

BEHAVIOURS OF CONSUMERS ON EU ECO-LABEL PRODUCTS: A CASE OF STUDY FOR DETERGENTS WITH EU ECO-LABEL

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Abstract: *EU Eco-label is a voluntary label, highly regarded Europe-wide, whose objective is to promote and establish a functioning environmental excellence. Considering that, the research started, first of all, from the desire to evaluate the extent to which the European Ecological Label is known among consumers in the Vlaicu neighborhood of Arad. Secondly, the research has established as a hypothesis the knowledge and frequency of use of detergents with EU Eco-label. The research's results show that the consumers from Vlaicu neighborhood of Arad are fairly interested in purchasing and consuming that products.*

Key words: *consumer behaviors; EU Eco-label products.*

INTRODUCTION

This article intends to provide an updated portrait of what are the main motivations that push consumers to use the EU Eco-label products and the benefits that consumers perceive as deriving from it.

The tendency to implement diverse environmental tools and promote the adoption of environmentally friendly practices is relatively new[1]. One such tool is the EU Eco-label used as a voluntary European initiative meant to attest to the responsible attitude towards the environment[2,3].

The objective of the EU Eco-label Regulation (EC) 66/2010 is to establish a functioning, highly regarded Europe-wide voluntary ISO Type I Ecolabel [4], based on product and service requirements (so-called "criteria") that are appropriate for such an Eco-label. Such criteria must be based on the latest scientific and technological considerations, be market-orientated, consider the most significant impacts and be simple to understand for consumers [5,6].

The intention is that the EU Eco-labelling scheme will provide consumers with accurate, non-deceptive, science-based information on the environmental impacts of products and services, and will influence their purchasing decisions [7].

Since its first release in 1992, a steadily growing number of companies have been awarded the EU Eco-label [8]. Indeed, EU Eco-labelled products numbers have increased steadily up to 72797 as late as September 2019. However, the number of companies (licenses) stand at 3.831 in September 2019, which is modest for the whole of the European Union [9]. Indeed, whilst generally increasing, the level of uptake for particular product groups is often very low and, for some others (such as a number of IT products), it is equal to zero [10].

Figures 1 show the number of EU Eco-label licenses and products/services in the period 2010–2019 (official data of the European Commission).

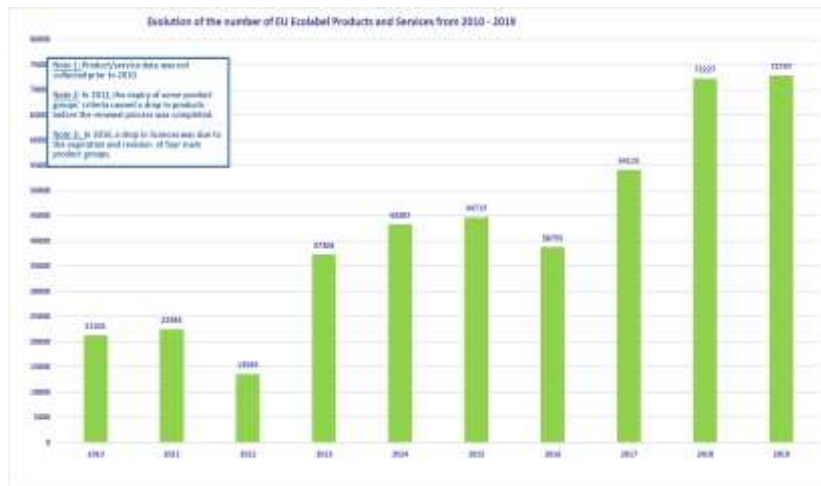


Figure 1. Evolution of the number of EU Eco-label products and services [1]

There is a large amount of literature available on Ecolabelling and product labelling that has investigated and analyzed the role of Ecolabels in companies' market and eco-innovation strategies [11]. As for the EU Ecolabel itself, however, much of the available contributions come from the 2006 EU Ecolabel Evaluation Study, the EVER study (2006 Evaluation of the EU Ecolabel) carried out on behalf of Directorate General for the Environment of the European Commission by a consortium of consultants [12].

