Slađana Pavlinović Mršić, PhD[1]

WHO MOST FREQUENTLY BUYS EU ECOLABEL PRODUCTS IN ORGANIC STORES IN CROATIA?*

Prethodno priopćenje / Preliminary communication
UDK / UDC: 658.89
DOI: 10.51650/ezrvs.20.1-2.6
Primljeno / Received: 07/01/2026
Prihvaćeno / Accepted: 17/02/2026

Eco-labeling is becoming a popular tool within the framework of the green transition. However, additional insights into consumer responses to this environmental policy instrument are still lacking. This research investigates the application of the EU Ecolabel in organic stores in Croatia. The objective of the research is to identify the key factors influencing the probability of purchasing products with the EU Ecolabel in organic stores. The Flash Eurobarometer 535 dataset is used, focusing on a subset of respondents in Croatia who purchase products with the EU Ecolabel. Particular attention is given to respondents who most frequently purchase such products exclusively in organic stores. The results of the binomial logit regression indicate that young consumers, females, consumers without children, and frequent buyers are more likely to report organic stores as their primary and exclusive purchase location for products with the EU Ecolabel. The novelty of this research lies in examining a niche segment of the organic products market—namely, consumers of EU Ecolabel products in organic stores in Croatia. Existing literature suggests that a uniform approach to consumers of organic products, which neglects their socio-demographic characteristics and attitudinal factors, may be misleading, as significant differences across market segments may exist. Furthermore, knowledge about consumers who shop in organic stores remains limited.

Key words: *EU Ecolabel; organic store; logit; consumer profile; Flash Eurobarometer.*

[1] Assistant Professor; University of Split, Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism, Cvite Fiskovića 5, 21 000 Split, Croatia; e-mail: spavlino@efst.hr

*This paper/research was funded by the European Union (NextGenerationEU) under the Croatian Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021–2026 (NRRP), through the University of Split institutional project "Contemporary Challenges of Sustainability in the Context of Global Change (CHASING)", approved by the Ministry of Science, Education and Youth of the Republic of Croatia. Views and opXinions expressed are however those of the author only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission. Neither the European Union nor European Commission can be held responsible for them.

1. Introduction

The EU Ecolabel is an official EU third party certification scheme implemented by independent authorized entities (Kabaja, 2023, p. 72). A literature review of Kabaja (2023) indicates that there is a limited number of studies dedicated to this eco certification scheme that is understood as an important tool of the European Green Deal and of the green transition to low-carbon emission and low polluting economies in general. The EU Ecolabel functions as a credible source of information about market goods that catalyses exchange and thus boosts the economy of low polluting products. Thus, additional knowledge about functionality of this labeling scheme would finally contribute to potential success of the green transition. Furthermore, studies on organic products by Desquilbet et al. (2018) and Nemayr (2022) show that there are considerable differences in consumer characteristics and sustainability indicators of organic products across retail channels, but still there are limited studies investigating distribution channels of organic products or products with the EU Ecolabel in Croatia.

Focus of this research is consumer behavior with respect to the EU Ecolabel in Croatia in organic stores. Organic stores are also named as bio shops or specialized stores that usually offer credible environmentally friendly products, that is, products with reduced environmental impact and with controlled and minimized content of pesticides and other hazardous chemicals. For instance, Pérez-Hernández et al. (2025, p. 278) define bio-based products as "wholly or predominantly derived from resources of biological origin" which compose bioeconomy or circular bioeconomy that are relevant concepts of SDG 12 Responsible production and consumption and related Target 12.2. and Target 12.5. Since, for a rational type of producer, a decision to implement an eco label is usually supported by a cost benefit analysis, and part of expected benefits proceeds from eventual increase in revenues, knowledge about sales changes and consumer profile becomes relevant in the context of the EU Ecolabel.

