

## **Factors influencing the buyer behavior in tourism: The case of sustainable green products**

### **Fatores que influenciam o comportamento do consumidor no turismo: O caso dos produtos verdes sustentáveis**

**VITOR FIGUEIREDO<sup>1</sup>, RICARDO COSTA GUERRA<sup>2</sup>, EDUARDO GONÇALVES<sup>3</sup> & JOSÉ  
ALEXANDRE MARTINS<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Universidade da Beira Interior; <sup>2</sup>Escola Superior de Turismo e Hotelaria do Instituto Politécnico da Guarda;

<sup>3</sup>Universidade da Maia

Contacting author: vitor.figueiredo@ubi.pt

**Abstract** | Sustainability is a factor that cannot be ignored today, neither in investment decisions nor in political decisions on the planning and management of tourism destinations. The creation of green products is therefore a fundamental requirement to attract tourists without jeopardizing the sustainability of the ecosystems in which tourism takes place. This study seeks to understand what factors influence the buyer behavior of tourists when consuming green products. A mixed research approach was used in which tourists and visitors who have visited and/or consumed products classified as natural or green were interviewed by means of a questionnaire. According to the results, consumers consider it important to protect the environment and avoid environmental damage, where Governments play an important role in drafting legislation to protect the environment. Respondents have the awareness that the environment is deteriorating where environmental awareness is a reason for satisfaction and influences consumer behavior when purchasing tourism products. This suggests the need for significant investment in a wider range of ecological/green tourism products by the various tourism providers to attract and retain satisfied customers. The aim of this study is to develop a specific exploratory combinations factor for the buyer behavior of environmentally friendly products in the tourism sector, which will help stakeholders to make decisions and evaluate environmentally friendly measures and businesses contributing to the satisfaction of users who are sensitive to the issues of sustainability and environmental preservation.

**Keywords** | sustainability, tourism, consumer experience, buyer behavior, green products

### **1. Introduction**

The consumption of green products consists of forms of leisure based on experiences related to natural attractions. In this study, we start from the premise that the image of nature is the

result of a socio-cultural construction and therefore plays an important role in the choice of nature tourism destinations (Priskin, 2001). We propose an approach that is concerned with the study of resource use and its impact on the environment, valuing personalized services and contact with the host community and cultural and natural resources (Brito, 2000). Based on these principles, research focuses on the relationship between consumer behavior, the tourism experience satisfaction and sustainable green products (Lee; Honda; Ren Lo, 2016; Fayos-Solà, 2015). In addition, the dimensions of this experience have been shown to be crucial when measuring the variables that influence tourist buying behavior (Gowda & Anand, 2020), especially concern for the environment, consumer attitudes towards sustainability issues, beliefs, perceptions and knowledge, and consumer involvement in environmental and sustainability issues. On the other hand, external factors such as social and cultural issues, organizations' image of social and environmental responsibility, knowledge of environmental policies, and marketers' focus on green and eco-friendly advertising have been incorporated into environmentally conscious positioning.

In a more refined analysis, we can also speak of the experience economy, a concept that places the tourist experience at the center of the product strategy and service offering, resulting from the experience of "memorable and unique events" (Pine, & Gilmore, 1999 and 2014). Tourism is no stranger to this trend, and these "memorable experiences" are considered a critical component of tourism and its management (Quan & Wang, 2004; Tung & Ritchie, 2011).

Thus, the general objective of this study is to characterize the tourist experience based on green ecotourism products and, in particular, to understand the dimensions of this experience, especially the factors that influence tourist buying behavior (Karimi & Pirasteh, 2015). This involves investigating the quality of the service, the authenticity of the experience and the degree of interaction between the local culture and the environment (Gonçalves, Guerra & Figueiredo, 2023). These are the dimensions that play a key role in shaping tourist satisfaction. Although there is no specific scale for green products in the tourism sector in Portugal, we considered a number of approaches for our study, namely: tourist satisfaction with green products, sustainability indicators, destination evaluation, existing documentation that could suggest specific scales, or suggestions for assessing tourist satisfaction with sustainable green products. In fact, the 2021 Sustainability Report already provides information on the initiatives that Turismo de Portugal itself has pursued during the pandemic years, bringing new priorities in the area of sustainability, while being in line with the commitment made in the 2027 Tourism Strategy. However, he stressed the need to also link these initiatives to a post-pandemic tourism recovery plan, an objective set out in the "Reactivate Tourism - Build the Future" plan and included in the "20-23 - More Sustainable Tourism" program, which embodies a "consistent, sustainable and responsible" approach to tourism development (TdP, 2021).