Ecolabelling schemes, whose primary function is that of being communication tools, aim to close the information gap between operators providing environmentally friendly products/services and consumers making purchasing choices on the market. Therefore, Ecolabels have a specific role in contributing to the overall awareness of the environmental impacts of products and services [13].

A significant number of consumers seem to share this opinion: buying environmentally friendly products has a positive and significant impact on solving environmental problems [14].

The EVER study (2006) found that companies apply for the EU Eco-label to take advantage of business opportunities offered by consumers' increased awareness of environmental issues, and to satisfy customers' specific requests for products and services with high environmental quality. Indeed, in a quantitative analysis carried out by Testa et al. [15] to assess whether the EU Eco-label can stimulate eco-friendly behavior, the authors show that Eco-labels in general play a significant role of "guarantee" for consumers and, consequently, are able to guide consumers' choices toward products and services with a higher environmental quality [16]. Considering these initial considerations, it can be argued that one of the most powerful drivers for companies to choose the EU Eco-label is the need to respond to external pressures coming from the "demand side" [17], final consumers and intermediate customers, who ask for reliable and clear information on the products and services that are presented as "green" [18].

Eco-labels, in particular, aim at establishing a reliable and trust worthy information system on products' environmental qualities [19] and are used by companies as a marketing and communication tool targeting customers and consumers in order to increase market share.

Behaviors of consumers on Eco-label products

Regularly, there are two ways of exposing product information to consumers: through media advertising channel: radio, newspaper, television, etc., or through information provided by the label.

Effectiveness of Eco-label is break down through four main determinants: awareness on Eco-label, environment motivation, Eco-knowledge and Eco-availability.

The relationship between these four determinants with attention to Eco-label, and the relationship between attention to Eco-label with Purchase behavior on ecological products is successfully tested in order to affirm about the effectiveness for Eco-label.

A global increase in environmental awareness and concern about issues such as climate change, resource depletion and higher levels of pollution are having a greater influence on the purchasing decisions and product selection of consumers.

It is a clue that consumers often look for environmental information on product label. Once consumers gained sufficient knowledge about the environmental consequence, their awareness level would be increased consequently, further their purchase behavior towards green products would be potentially stimulated [20,21]. Furthermore, the type of message, which poses on label, might also effect consumers' perception on health and environmental risks of product.

Individuals or groups of individuals, in response to social and cultural pressures, select, consume, and utilize portions of the available products supply differently. And the consumers' behaviors are complex, and have different kinds of determinants [22].

These determinants are divided into two categories: sociodemographic determinants and psychosocial determinants. In specific to ecologically conscious consumer behavior (ECCB) [23], these determinants are also taken as indicators of consumers' propensity of purchasing ecological products by certain studies.

Demographic variables, which correlate with ecologically attitudes and behaviors, are classified as age, gender, education, income. For instance, the ecological consumers are young, female, and well educated. [24]

Age. There are lots of early studies on the age influence consumers' ecologically attitude and behavior by different researchers. Most of them are likely to support the statement that younger individuals are likely to be more sensitive to environmental issues. Moreover, that age proved significant and negatively correlated with environmental sensitivity/attitudes. They also offer an extra explanation about the relationship. Being ecological will properly challenge consumers' existing traditional values and habitual behaviors, accordingly, certain changes are required. Facing these challenges with required changes, youth seems to be much more acceptable for reforming their minds than elders.

Gender. Lots of previous studies conclude that there was a significant relationship between gender and ecological knowledge. Large amount of studies can indicate that male tend to have higher and better knowledge about green issues than female. However, there are certain studies showing a trend as females hold higher concern on being ecological and are willing to join ecological behavior.

