

Reflexive persona method and social representations: emerging patterns of the acceptance of recycled plastics among young people

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INTRODUCTION

Sustainability requires a transition from linear to circular economy, briefly described as „9 R-s“: Refuse, Rethink, Reduce, Re-use, Repair, Refurbish, Remanufacture, Repurpose, Recycle, Recover (Potting et al., 2017). This requires both application of new technologies, and transformation of social practices.

Our focus:

Using high tech materials like recycled plastics (RP) in consumer products is an innovative way to reduce human environmental impact. Acceptance and uptake of recycle based products by consumers is thus a necessary component of practice change.

Aim:

According to theory of social representations (SRT), reflexive groups differ systematically in the ways a social object is constructed discursively and in action. Studies on new technologies (Gaskell et al., 2010) indeed describe variation in public perception of new high-tech objects. To promote wider acceptance of consumer products containing RP, social representations (SR) should be studied in different segments of population. Knowledge of variability of SR and practices related to RP is necessary for tailored use of enablers and overcoming barriers for specific user groups.

PROBLEM

For the description of user diversity, we use the Persona method. Its aim is to form vivid personalized fictional characters that represent specific user segments (both typical and extreme), to make different users closer and more understandable to the product developers or marketers. Although this method is widely used in marketing and computer interface design, it is theoretically underconceptualized.

METHOD

- Desk research and secondary analysis – main enablers and barriers for the acceptance of RP, typologies of ecological orientations (Roosalu et al., 2022)
- Original survey among young people – relations of environmental concern with other variables (Rämmer, 2023)
- Defining organizing principles of the representational field - questions on ecological concern and responsibility (EB 2017. EU-28) in different age groups
- Constructing reflexive subgroups within this field
- Constructing relevant Personas who represent different subgroups