Ecotourism is an excellent example of green tourism, promoting the participation and involvement of communities in its activities and stimulating public-private partnerships that add value and share sustainability principles. We therefore propose defining a buyer behavior factors for green tourism products that can be used by decision-makers and players in the sector when defining their market policies.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. The motivation process in tourism satisfaction**

Green and nature tourism allows people to experience natural heritage, landscapes and, at the same time, traditions and natural values and an attachment to place (Hwang, Lee, & Chen, 2005). Moreover, literary semantics combines various definitions for nature tourism, mainly due to the characteristics that enable a range of advantages, both in terms of the economy and the environment.

In the 1980s, Holbrook and Hirschman considered the relevance of moving from an approach centered on the individual and their rational decision to one that focused on the experience provided by the consumption of a given product (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). First of all, there is the issue of the image of the tourist destination, which is a recurring theme in tourism studies (Gallarza, Saura & Garcia, 2002; Stepchenkova, 2010). In addition, there are other exploratory topics within the social sciences, such as environmental psychology (i.e. Fridgen, 1987), marketing (i.e. Assael, 1984) and consumer behavior (i.e. Boulding, 1956; Herzog, 1963). However, the conceptualization of the image of a tourist destination is not univocal. It is multidimensional in nature and has been studied in different ways, focusing on the correlation between tourist demand and the image perceived by visitors and the image projected by those in charge of the destination (Stepchenkova, 2010). Among the approaches to the area of tourist destination image, there are studies that take a general approach (i.e. Chon, 1990; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Gallarza, Saura, & Garcia, 2002; Pike, 2002; or Tasci, Gartner & Cavusgil, 2007). Other authors present approaches that focus on the question of the dimensions of the destination image (i.e. Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Gallarza et al., 2002; Tasci et al., 2007); still others emphasize the measurement of the destination image (Chon, 1990; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Gallarza et al., 2002; Pike, 2002; Tasci et al., 2007); others also address the influence of host communities on the destination image (Gallarza, Saura & Garcia, 2002). Pike, 2002; Tasci et al., 2007); others also address the influence of host communities on destination image (Gallarza, Saura & Garcia, 2002); or the link between destination image and tourist satisfaction (Chon, 1990). Motivations as influencers of tourist consumption behavior have also been the subject of studies (Devesa, Laguna, & Palacios, 2010; Farmaki, 2012). In this sense, motivation is directly correlated with travel options and the tourist activities that make up the destination (Moutinho, 1987; Heitmann, 2011).

Also considering the process of globalization, places have been emphasized in their identities and characteristics as an emotional attraction in terms of place attachment (Lewicka, 2011). This positioning helps to stimulate tourists' propensity for unique places where the tourist experience is lived (Silva, 2015). Today's tourist is a more experienced traveler, assuming a change in values and lifestyles; he is a more attentive and demanding consumer in search of authentic, unique and memorable experiences (Pezzi & Vianna, 2015), with a predisposition to create a positive impact on the destination (Mckerher, 2002; Newsome, Moore, & Dowling, 2013). The positive image of the destination will become intertwined with the tourist's emotional environment (Prayag & Ryan, 2011). In fact, the literature indicates that the perception of the quality of the destination correlates with the place itself, and a positive evaluation of the place strengthens the ties between the two (Williams & Vaske, 2003; Hwang, Lee & Chen, 2005; Lewicka, 2011; Ramkissoon, Smith & Weiler, 2013).

But it's not only in the tourism sector that care for the conscious consumer who is concerned about sustainable and ecological choices is manifested. Today's consumer, as a result of the immense amount of information, access to new technologies and competitors available at the time of the purchase decision, makes it essential for companies and entities, in any sector of activity, to try to respond to these new characteristics that are transversal to all consumers (Gowda & Anand, 2020).