The empirical part of this study exploits the Flash Eurobarometer 535 dataset and considers a subset of respondents in Croatia who buy products with the EU Ecolabel. This study investigates differentiating characteristics of consumers who buy products with the EU Ecolabel only in organic stores in comparison to other consumers of products with the EU Ecolabel in Croatia. While the literature overview on organic markets mainly devotes to food products, which arises from the concept of organic agriculture, the EU Ecolabel currently applies to non-food products (Prieto-Sandoval et al., 2020, p. 859) but Kauko et al. (2017) investigated the applicability of the EU Ecolabel to food products also.

Apart from the main socioeconomics predictors, this study also elaborates the relevance of environmental trust, environmental concern and environmental attitudes for the purchase in organic stores. Namely, Wilska et al. (2025, p. 7) recognizes green attitudes as relevant property for differentiation among green and non-green consumers while environmental concern involves "cognitive and emotional involvement with environmental issues and a perceived sense of personal responsibility to act" (Van Hoang, 2024; Zeng et al., 2023 in Khan, 2025, p. 652) that is positively associated to pro-environmental behavior.

The paper consists of six chapters. The first chapter introduces the research subject and research questions. Relevant literature is reviewed in the second chapter. The third chapter is dedicated to materials and methods while the results of the empirical research are presented in the fourth chapter. The fifth chapter discusses results and the sixth chapter concludes.

2. Literature review

A conducted literature review aims to identify academic work dedicated to improved understanding of a profile of organic products' consumers in general with a particular attention to relevant factors that are connected to consumers' behavior in the context of organic stores in Croatia. After conducting a search for the relevant literature, it can be stated that a significant part of it is dedicated to organic food. However, much less studies are focused on non-food organic products or organic products in general. Also, there is a limited literature on the consumer profile of organic stores as a very specific sales channel.

Zamkova et al. (2018, p. 1048-1049) analysed a sample of Czech respondents and found that there are gender differences in purchasing location of organic food. While the majority of male respondents buy organic food in malls and supermarkets, females equally attend malls and supermarkets, and health food and organic food stores to purchase organic food. Therefore, it can be expected that females are more likely to purchase products with the EU Ecolabel in organic stores. Looking at the age structure, the same study indicates that the age group 36-45 years old is more likely to buy organic food in the supermarkets. Organic food retailing from both consumer and producer perspective was studied by Sirieix and Schaer (2005). The authors categorised respondents in three clusters. A cluster of occasional buyers shop products in hypermarkets while very heavy buyers most often shop organic food in other places such as open markets. Šugar and Brščić (2020) investigate the perception of organic food in Croatia. The most frequent buyers of organic food products in their sample are middle age women. Thus, it would be interesting to investigate how this age group specifically behaves with respect to purchases of products with EU Ecolabel in organic stores. Also, the authors find that among the most important purchase decision factors related to those types of products are trust and quality. This study will also investigate if trust and quality are relevant for purchase of products with the EU Ecolabel in organic stores in Croatia. Ngobo and Jean (2012) investigate the importance of own-store organic brands on organic product demand. The research shows that they are not very influential in stores with a variety of selection. The researchers investigated the sample of buyers who at least once bought an organic store brand. They find that purchase of organic brands decreases with the family size, but increases if a buyer is an employed female. Interestingly, this research also detects a positive relationship between price and demand for organic store brands. Neumayr (2022) investigated a demand for organic food in supermarkets and organic stores and found that these two retail channels attract different types of consumers. Their literature review suggests that the average organic consumer is a female with a degree and with children, while the effect of age and income remains inconclusive. Neumayr (2022, p. 26) stresses the key limitation of the literature on organic food consumers profiling is a missing context of the purchase. The author conducted a survey among 440 buyers in supermarkets and organic stores. Buyers in supermarkets are younger and males giving advantage to prices, and with lower trust. On the other hand, buyers in organic stores are more likely females, older, giving advantage to quality and trusting their retailer. Recio-Román et al (2024) find that ecolabel trust is positively associated with ecolabel buying behavior. This study employs the Flash Eurobarometer 535 with a whole EU countries dataset. The variables they construct among others are ecolabel knowledge (Q1 if yes, then 1, otherwise 0), ecolabel trust (Q7; 1 - strongly disagree; 4 – strongly agree), environmental concern (DX2_1; 1 - strongly disagree; 4 – strongly agree),