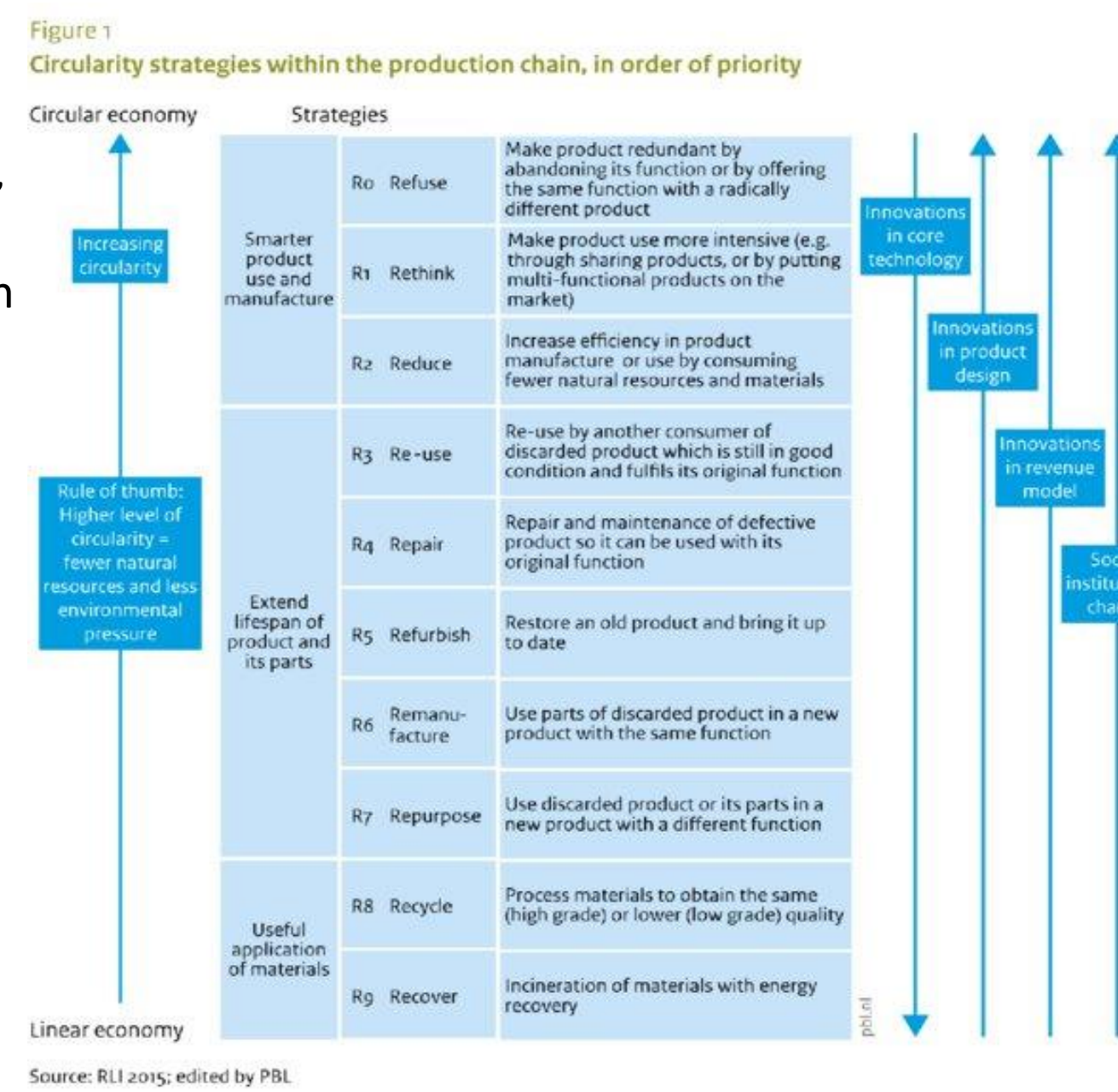
Typology – basis for our personas

Typology – basis for our personas	
Background	Story, context
Environmental attitudes and behaviours	Ecological behavior Readiness to pay more for ecofriendly products and services Attitude to climate change Image of circularity/sustainability
Individual resources and other aspects related to attitudes about proenvironmental consumption	Political position Values Trust: organizational trust, trust towards science
Socio-institutional contexts	Attitude towards globalization Institutional settings Country's position in (plastic) circular economy Dominant values, attitudes, culture

RESULTS

1. Constructing Personas

Based on Eurobarometer survey analysis, 9 nominal categories were distinguished, covering the whole socio-demographic and representational field. These categories were filled with distinct group positions, which cover the full spectrum of environmental beliefs and practices. Each group position was further detailed by constructing (reflexive) subgroups and Personas representing them. Personas express various environmental motivations and practices, values and attitudes towards sustainability, climate change, eco-consumption, and technological innovation. Personas and subgroups were partly constructed with the help of LLM (Taru, 2023).



Reflexive Persona method is a tool for understanding of interests and views of different subgroups in the society and for targeting outreach activities

Se deben utilizar diferentes caminos hacia la sostenibilidad.