## **2.2. Factors influencing the consumer behavior for green tourism**

This work is based on and adapts the external factors and internal factors proposed by Gowda & Anand (2020), seeking to validate a combination of factors at national level to understand which of these factors affect purchasing decisions, that is, which behavioral factors influence the choice of green tourism products.

According to the authors Gowda and Anand (2020) the purchasing behavior of green products/services can be explained by a set of variables that are grouped into two aspects: internal and external.

Internally, purchasing behavior for green products is influenced by concern for the environment, consumer attitudes towards sustainability issues, beliefs, perceptions, knowledge and consumer involvement in environmental and sustainability issues. On the other hand, external factors such as social and cultural issues, the image of social and environmental responsibility of organizations, knowledge of environmental policies, as well as the focus of marketing professionals on green and green advertising (Gowda & Anand, 2020).

The rise of environmental awareness has significantly influenced consumer behavior, especially in the tourism industry. Green tourism, which emphasizes sustainable practices and eco-friendly services, has gained momentum as travelers become more conscientious about their environmental impact. Understanding consumer behavior in this context is crucial for businesses

aiming to cater to this growing market segment. This essay explores the factors driving consumer behavior in green tourism products, supported by current research and real-world examples.

Consumers are increasingly motivated by a sense of responsibility towards the environment. According to a study by Han, Hsu, and Sheu (2010), ecological concerns and a desire to contribute to environmental preservation are primary motivators for choosing green tourism products. This sentiment is echoed in the findings of Kiatkawsin and Han (2017), who identified that environmental attitudes significantly influence tourists' intentions to engage in eco-friendly travel.

Additionally, personal health and well-being are becoming important factors. Eco-friendly accommodations and activities often promise a cleaner, more natural experience, which appeals to consumers seeking health benefits from their vacations (Lee, Hsu, Han, & Kim, 2010).

Demographic factors such as age, education, and income level also play a critical role in shaping consumer behavior towards green tourism. Research indicates that younger generations, particularly Millennials and Generation Z, are more inclined towards sustainable travel practices (Juvan & Dolnicar, 2014). These groups not only have a heightened awareness of environmental issues but are also more likely to support businesses that reflect their values.

Higher education levels correlate with greater environmental awareness and a propensity to choose sustainable options (Budeanu, 2007). Furthermore, higher income levels enable consumers to afford potentially more expensive eco-friendly alternatives, making income a significant determinant of green tourism behavior.

Despite the growing interest in green tourism, several barriers hinder its widespread adoption. Cost is a significant factor; eco-friendly options often come at a premium, which can deter budget-conscious travelers (Han, Hsu, & Sheu, 2010). Additionally, a lack of awareness or understanding of what constitutes a green tourism product can prevent consumers from making eco-friendly choices (Choi & Parsa, 2007).

Perceived inconvenience also plays a role. Green tourism might require additional effort in terms of research and planning, which can be a deterrent for some travelers who prioritize convenience (Juvan & Dolnicar, 2014).

### **3. Methodology**

Based on a review of the literature on green and nature tourism, but also on the image of tourist destinations and the determinants of tourist demand, namely the internal and external factors that condition purchasing and consumption behavior, we seek to clarify their characteristics. What's more, this work aims to provide insights into the possible factors that influence the purchasing behavior of users and potential users of green tourism products, both

ecological products and local products that respect sustainable principles and contributes to satisfying experiences. This study is exploratory and descriptive in nature, based on a theoretical and conceptual component, whose approach is essentially a mixed research approach (Marconi & Lakatos, 2010). In this sense, the questionnaire aimed at actual or potential visitors and/or consumers of products classified as natural or green consisted not only of questions to characterize the respondent, but also questions to assess their knowledge of the external and internal factors that influence their buying and consuming behavior towards green and ecological products. In this way, based on the aforementioned literature review, it was possible to establish combination of factors or set of statements that provide a definition of the factors that influence consumer purchasing behavior and, consequently, satisfaction in sustainable contexts. This questionnaire survey was administered on social networks and online consumer groups during the month of April 2024, using a form designed and made available via Lime Survey. This resulted in a non-random convenience sample of 135 individuals whose questionnaire was validated. The data was processed in SPSS, with descriptive and factorial analyses. This component of the study also used content analysis.

