

## ATTITUDE OF CUSTOMER TOWARDS GREEN PURCHASING, ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS AND GREEN PRODUCTS

INGRID SOUČKOVÁ

Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava, Slovakia  
e-mail: [ingrid.souckova@stuba.sk](mailto:ingrid.souckova@stuba.sk)

Public environmental awareness is one of the most important indicators for showing civilizational values. It reflects many aspects of environmental status, such as people's knowledge, personal consideration and behavior and the human attitude towards sustainable society as a whole. All of the information is useful for environmentalists, businessmen, decision makers or educators in planning social sustainable development. Protecting our environment is the most important part of implementing this strategy. From this point of view, government, private enterprises, and individuals each plays a special role for developing a sustainable society. All parts should join together and cooperate with each other to make environmental quality improvements. Based upon a survey on environ products and environmental awareness, this paper provides the results of the questionnaire survey on the public's perception of the local environmental quality and performance and of their willingness to pay for improving environmental quality and making green purchases. The results indicate that people are not satisfied with the environmental quality. The amount of household electrical, electronic and other equipment has increased dramatically and most of them are phased out within their product lifetimes. We would like identify willingness of people share environmental responsibility. Willing to pay for environmental improvement and to purchase environmentally friendly products. How many of all the respondents would chose reuse and recycle waste.

**Key words:** environment, environmental awareness, "green" thinking, eco-labeling, public perception.

**Stav korisnika prema ekološkoj kupovini, ekološka svijest i ekološki proizvodi** Javna svijest o zaštiti okoliša je jedan od najvažnijih pokazatelja civilizacijskih vrijednosti. Odražava mnoge aspekte stanja okoliša, kao što su ekološki status, znanje ljudi, individualna poimanja i ponašanja, te ljudskog odnosa prema održivom društvu u cjelini. Sve informacije su korisne ekolozima, poslovnim ljudima, donosiocima odluka ili edukatorima u planiranju društveno održivog razvoja. Očuvanje okoliša je najvažniji dio provedbe ove strategije. S ove točke gledišta, vlade, privatne tvrtke i pojedinci imaju posebnu ulogu za razvoj održivog društva. Svi se moraju udružiti i surađivati međusobno kako bi se postizali pomaci u kvaliteti okoliša. Na temelju provedene ankete o ekološkim proizvodima i ekološkoj svijesti, ovaj rad daje rezultate upitnika o percepciji javnosti prema lokalnoj ka kvoći okoliša mjerama i njihovoj spremnosti plaćanja za poboljšanje kakvoće okoliša i ekološku kupovinu. Rezultati pokazuju da ljudi nisu zadovoljni kvalitetom okoliša. Količina električne, elektroničke i druge opreme se u domaćinstvima dramatično povećala a većina biva odbačena unutar životnog vijeka proizvoda. Željeli bismo utvrditi spremnost ljudi za preuzimanje odgovornosti prema okolišu. Spremnost plaćanja za poboljšanje okoliša i kupnju ekološki prihvatljivih proizvoda. Koji broj od svih ispitanika bi odabrao ponovnu uporabu i recikliranje otpada.

**Ključne riječi:** okoliš, ekološka svijest, "zeleno" razmišljanje, eko – označavanje, percepcija javnosti.

### INTRODUCTION

The environmental awareness and environmental protection in developed countries of the world are developing rapidly. They belong to decisive conditions of sustainable development of life and society. In this respect, it is vital to involve

public participation, the voluntary approach, increasingly intensive application of the principles of "green" thinking, and the precautionary principle. In terms of production and sales of products, majority of consumers are not capable of complex

assessment of what is beneficial or harmful to the environment as well as to their own health. Appropriate labeling of products should help them choose healthy products. They are used to a system of environmental assessment and labeling of products, which confirm that a product meets parameters that minimize or eliminate adverse effects on the environment. The aim is to assess products in the stage of raw material, through manufacturing, and product use to disposal, or, preferably, recycling. The application of these systems and demands is not only a goal of national environmental authorities, but in recent years, also a substantial interest of

manufacturing companies or consumers. Re-education of consumers in this direction, however, is inefficient mainly due to the fact that in Slovakia, very few types of products are labeled as eco-products.