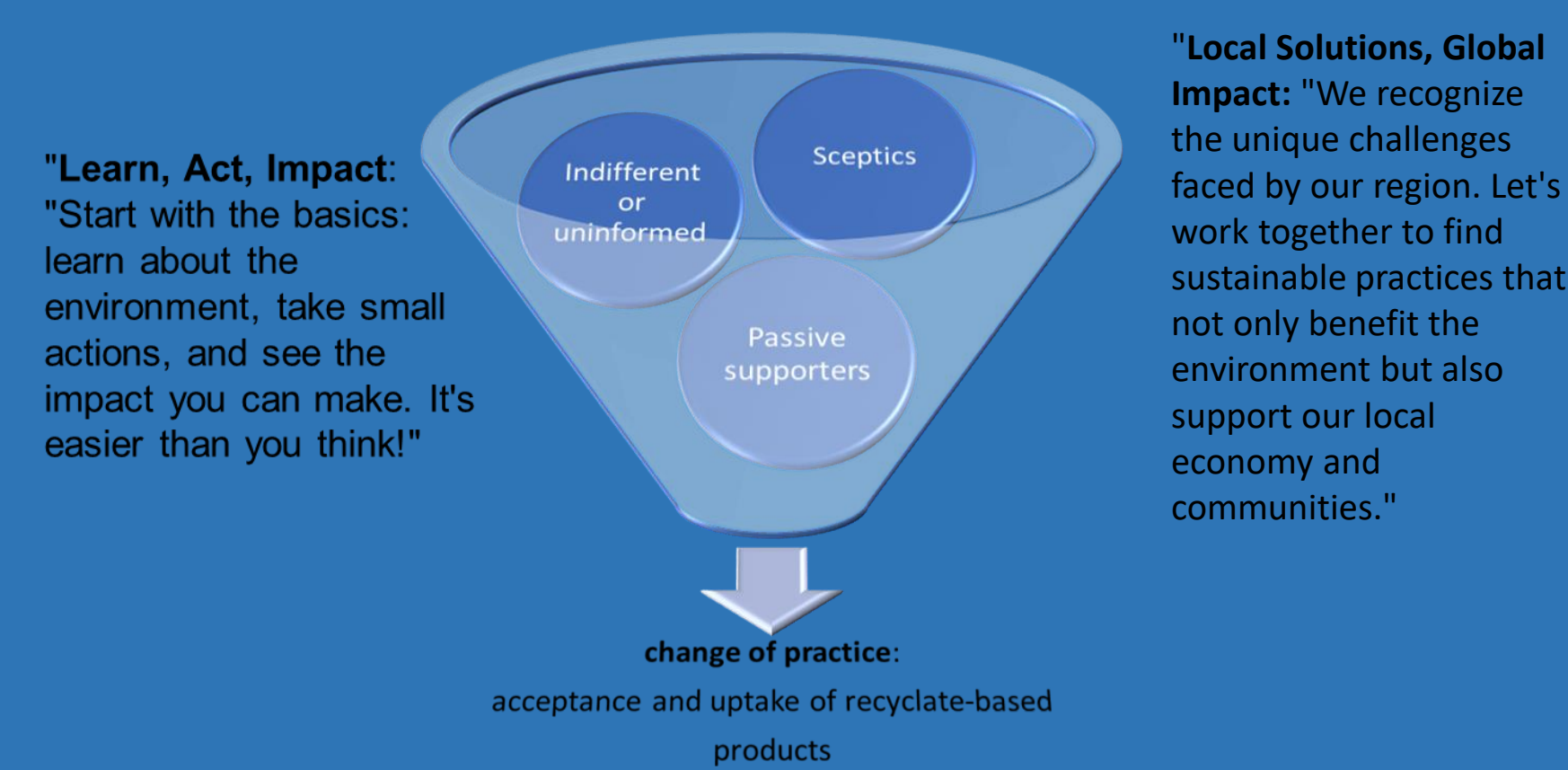
1. Umbrella messages for all



Each choice you make contributes to a more sustainable future. Embrace the power of using recycled plastics to mitigate climate change and protect our environment for generations to come.

RECYCLING IS GOOD
RECYCLATES ARE GOOD
FOR YOU AND FOR THE WORLD

2. Targeted messages for subgroups



"Learn, Act, Impact: Start with the basics: learn about the environment, take small actions, and see the impact you can make. It's easier than you think!"

"Local Solutions, Global Impact: We recognize the unique challenges faced by our region. Let's work together to find sustainable practices that not only benefit the environment but also support our local economy and communities."

3. Targeted messages for Personas

Vanessa, consumerist trendsetter



- Nudging
- Showcasing trendy, designer reusable products that align with her fashion-forward image.
- Collaborating with sustainable brands that offer stylish, eco-friendly alternatives to single-use plastics.
- Highlighting the convenience and cost-effectiveness of reusable items without compromising her style
- Soft propaganda
- **Message of Fashion and Style:**
- **Message of Luxury and Exclusivity:**
- **Message of Eco-Glamour:**
- **Message of Effortless Elegance**
- **Message of positive influence**
- "Vanessa, your influence is incredible. By embracing sustainability, you can inspire your followers to do the same. Imagine the impact we could make together. Let's lead the way toward a more stylish and eco-friendly future."