#### 4. Results

The 135 responses collected and validated correspond to 51.1% females and 49.9% males (with 2 non-responses). In terms of level of education, whose data is reflected in Table 1, it should be noted that 56.3% have higher education.

**Table 1** | Level of education of the respondents

Years of Education	Freq.	%	Cumulativ %
<=9	3	2,3	2,3
>9 and <=12	55	41,4	43,7
>12	75	56,3	100,0
Total	135	100,0	

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on the data collected through the questionnaire applied

In terms of the location of the respondents' place of residence, as shown in Table 2, the districts of Viseu (24.8%), Porto (22.6%) and Guarda (18.0%) stand out.

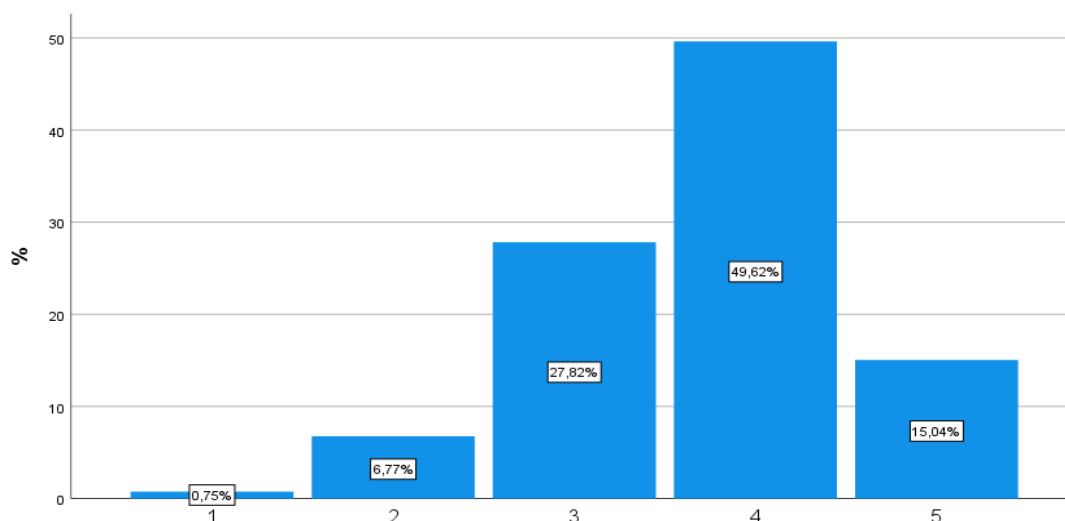
**Table 2** | Distribution of respondents by district of origin

District	Freq.	%
Aveiro	10	7,5
Braga	3	2,3
Castelo Branco	5	3,8

Coimbra	9	6,8
Guarda	24	18,0
Leiria	5	3,8
Lisboa	5	3,8
Madeira	1	0,8
Porto	30	22,6
Santarém	4	3,0
Setúbal	1	0,8
Viana do castelo	1	0,8
Vila Real	2	1,5
Viseu	33	24,8
Total	135	100,0

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on the data collected through the questionnaire applied