Eco label is a tag that following a review of the procedure laid down in this Act certifies that the product meets the high standard requirements of environmental protection compared to other products in the same product group. Until now, national eco-labels have been granted to more than two hundred products, and European Eco-label products have been granted to eight products, including two services [1].

## ANALYSIS AND METHODS

This article contains the results of a questionnaire survey conducted in Slovakia. Respondents were contacted electronically via the Google interview, as well as personal distribution of the questionnaire in "paper" version. 100 questionnaires out of the 120 distributed questionnaires were returned. It should be noted that some respondents did not answer some of the questions. We cannot realistically assess whether it was because they "forgot", did not want to answer, or any other reason. The survey was conducted to determine the perception of environmental product labeling and environmental awareness of environmental care in Slovakia [2, 4]. Furthermore, we were interested in whether the customer, when buying products, is interested in those taking into

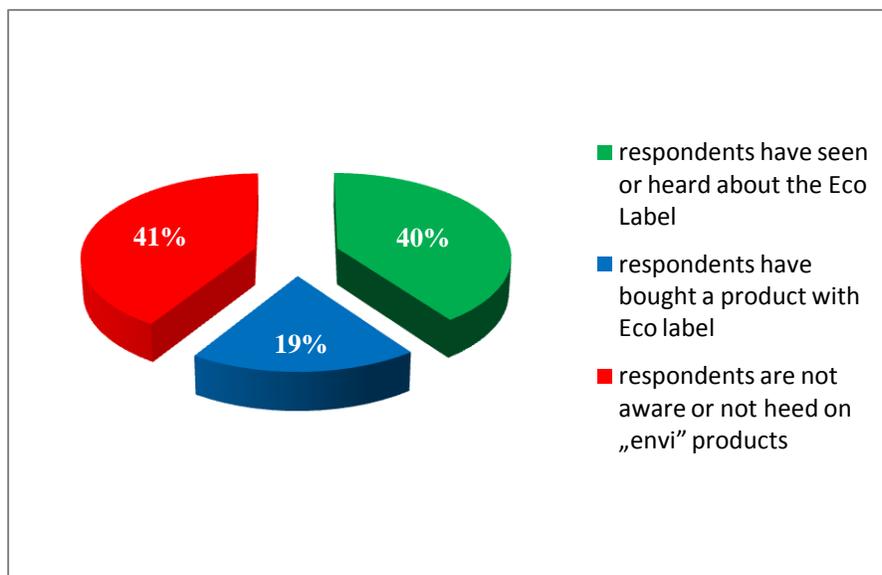
account environmental aspects of the production, use, or disposal of waste products, or what impact they have on the environment. A third area of concern was to examine whether the customer is willing to pay more for products made by techniques and technologies that are environmentally friendly.

The questionnaire consisted of 9 questions and was conducted in the period from January 2015 to February 2015. Socio-demographic questions were removed from the questionnaire because respondents were often reluctant to answer questions about their personal economic status. Given the focus of the questionnaire, in principle it was not important.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- Regarding the impact of environmental labeling of products on purchasing decisions, the respondents' answers were as follows: 40% say they have seen or heard about the Eco Label. Nearly one-

fifth (19%) have indicated that they have even bought a product bearing the Eco label. Other respondents, when buying products, are not aware nor care whether the product is marked as „environ”.