Keywords: sustainability, transformation of social practice, theory of social representations, Persona

Additional information
<https://www.primus-project.eu/>



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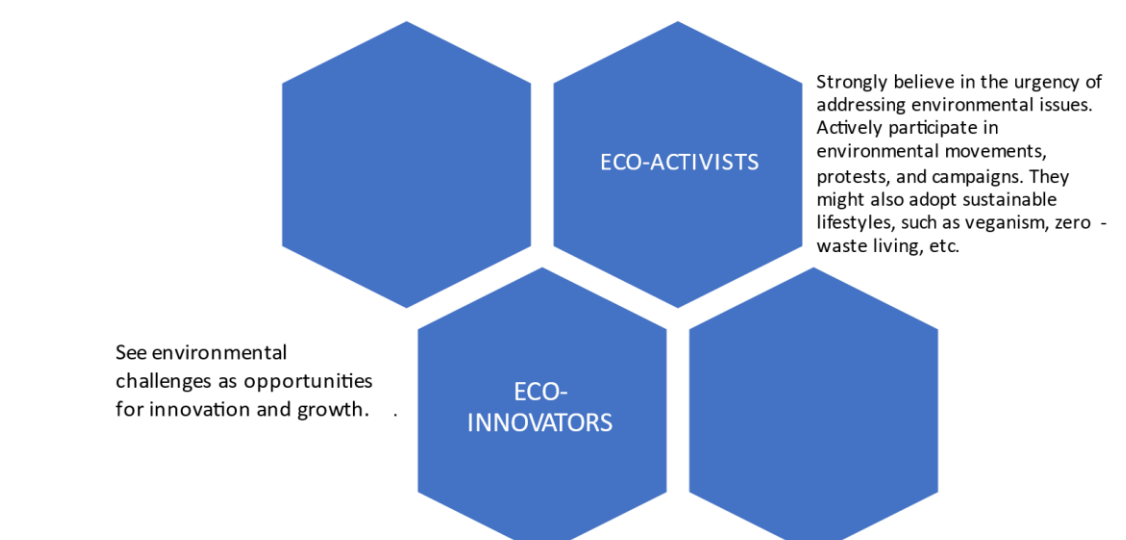
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RESULTS

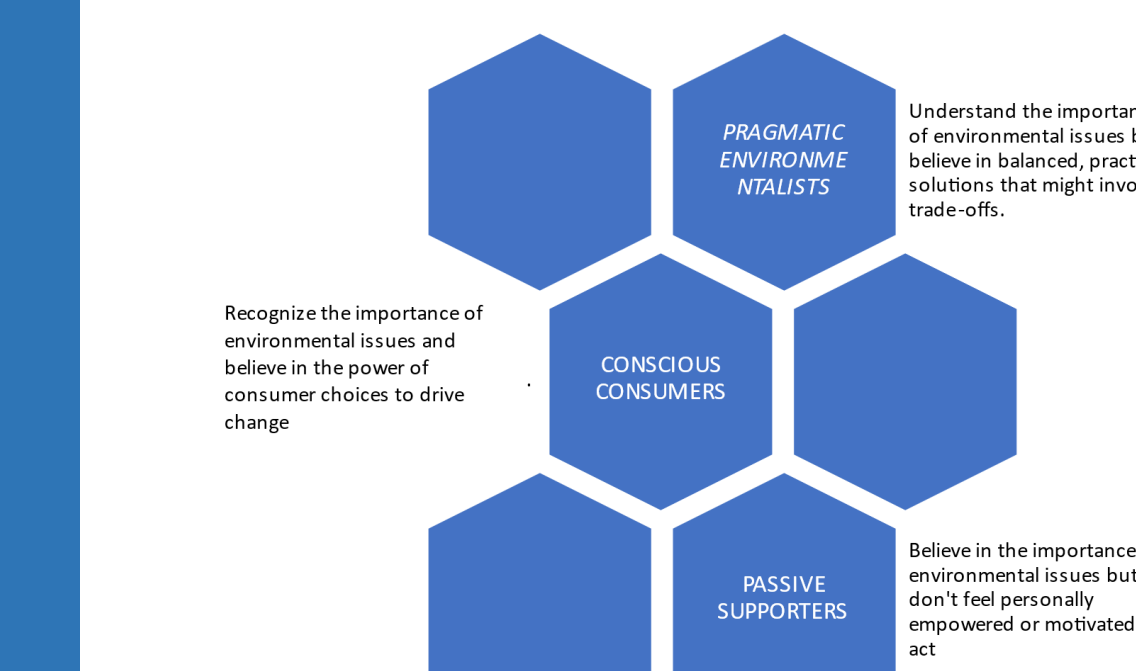
General framework - representational field of ecological concern and responsibility (EB 2017, EU-28)