Education. Level of education is another demographic variable effectively works on consumers' ecological attitude and behavior. The positive relationship has been identified by large amount of previous studies [25]. A vast majority results tell that there is a significant relationship the better educated tend to score higher on all components of the environmental domain. Therefore, consumers with high level of education are expected to have much clearer and full perspective understanding on ecological issues.

Income. Income is another social-demographic variable of affecting ecologically attitudes and behaviors. Further, they pointed a common belief: the higher income level the person has, the more he or she is likely to support ecological products purchasing [26].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper is based on a research that use the sociological questionnaire as tool. Therefore, a questionnaire was designed and applied by face to face to people and asked directly one by one in Vlaicu neighborhood Arad city, in order to collect primary data. Questions were containing multiple choice answers. In order to answer to these

research questions, we have used the data collected by the empirical survey on the EU Eco-label that ran from February to April 2019.

The questions were based upon the constructs emphasized in the conceptual model. The structure of the questionnaire was based on the category of EU Eco-label detergents sold in the area of Vlaicu neighborhood, was the following: Frosch, A-sens, Winni's, Dettol, Ecoline. The analysis was facilitated by the functions provided by SPSS software, it was created a data base which afterwards was analyzed and interpreted, following the proposed hypothesis. Next, there's going to be presented the data's analyses and interpretation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Looking in detail at the environmental effects of the use of the EU Ecolabel, almost half of interviewees indicated that the EU Ecolabel had some effect on the environmental performance of the product in the areas of air and water emissions, waste/recycling and water/material use.

In this study, totally 30 people answered the questionnaire, and 23% of the participants were male, the others 77% were female (Figure 2).

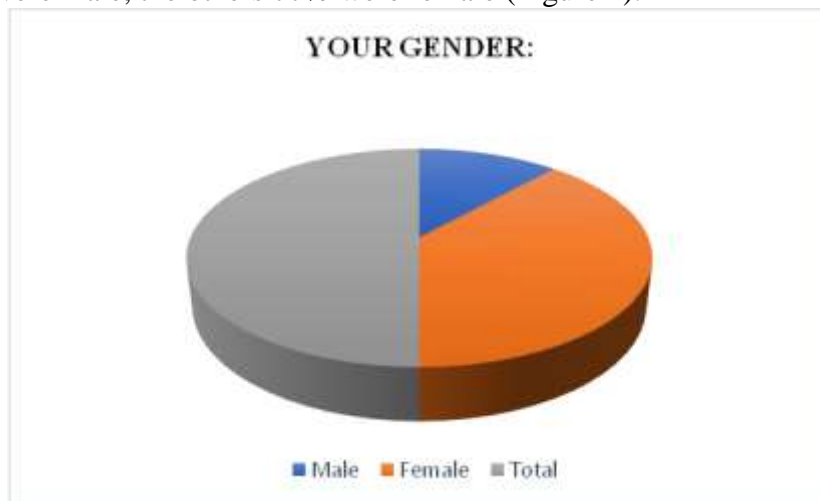


Figure 2. The gender of the people surveyed

70% of the participants were also young people (20-30 years old). It was followed by group of people 31-40 years old, as almost 27 percentage (Figure 3).