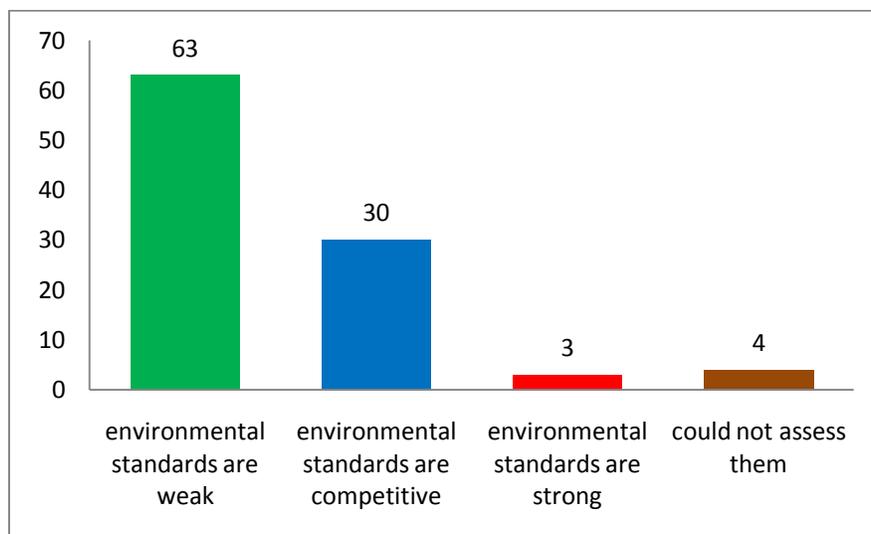


**Figure 1.** Impact of labeling of products on purchasing decisions [Own source]

**Slika 1.** Utjecaj označavanja proizvoda na odluku kupca [vlastiti izvor]

- How respondents perceived environmental levels of companies in Slovakia? It was found out that 63% of respondents think that the environmental standards of Slovak companies are weak. Only 3% consider them as strong, and 30% of respondents consider them as compete-

tive. The remaining 4% respondents could not assess them. Management of companies should make a note that they should invest more in protection of the environment because this investment can be repaid many times.

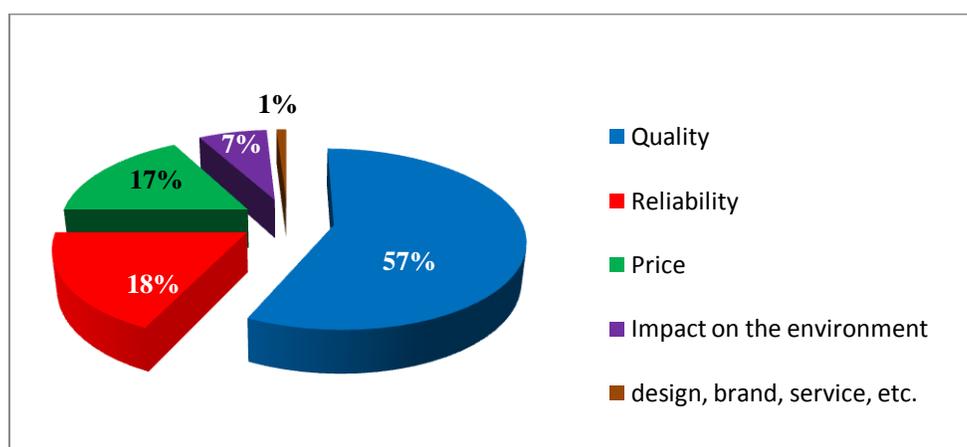


**Figure 2.** How respondents perceived environmental levels [Own source]

**Slika 2.** Kako ispitanici percipiraju razine zaštite okoliša [vlastiti izvor]

- When the respondents were asked whether they buy products according to how the use of these products impacts the environment, the results were as follows: 62% of consumers – respondents do not take impact on the environment into account when purchasing a product.
- The next question was directed towards the respondents' views of which of the following factors - reliability, quality, cost, environmental impact, and others - they preferred when buying durable consumer products. This question was answered as follows. Clearly the most

important factor for a consumer buying a product is quality (57%). This factor is followed by reliability (18%). And what was our biggest surprise – in the third place in the ranking is price (17%) although it is in close proximity to the second one - reliability. Unfortunately, the environmental focus and product selection depending on impact on the environment are important only to 7% of the respondents. One percent of respondents indicated what they understood under "others ..." - design, brand, service, etc.