Consumer lifecycle phase (generation)	1 Very responsible & very concerned (35%)	2 Fairly responsible & fairly concerned (45%)	3 Neither responsible nor concerned (20%)
A. "young" youth 15-24	A1	A2	A3
B. "adult" Young adults 25-34 Generation Z	B1	B2	B3
Adults 35-54 Generation X, Millennials			

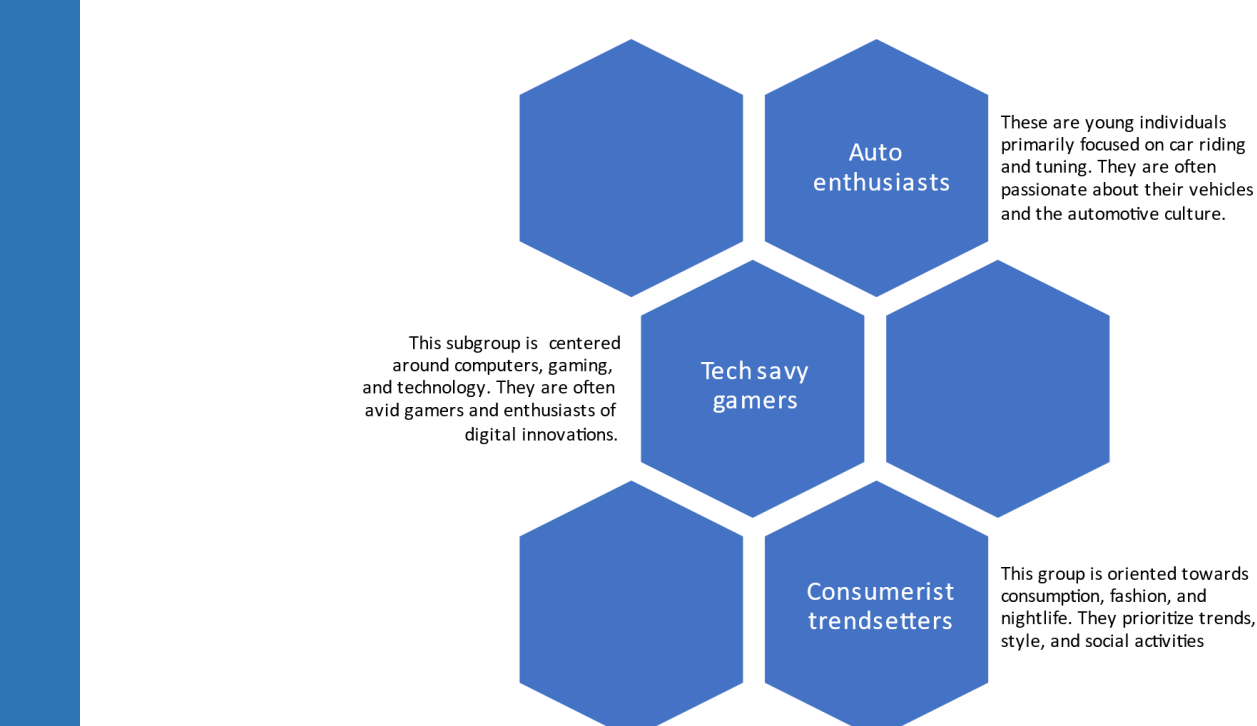
Subgroups of young people – very concerned and very responsible