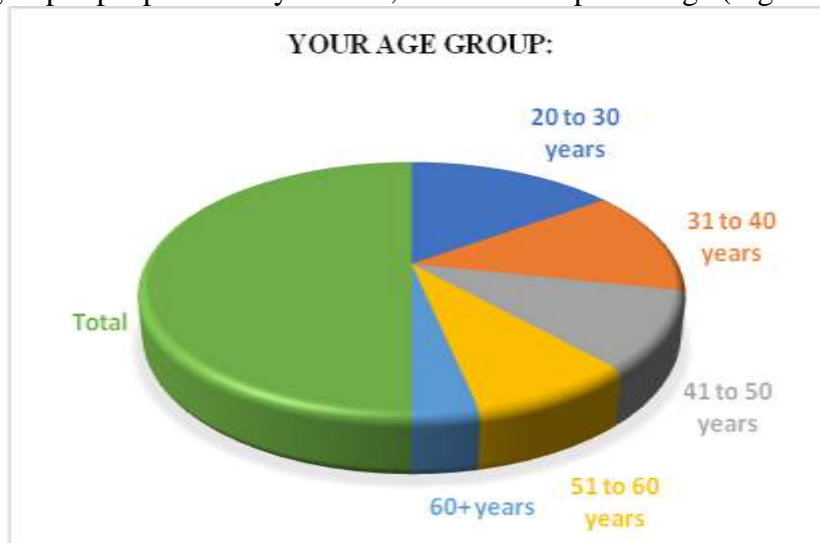


Figure 3. The age groups of the people surveyed

Also, most of people who were answered the questionnaire has bachelor degree from universities, as approximately 46%. This was followed by high school graduated people by 34% (Figure 4).

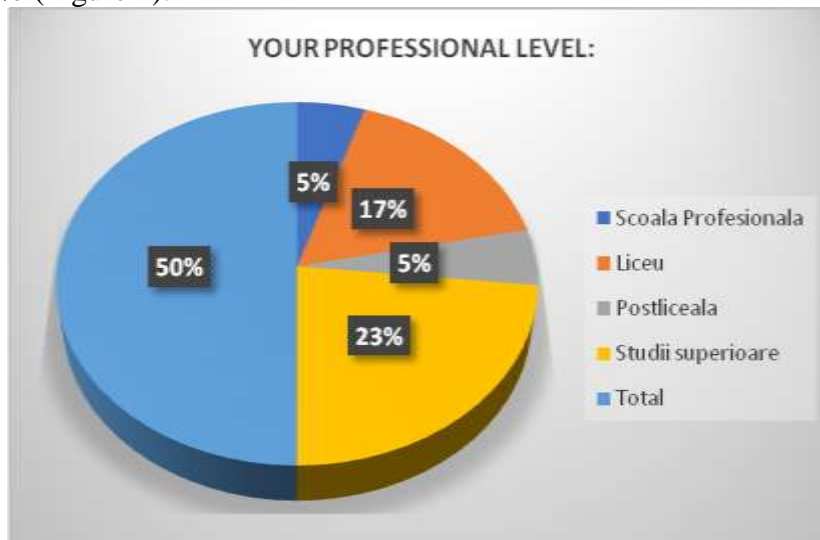


Figure 4. The professional training of the people surveyed

Moreover, generally, people participated to this study was had good living conditions (Figure 5). That is, around 37% of people were had sufficient conditions for decent living, 17% people could buy occasionally some expensive things and 30% people could buy everything they need.

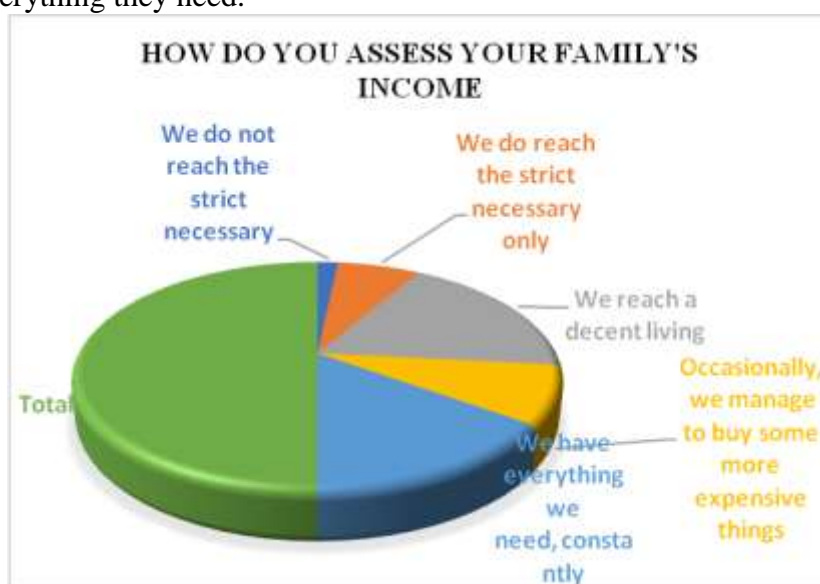


Figure 5. The living's level of the people surveyed

First question of the questionnaire was „When have you first heard about products with European Eco-label?”, and the most of people (34%) responded as „1 year ago”, the second common answer (26%) was „few months ago”. The results were shown in Figure 6. Due to young age group, the people found out about eco-label around this year.