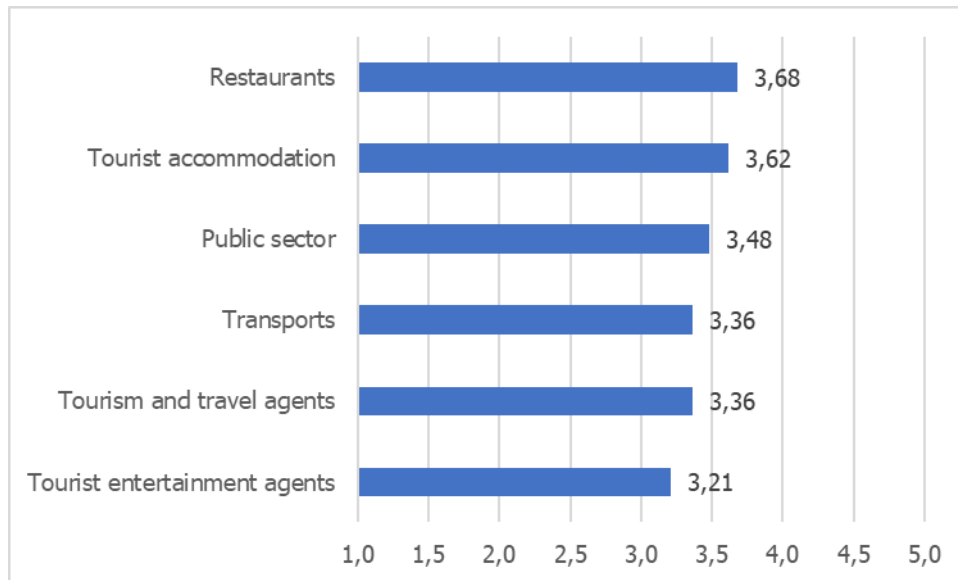
The level of importance attribute to ecological/greens issues when there is a decision to travel is high, presenting a 3,71 mean with a 0,8 standard deviation. The mean is higher than 3, reasonable importance, and the median and mode are 4 (high importance) corresponding to 49,62% of the answers (Figure 1). It is also worth highlighting that 64,66% of the respondents indicated high importance (4) or very high importance (5).



**Figure 1 |** Level of importance attribute to ecological/greens issues when there is a decision to travel

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on the data collected through the questionnaire applied

Usually when traveling, the expectation about awareness of environmental and responsible issues on the part of tourism agents is generally consider not low (mean >3), and the bigger mean value it's for Restaurants (mean 3,68) and the smaller one is for Tourist entertainment agents (3,21) as seen in figure 2.

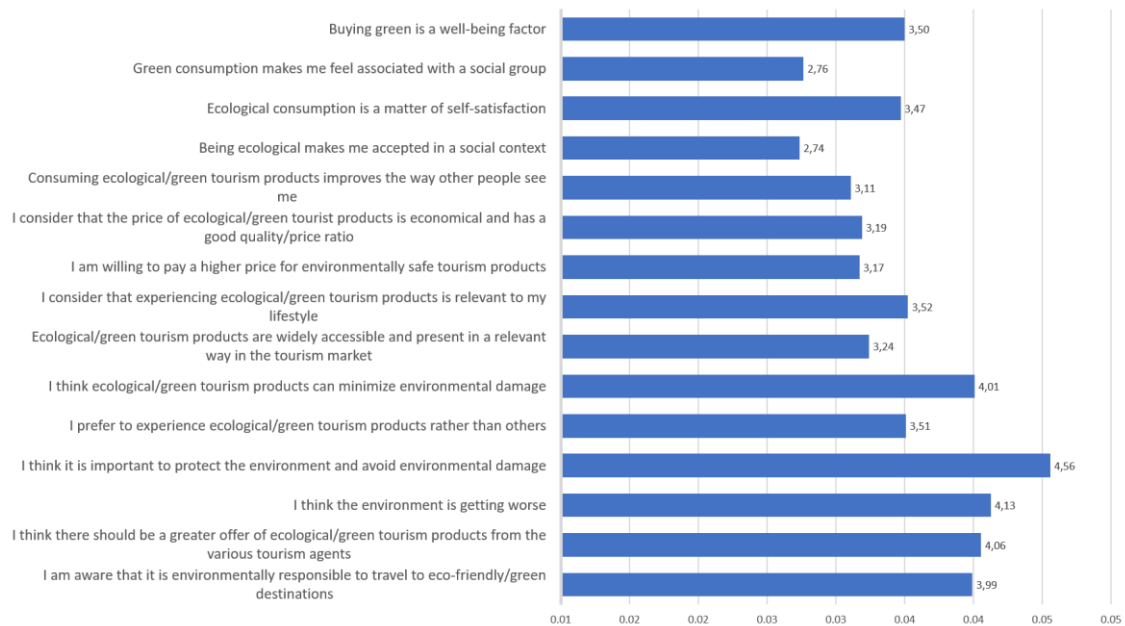


**Figure 2 |** Mean of the expectation about awareness of environmental and responsible

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on the data collected through the questionnaire applied

