### 3.5. Main Challenges to the Consumption of CE Solutions

Despite the undeniable growth of circular consumption and the general perception that consumers prefer to buy green or sustainable products [56,64], there is a clear misalignment between consumers' stated attitudes and intentions and their behaviors [14]. This is widely referred to in the scientific literature as the "intention–behavior gap" [14,17,62]. However, most studies on the understanding of sustainable consumption behavior focus on the

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various factors that underlie sustainable consumption intentions, leaving the inconsistency between the two as a practically unavoidable frustration for academia, business and industry, and marketing.

The lack of understanding of the intention–behavior gap can be attributed to, on the one hand, the variables mobilized at the point of purchase. On the other hand, there is a matter of methodology. Although useful, overreliance on quantitative and statistical data (for instance, [49]), often elicited from self-reporting inquiries, can breed inaccuracies and further widen the gap between consumers' behaviors and intentions. Because people respond in accordance with what is socially desirable, there is the danger of exaggeration or biases [14,64]. A possible alternative could lie in the shifting from the analysis of reported behavior to an analysis of observed behavior [31]. Complemented with a more frequent use of qualitative data, this shift could help determine the reasons behind the complex issue of the intention–behavior gap.

#### 3.6. The Role of Institutions

The ways in which individuals relate and adhere to social structures and practices, made of shared meanings, skills, performances and regulations, decisively influence consumption patterns [112]. Therefore, it is necessary to redirect analytical attention to the social, cultural, political and material dimensions of environmental change [47,60,68].

Consumption is an essentially institutional act [47,68,88], as it constitutes and occurs within relatively stable social structures, defined as systems that encompass multidimensional configurations of economic, social and political agencies [34,72]. This usually includes regulatory and formal framings, constitutions and laws, financial devices and market regulations, as well as informal and shared rules of conduct, shared beliefs, and cultural scripts. The interaction between all these factors modulates and supports consumers' behaviors [14].

Interpreting consumption as practice recognizes the limitations of framing the consumer as a subject whose choices are rationalized and dependent on information and awareness campaigns, for example [47]. It also recognizes the need to consider the infrastructural and social dynamics that alter consumption patterns. Thus, the focus must go beyond consumer intentions and behaviors to focus on the wider socio–technical context [60,68,88].

Institutions are determinant in defining and normalizing the diversity of behaviors and choices available to consumers. However, while institutions modulate consumer behavior, they only do so when they are perceived as legitimate [34,60]. This happens when they relate to underlying and shared socio-cultural values. In this sense, change is more likely to occur when consumers sense a tension between the institutions which mediate consumption and the values they subscribe to. Thus, social and economic institutions co-evolve with social change, becoming a key feature of structural change. Referring to the transition towards the CE, different institutional environments (the market, the company, the community or the values) will favor different types of and reasons for interaction [34] and can simultaneously act as both a catalyst and as a constraint.

Indeed, the literature on the CE transition regarding institutions places them in an ambivalent and paradoxical role [33,34]. While it finds that one significant constraint to the CE transition process is regulatory and formal in nature, it also finds that the implementation of circularity is mainly driven by social and regulatory institutional factors. This scenario renders noticeable the insufficiency of approaches based on individual consumer behavior [1,14,60]. Rather, a macro-institutional approach is needed to handle existing conflicts between economic goals, environmental needs and social justice matters.

Hence, behavioral change must be supported politically and institutionally. Despite their highly contextual character, policy instruments become defining in their role, as they can induce an actual change in consumption patterns. Ref [117] defines these instruments in four different categories: financial incentives, bans and mandates, information campaigns and, more recently, nudges. Nudges are a way to alter behavior without the prohibition

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of other options or the significant alteration of their costs, but by steering people in a certain direction. Organizational support is also instrumental, since organizations can use their purchasing power and their position as intermediaries to create and mold a more sustainable demand [32,66,71].

#### 4. Conclusions

The holistic CE realization requires delving into the complexities of consumption dynamics, navigating the balance between individual agency and institutional structures, and developing comprehensive paradigms that transcend sectorial boundaries.