Figure 6. The degree of knowledge of EU Eco-label

The second question of the questionnaire (Figure 7) was „How often do you purchase products with EU Eco-label?” and the most of people (34%) responded as „once at 2-3 months”.

This shows that the EU Eco-labelled products are bought fairly often.

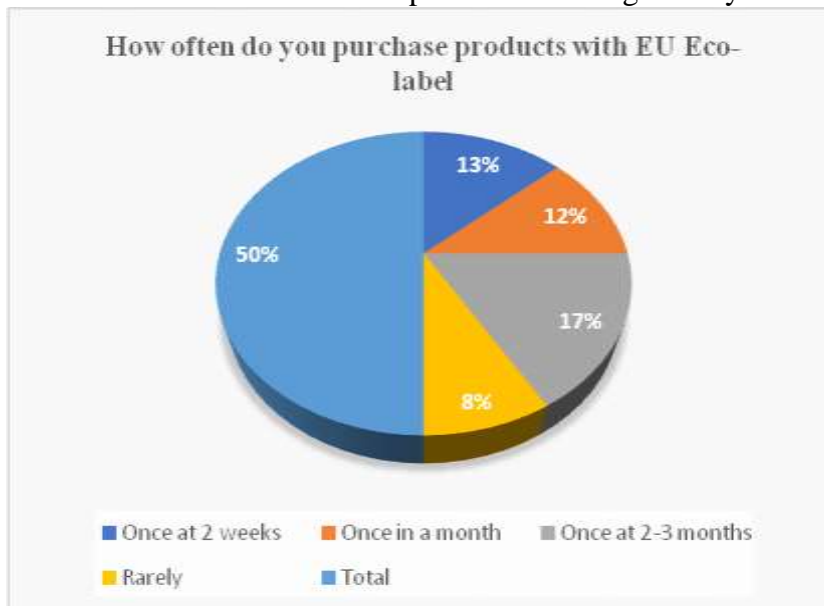


Figure 7. The degree of purchase of EU Eco-label products

Third question in the questionnaire (Figure 8) was „How often do you use products with EU Eco-label?” and people have responded „daily” approximately 47% as the most common respond. Also „once per week” and „rarely” responds had the same percentage as 23%.

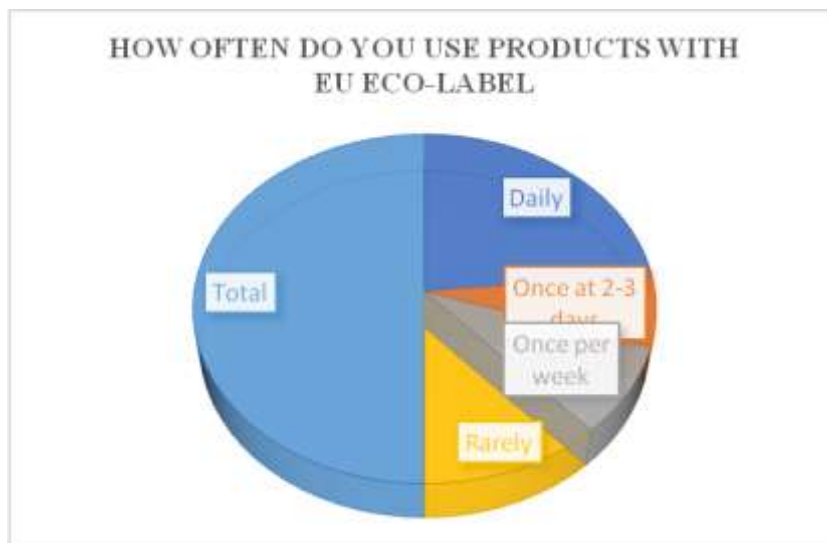


Figure 8. The degree of use of EU Eco-label products

For the fourth question, people responds were shown in Figure 9. The fourth question of the questionnaire was „Which are the main benefits of use products with EUEco-label?”