Considering 29 statements (items) relating to issues that could influence the buyer behavior of ecological/green products for which the level of agreement was requested in the survey used (scale from 1 - Completely disagree to 5 - Completely agree) the results (Figure 3 and Figure 4) shows that the global level of agreement is corresponding to a 3,57 mean value. Furthermore, it is possible to highlight the statements with higher means (above to 4) and the one's with lower means (under 3). So, the statements with higher levels of agreement of the respondents are:

- (i) I think it is important to protect the environment and avoid environmental damage (4,56);
- (ii) The role of governments is important in drafting legislation to protect the environment (4,15);
- (iii) I think the environment is getting worse (4,13);
- (iv) I think there should be a greater offer of ecological/green tourism products from the various tourism agents (4,06);
- (v) I think ecological/green tourism products can minimize environmental damage (4,01);

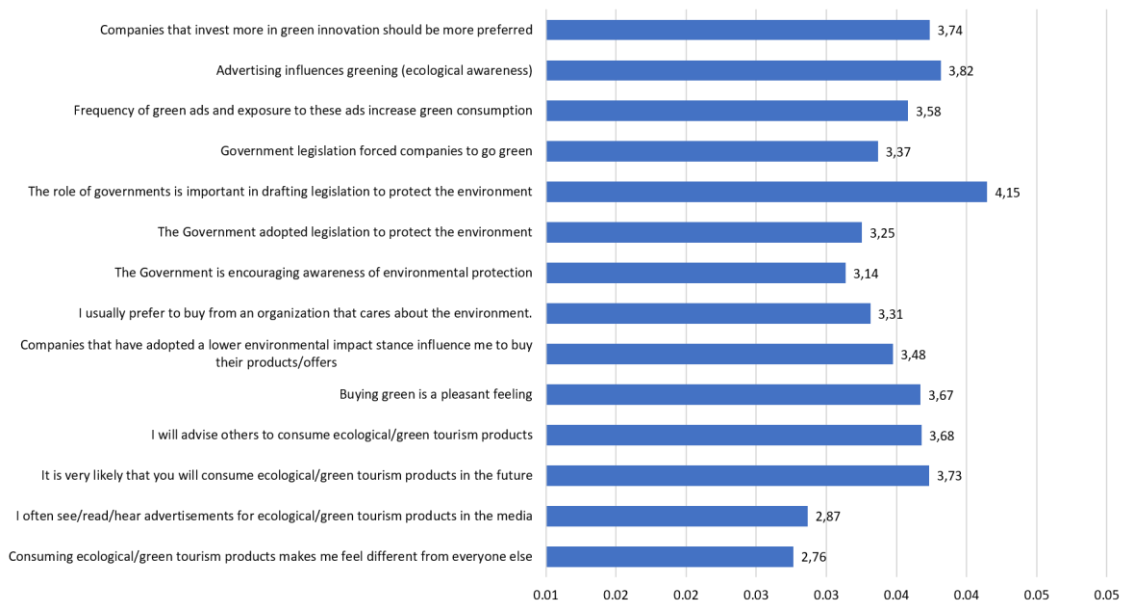


**Figure 3 |** Mean of the level of agreement about some issues that could influence the buyer behavior of ecological/green products

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on the data collected through the questionnaire applied

And the statements with lower levels of agreement of the respondents are:

- (i) Being ecological makes me accepted in a social context (2,74);
- (ii) Green consumption makes me feel associated with a social group (2,76);
- (iii) Consuming ecological/green tourism products makes me feel different from everyone else (2,76);
- (iv) I often see/read/hear advertisements for ecological/green tourism products in the media (2,87);