This review article has made clear that the pathway to the CE's market valorization rests firmly on the interrelations between micro, meso and macro levels of action. However, the analysis demonstrates an imbalance between the size and scope of the literature devoted to the analysis of production patterns and models and the attention paid to consumption, despite its defining role in the CE implementation. This may be partially attributed to the diversity and frequent ambiguity of the terms used to define consumption in the CE. The proposal of a definition of circular consumption aims at specifying and stabilizing the characteristics and practices that support the CE, as well as signaling the importance of the role of consumption in implementing a circular economic model. Circular consumption is supported by shifts in consumption practices, which motivate different consumption modes. The discussion focused on two specific modes (collaborative consumption and sharing economy) due to their prevalence in the literature. From here, the article focused on the different motivations and driving factors of these modes of consumption and of circular consumption as a whole.

The analysis showed that most studies aiming to understand the role of consumption and consumer behavior in the adoption of circular practices fails in swerving from the limitations of framing consumption as being mainly or solely dependent on the rational capacities of individuals, who consume in some sort of cultural, economic or social void. On the contrary, most individuals do not adopt circular consumption practices for environmental or societal reasons, nor in a conscious or rationalized manner. They do so under the influence of cultural norms, social and economic institutions, and governance systems and stakeholders. Therefore, a new conceptual framing of circular consumption should allow for the consideration of consumption as an individual practice, but also as the result of interrelations between different social, economic and educational systems.

This does not mean that individuals are not able to reciprocally shape the institutional environment within which they act. Indeed, the understanding of consumption as practice allows for a more nuanced approach which recognizes that while practices are the result of consistency and reproduction, they are also dynamic in nature and therefore able to produce transformation. The choosing of consumption practices that defy the prevalent social and cultural constraints can eventually lead to institutional changes. The implementation of circularity in consumption will be more prevalent the more it will be incorporated in practices and routines, going beyond regulation devices. The investigation of the interactions between individual and self-motivated agency and external regulations imposed by the institutional environment could prove fruitful as a subject of further research in the area of circular consumption, aiding to understand the transition towards more sustainable societies. The need to better understand these tensions between agency and structure has applications for the analysis of consumer behavior, but also for producing and accelerating broader processes of circularity implementation, requiring technical, institutional, and social restructuring and alignment, as well as public policy interventions. These should go beyond sectorial interventions and adopt a holistic and contextual view of the CE transition.

Shared collective practices and routines often become narratives that establish new institutions and influence peers and stakeholders. However, the analysis notes that these new narratives of sustainability and circularity often do not pose a big enough challenge to the linear economic model and, therefore, is far from having an effective role in mitigating its negative effects. However, reducing overall consumption seems to be irreconcilable

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with the current market culture and the embedded materialism that dominate consumption practices. Rethinking economic growth through the lens of consumption is dependent upon a change in institutional narratives and structures, which would be essential in stabilizing and legitimizing consumption practices.

Limitations and Further Research

The limitations of the present study, including its disproportionate focus on the European Union context and the absence of a true systematic review, warrant acknowledgment. Still, our analysis points to some research avenues at the different levels of CE market valorization. Referring to the micro level, there is a need to investigate the development of consumer-centric circular business models that prioritize consumer engagement and participation, exploring how these models might influence consumption patterns in order to promote circularity. At the meso level, there is a need to explore the role of collaboration, such as industrial symbiosis and resource-sharing consortia, in the fostering of circular consumption practices among businesses and industries. The fact that this level demonstrates a lack of scientific knowledge [19] could be attributed to the lack of appropriate metrics and performance indicators.

Future research should focus on the development of comprehensive measuring tools and indicators to assess the circularity performance of industrial symbiosis initiatives, providing insights into how they can influence consumption practices. At the macro level, further examination into regulatory barriers and enablers is required, alongside international comparative analysis. Comparisons between countries to evaluate how different policy frameworks and approaches can influence circular consumption practices can help define best practices and areas for convergence. Finally, the interplay between these three levels should be investigated to understand how their alignment can develop comprehensive transition pathways that outline how circular consumption can be effectively integrated into existing economic systems, considering the role of businesses, industrial symbiosis, and supportive policies.

**Supplementary Materials:** The following supporting information can be downloaded at: https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/su151914292/s1, Table S1: Global vision of the 84 articles analyzed for qualitative assessment.

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