Half of the people (50%) think that eco-labelled products have effective impact in “reducing the water pollution”. Also, 20% of people thought that eco-labelled products “do not contain dangerous substances for the aquatic environment” or “it is not harmful for the environment”, also 10% of people surveyed think that „reduces the amount of waste”.

As a result, people thought that eco-labelled things were better way to protect environment and give less harm to it.

The result of this study was compatible with Brécard et al. (2012) and Çağlar et al. (2017). According to Brécard et al. (2012) and Çağlar et al. (2017), a significant number of consumers seem to share this opinion: 21% of Europeans estimate that buying environmentally friendly products has a positive and significant impact on solving environmental problems.

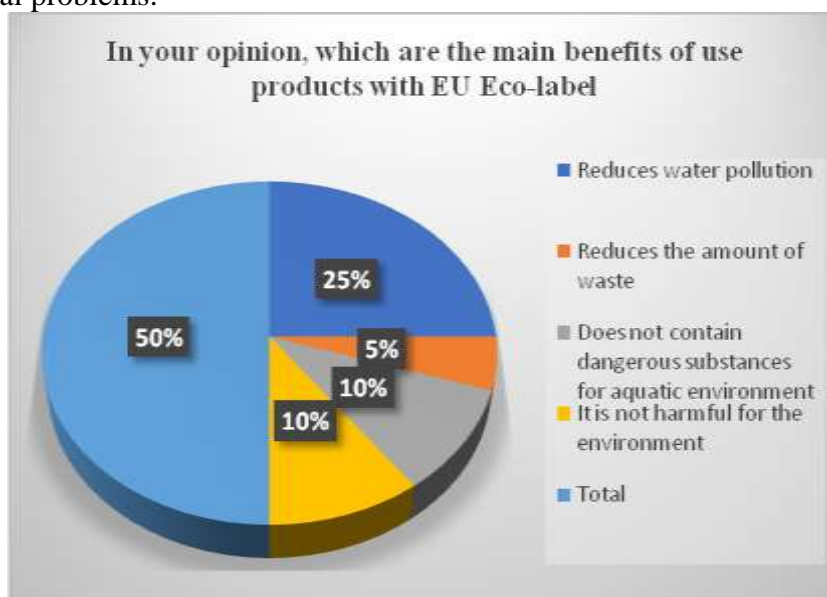


Figure 9. The benefits' perception of use of EU Eco-label products

It was interesting that for question 5, the most of people, 46%, have given the same answer. The answer given for question 5 by people was shown in Figure 10.

In fifth question (Figure 10), which was „How satisfied are you with the European Eco-labelled products?“, people have answered generally (46%) “very satisfied”. In addition, 34% of the people said they are “satisfied” with the EU Eco-labelled service and products. About 20% responded “rather satisfied” when being asked the question 5.

As it seen, people are generally satisfied with the eco-labelled products/services, so the future of this types of products shows high potential.