**Figure 3.** Which of the following factors respondents prefer? [Own source]

**Slika 3.** Kojeg od navedenih čimbenika ispitanici preferiraju? [vlastiti izvor]

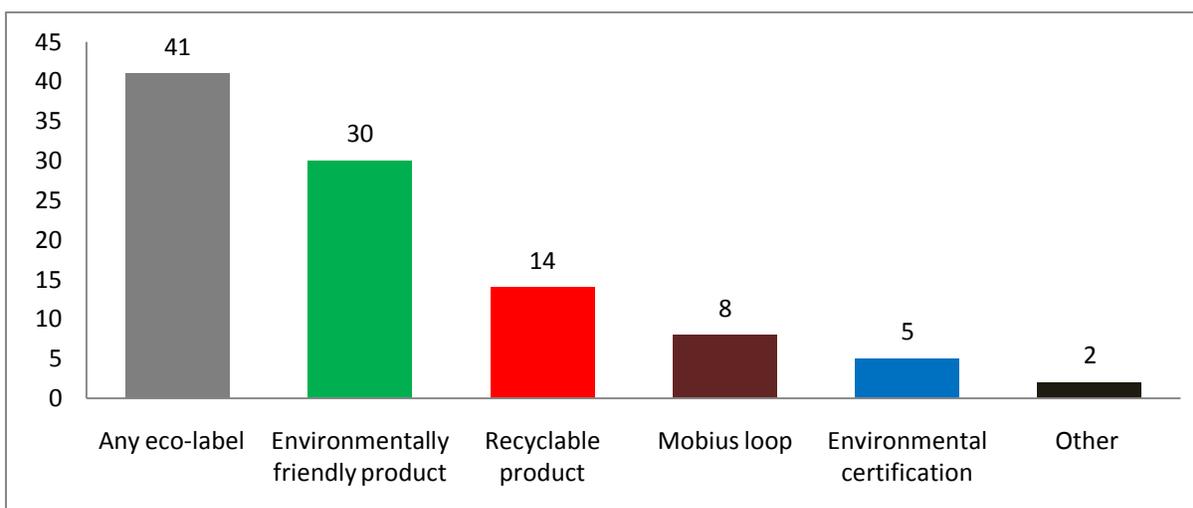
- When the respondents were asked to sort the environmental aspects (return packaging, recyclability, reproducibility, reduced emissions, environmental labeling) by relevance from the least important (score 5) to the most important (score 1), we obtained the following results. Because individual parameters were evaluated by different numbers of points, we evaluated them separately.
- The “return packages” were rated by 8% of respondents as the most important aspect and by 7% of respondents as the least important one. Recyclability was

evaluated as the most important aspect by 48% respondents but as the least important one by 4% respondents. Reproducibility was rated by 15% respondents as the most important aspect and, on the contrary, as the least important aspect by 13% of them. Reducing of emissions is the most important parameter for 33% of respondents. The idea that emissions reduction is the least important parameter is shared by 11% of respondents. Environmental labeling is considered as the most important aspect by 10%

respondents, but only 52% of respondents reported it as the least important aspect.

- In response to some of the above questions, we asked respondents which eco-labels on products they mostly noticed. The most common response was that respondents hardly noticed any marks. Of all those surveyed, almost 41% respondents did not notice any eco-label. The remaining responses were:

30% of the respondents noticed the mark “environmentally friendly product”, 14% of the respondents noticed the mark “recyclable product”, 8% of the respondents noticed the mark of “the recyclable packaging” called “Mobius loop”, and 5% of the respondents noted that they noticed the mark “environmental certification”.



**Figure 4.** Which eco-labels are mostly noticed on products? [Own source]

**Slika 4.** Koje ekološke naljepnice se uglavnom primjete na proizvodima? [vlastiti izvor]

- When the consumers were asked whether they were willing to pay more for a product if it was made by environmental technologies, as an ecological product, or an environmentally friendly product, 59% of respondents answered positively, that they were willing to pay more for a product with proven protection of the environment. The negative responses

were as if "copied" from the previous question - 41% of the respondents were not willing to pay a higher price for such products. In this question, respondents also verbally formulated justification under what circumstances they were or weren't willing to pay more for any products. For more information, see Tables No.1 and No. 2.