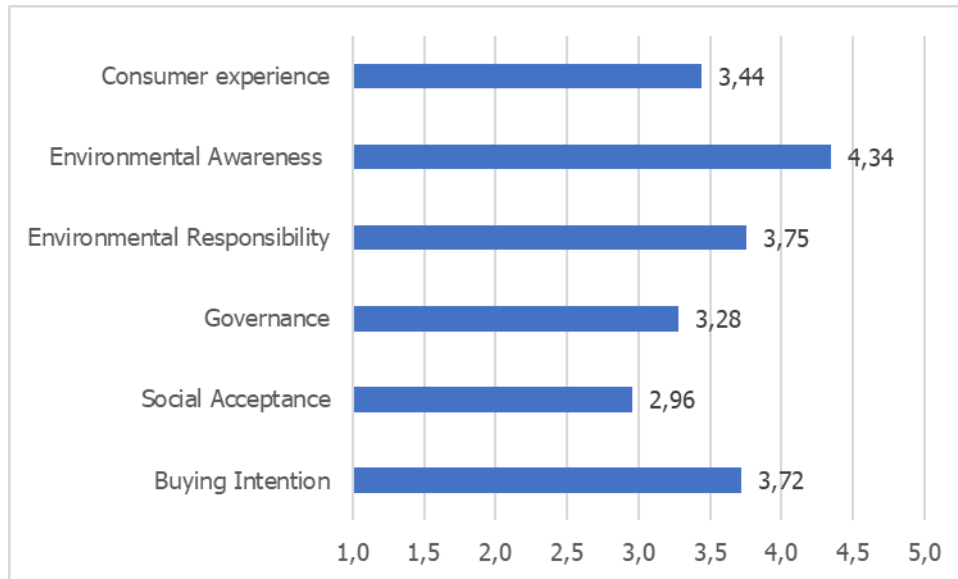


**Figure 4 |** Mean of the level of agreement about some issues that could influence the buyer behavior of ecological/green products

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on the data collected through the questionnaire applied

An exploratory principal component factor analysis was performed with the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) of 0.837, which corresponds to a good factor analysis, and the Bartlett's test of sphericity indicated that the correlation matrix is not the identity matrix ( $\text{sig } 0.001 < 0.05$ ), showing that there is a correlation between the variables (items). From the analysis of communalities, it is clear that the proportion of variance of each variable explained by the main components retained exists, showing the existence of a relationship between the variables and the retained factors, presenting values between 0.525 and 0.860. From this factor analysis we retained 6 factors that we named as Buying Intention, Social Acceptance, Governance, Environmental Responsibility, Environmental Awareness and Consumer experience.

In terms of influence on the purchasing behavior of ecological/green products (Figure 5), Social Acceptance stands out as the factor that have the least influence (2.96). All other factors have average values greater than 3, with the values closest to 4 corresponding to the factors Buying Intention (3.72) and Environmental Responsibility (3.75) and the highest average value, superior to 4 is the Environmental Awareness factor (4.34).



**Figure 5 |** Influence on the purchasing behavior of ecological/green products for each factor

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on the data collected through the questionnaire applied

## 5. Conclusion

Sustainability is a factor that cannot be left out of investment decisions today, nor can it be left out of political decisions in the planning and management of tourist destinations. The creation of green products is therefore a fundamental condition for attracting tourists, without jeopardizing the sustainability of the ecosystems where tourism takes place. However, it is first necessary to understand which factors tourists value in relation to sustainability, and then to understand how we can create products that tend towards these factors in order to improve the consumer experience and satisfaction.

This study seeks to find a specific consumer behavior factors for green products in the tourism sector, thus helping stakeholders both in decision-making and in evaluating green policies and businesses in the tourism sector. The limitations of this study include the fact that it was only applied to the Portuguese market, and due to the characteristics of the sample (convenience) and its size, it is not possible to generalize the results to wider populations. The use of online collection tools can also hinder the validity of the data collected. More studies are therefore needed with new sample types, collected in contexts other than the one used here, in order to replicate and validate the model proposed here.

However, according to the results, consumers consider it important to protect the environment and avoid environmental damage, suggesting that decision-makers need to take greater account of environmental and sustainability issues when strategically defining and planning investments in tourism products.

Governments play an important role in drafting legislation to protect the environment and put sustainability on the political agenda.

The awareness of respondents that the environment is deteriorating is consistent with the results already found in other studies where environmental awareness is a reason for satisfaction and influences consumer behavior when purchasing tourism products.

This suggests the need for significant investment in a wider range of ecological/green tourism products by the various tourism providers in order to attract and retain satisfied customers.

Another important conclusion from this study is that consumers are now aware that tourism can be an industry that has a responsibility to develop eco/green tourism products in response to market demand and changing consumer behavior, who are looking for tourism products that can minimize environmental damage.

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