Subgroups of young people – fairly concerned and fairly responsible



Subgroups of young people – neither concerned nor responsible



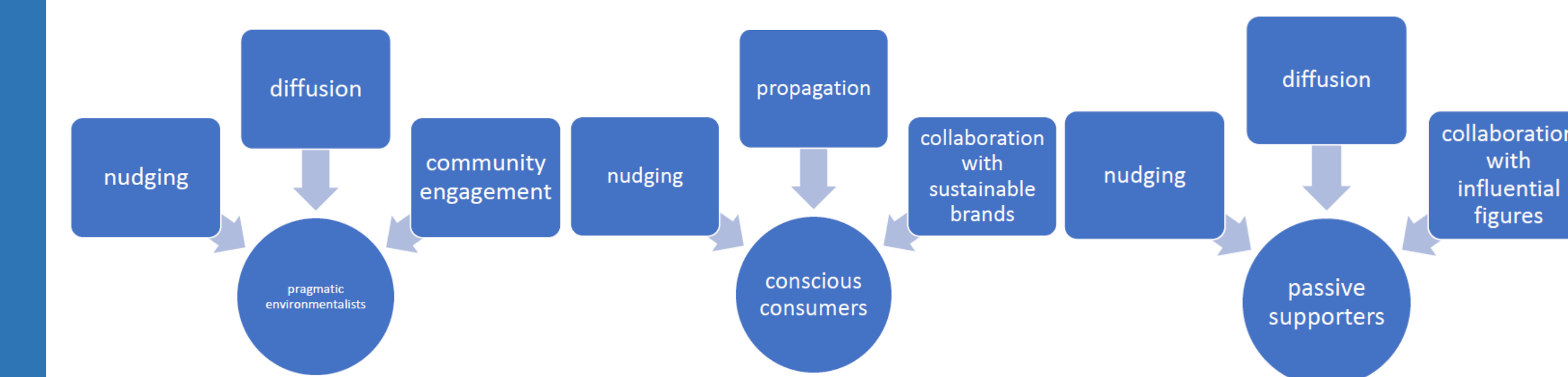
Subgroups of 15-24 yr old youth (A) and 25-34 yr old adults (B) key persons in the representational field

1 Very responsible & very concerned	2 Fairly responsible & fairly concerned	3 Neither responsible nor concerned
-ECO-ACTIVISTS	-PRAGMATIC ENVIRONMENTALISTS	-INDIFFERENT OR INFORMED
-ECO-INNOVATORS	-CONSCIOUS CONSUMERS	-SCEPTICS
A1.1 ECO-WARRIORS	A2 AMBITIOUS YOUNG PERSONS	A3.1 AUTO ENTHUSIASTS: A3.2. TECH SAVVY GAMERS: A3.3. CONSUMERIST TRENDSETTERS
A1.2. ECO-CONSCIOUS TECHIES	B1 EXPERT	B3.1. POPULIST SCEPTIC B3.2. MATERIALISTIC YUPPIE B3.3. CORPORATE INTEREST SKEPTICS
B2.1. GOOD CITIZEN B2.2. CARING MOTHER		

2. Tailoring messages

Diverse communicative strategies (Moscovici, 2008) and key messages addressed to reflexive subgroups and Personas were crafted in collaboration with LLM. Our prompts were based on the previous mapping of typical drivers and barriers to eco-friendly consumption in different subgroups and Personas (Roosalu et al., 2022).

Communicative strategy for pragmatic environmentalists, conscious consumers, passive supporters



CONCLUSIONS

1. In the framework of SRT the Persona method can be understood as personification of certain SR and as objectification of respondent variability.
 2. In the initial stages of collective cognitive coping with RP as a new social object (Wagner et al. 2002) public views are anchored in well-structured representations of climate change and eco-protection (with related attitudes towards technological innovations, economic growth, lifestyle changes, social, etc.).
 3. The process of Persona creation is similar to multilevel analysis of SR (Doise, 1992) –first we defined key organizing principles of representational field (plastic related concern and responsibility). Thereafter various subgroups in this field and the content of their SR were described. Finally various Personas representing these subgroups were constructed.
 4. Persona method enables to move from operating with nominal statistical groups to thinking of reflexive groups with intragroup communication, group identity and common representations.
 5. Persona construction is more effective in collaboration with LLM.
 6. With the help of LLM, appropriate behavioral and communication strategies were proposed for reaching different subgroups, aiming to enhance the acceptance of the new social object (recyclates). Targeted outreach activities are possible through social media.
- In conclusion - different roads to sustainability should be used. Our attempt was to find these ways with the use of Persona method in collaboration with LLM.

REFERENCES