**Table 1.** The reasons why the respondents are willing to pay more for green products**Tablica 1.** Razlozi zbog kojih su ispitanici spremni platiti više za ekološke proizvode

<b>The reasons why the respondents are willing to pay more for green products</b>
It is important to pay attention to the environment because of our future, which influences our life and especially the lives of our descendants.
If it is proven that the product was really produced by environmental technologies, I am willing to pay more for the product, as in this way I partially protect the environment.
Nature should be protected and we are currently in a stage when we have exploited it too much and that's not good. We should have regard of the environment.
Environmental technologies still have a great future; therefore, I am willing to contribute to development of technologies and measures for environmental protection.

**Table 2.** The reasons why the respondents are not willing to pay more for green products**Tablica 2.** Razlozi zbog kojih ispitanici nisu spremni platiti više za ekološke proizvode

<b>The reasons why the respondents are not willing to pay more for green products</b>
Currently, a consumer who decides to use environmentally friendly products is highly disadvantaged. When a consumer decides to support ecology, it enormously increases his expenses, which in most cases are not equivalent to his contribution to environmental protection. Primarily firms and producers should be geared towards environmental protection. They also influence the consumer's decision to purchase organic products.
We have too low earnings to buy more expensive products.
We have lack of information.
The cost of technology should be paid by the manufacturer.
Pay only to a certain extent. Because if we do not behave environmentally, it will hit us back soon. If not us, then the next generation. It is short-sighted to saw a branch under me and say to myself that it's great because it is cheaper.

- The next question was directed to Slovak organic products preferred to foreign ones. Respondents were asked whether they thought that Slovak products were comparable to foreign ones (to European production). A very positive fact is that more than 60% respondents think that our products are comparable to European ones. Another 30% respondents say that our products are even better than foreign ones. A little more than 5% respondents say they are significantly worse and about 2.5% of the respondents answered „I do not know“ or „no, they are not better“.
- In the final question of the survey, we investigated how knowledgeable

consumers were about environ products, about promotion of environmental science, about labeling of these products and about environ labels. The biggest number of the respondents replied that promotion was not sufficient (65%) and they would welcome improvement in this area, and almost one tenth of respondents

(9.7%) said that promotion was sufficient. 8% of the respondents said that they could not assess advertising and promotion because they did not follow any kind of them. 15% of the respondents replied that they had never registered any targeted promotion of organic products and their labeling.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that residents of Slovakia are not entirely indifferent to the environment in which they live. They monitor the impact of using some products and of their depreciation on the environment in which we live but not as significantly as they could. A significant role is played, as indicated in the survey, by the fact that awareness and promotion of environ products, labels, recycling and processing is quite weak. Eco-labeling affects purchasing decisions of consumers; therefore, it would be appropriate to promote and disclose more information regarding suitability or unsuitability of products because of their impact on the development of the environment. Regularly organized promotional events aimed at providing information and supporting products that are environmentally friendly (e.g. at points of sale) could be the right direction.

The good news is that Slovaks are interested in the environment in which they live, but the current financial situation in Slovakia does not allow them to choose ecological products, for which this parameter

is reflected in increased prices. The most important factors are quality, price, and then the environment. However, there are consumers who are willing to pay the higher price for eco products. The current situation requires reduction of waste. In considering recycling of products, it is important to choose the right basic raw material for production of products. In the selection of the material itself, manufacturers should preferably select materials which are recyclable. In Slovakia there are currently 124 landfills with waste, but their finish time and subsequent waste handling are crucial. According to our findings, many landfills will retire in 2015. For businesses, it should be a question of further solutions in care management, regardless of the results of any survey. [3]

Increased awareness of young people regarding “environmental issues” can be achieved including these topics in various subjects in primary and secondary schools and playful ecology education aimed at the smallest children. [5]

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