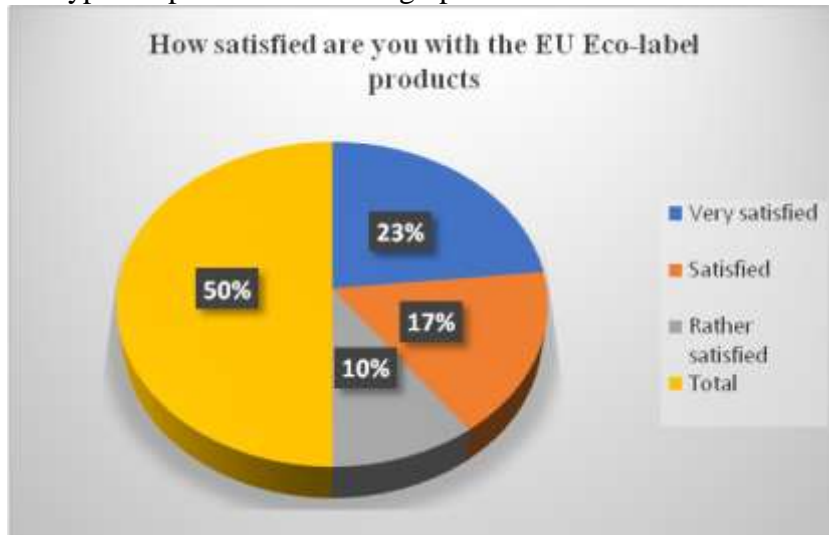


Figure 10. The degree of gratitude towards EU Eco-label products

As a result, for Romanian people from the city of Arad, eco-labelling was seen as an important issue.

CONCLUSIONS

A key finding from this survey is that the people from the city of Arad, Romania, have said that advantages of eco-labelled products are the safety of using a product or service with low environmental impact. With this answer, most of the Romanian people from the city of Arad were thinking correctly since eco-label’s task is this.

The main objective of Eco-label is to raise the awareness of consumer about positive environment effects of products and to guide them in environmental purchasing. Understanding the effectiveness of Eco-label can help companies, government, and organizations to understand how Eco-label executes its function in actual circumstance. Although a bulk of researches have done in respect of consumers’ attitudes towards ecological products, limited amount of the research investigated about the effectiveness of Eco-label.

Through this research, firstly, could be seen there is a direct correlation between the respondents’ professional level, their families’ incomes and the degree of use of the EU Eco-labelled products, as over 40% of people surveyed have a bachelor degree from universities, have sufficient conditions for decent living, and they generally use the products EU Eco-labelled daily.

Secondly, there’s another direct correlation between the degree of knowledge of EU Eco-label and the respondents’ professional level, as around 33% of respondents have heard about the EU Eco-label 1 year ago and they are at least high school graduated people.

Considering the hypothesis set up-front, the study’s results show that the EU Eco-label is relatively new among the population from Arad, but not forgetting that the most of the participants were also young people (20-30 years old).

Not least, the people surveyed said they use detergents with EU Eco-label daily or weekly, which reveals that these products are fairly used, people considering that eco-labelled products were a better way to protect the environment and give less harm to it.

Thereby, the ecological consumers are generally young and well educated.

Looking in detail for demographic groups, income and age have been tested in this research. Nevertheless, there is a demand for other researches to cover these two factors as the influence factors.

As issues such as overconsumption and the need to live in a more sustainable and environmentally friendly manner become ever more prevalent, it creates a unique trend influencing consumers' demands towards more environmentally friendly goods. Businesses should strive to adhere to this trend and should aim to satisfy consumers' demands for more environmentally friendly goods.

The major findings of the study show that consumers are becoming more environmentally responsible, and eco-labels have played a role in facilitating green purchasing.

However, in this research, many people have refused being surveyed because they have not even heard about eco-label products. A large part of consumers is unaware of eco-labels, because they are not informed about ecolabels or their use. Companies should therefore aim to increase the awareness of eco-labels and educate consumers about the potential use and benefits that eco-labels could provide to consumers.

The sample of the study was limited to one neighborhood in the city of Arad, Romania, being quite small compared with the whole population. This is a limitation as the sample results cannot be generalized and is only relevant to the study respondents' area. It is therefore proposed that a similar study be undertaken with a larger sample. Despite these limitations, a valuable contribution was made by the study to the field of eco-labels as the study gave better insight into consumers' perceptions of eco-labels from Arad. In order to increase the replication of the study, we encourage further researchers doing the same study under broader circumstances.

At last, English language is not the mother tongue of authors; therefore, it might cause unavoidable language mistakes in the study.

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