environmental attitude (DX2_2; 1 - strongly disagree; 4 – strongly agree), and ecolabel product buying behavior (Q3_1). While the cited study focuses on eco labels in general, this research analyses specifically a question related to the EU Ecolabel (Q3_2). Recio-Román et al (2024) report on logit estimators of PATH model, which indicate that living in smaller urban residential settlements decreases the probability of buying products with eco labels. While this probability increases with education, it decreases with age and for males. Furno et al (2021) investigate determinants of organic food purchase in Germany and Italy taking into account heterogeneity of the consumer population. Apart from OLS, they also apply quantile and mode regressions. Education, certified label, and ecological transportation significantly affect purchasing behavior of more frequent buyers while less frequent buyers are related to lower education level (p. 343). German distribution of organic product buyers is almost bimodal, which indicates possible existence of two groups of consumers, rare buyers and weekly buyers. The authors find mixed conclusions across quantiles and modes on the role of certification, education, age and other factors for frequency of buying organic products suggesting that market segmentation rather than on-fit-for-all market strategy would be appropriate for such type of a market. Kranjac et al. (2017) examined a profile of organic food consumers in Serbia. In line with the previously cited works, the most frequent buyers of organic food are middle aged, university degree females with an average income. Mitić and Čolović (2022) also investigate the profile of organic food buyers in Serbia and obtain results consistent with Kranjac et al. (2017) that a representative buyer of organic food are females, of higher income, education and age. Also, consumers may relate a product with an eco-label to a higher quality (Tiboni-Oschilewski et al., 2024, p. 3). Dimitri et al. (2017) conducted a spatial analysis of organic stores, and finds that neighbourhood income and education level is important for offering organic products in the stores. Jara et al. (2017) conduct an empirical analysis with the aim to compare organic and economic store brands with respect to packaging. They find statistical support for hypotheses that simplified packaging influences positively while overpackaging influences negatively a perceived quality of organic brand. Alonso González et al. (2025) sample shoppers attending organic-certified stores to examine their profile, that is, to investigate the effect of income, education, age, gender, environmental and health concerns, specific hobbies, and price on purchase of organic products. Aligned with previously reported studies, an average organic product consumer is a middle age woman with a high degree while Hwang & Chung (2019) find that older consumers have more attitude toward organic foods.

A significant part of the research on eco-labeling and organic stores cited above, and present in the databases, is narrowed to organic food while missing to address the whole range of organic products (such as medicine, cosmetics and textile). Based on the reviewed literature the aim of this work is to investigate who are the buyers of eco-labeled products. Focus of this research are buyers of products with the EU Ecolabel, and on the Croatian context.

The research question is narrowed and it is posted as follows: *Which factors affect the probability of purchasing products with the EU Ecolabel in an organic store?*

A particular focus on a specific sales channel is motivated by work of Neumayr (2022, p. 26) who notes that the existing literature on organic food consumption does not pay a particular attention on types of sales channels and those might matter for consumer profiling. Also Furno et al. (2021) detect differences across quantiles suggesting that one-fit-for-all marketing strategy would be inappropriate.

3. Materials and methods

This study employs the Flash Eurobarometer 535 dataset (European Commission, 2023) surveying attitude and actions with respect to environment, eco labels, and the EU Ecolabel in particular. This database has been already analysed by Recio-Román et al. (2024) to investigate determinants buying behavior of products with eco-labels in general on the sample of the EU member states. Pavlinović Mršić (2025) also analysed the Flash Eurobarometer 535 dataset but narrows the analysis on Croatia and investigates the trust in eco-labels from the perspective of information asymmetry problem. Unlike those works, this paper only considers a subsample of respondents who buy products with the EU Ecolabel, that is collected in Croatia and the research question targets specifically a distinctive behavior of a buyer who exclusively attends organic stores.

Therefore, a dependent variable is constructed by applying answers to question *Q5 Where do you most frequently buy products with the EU Ecolabel?* Explanatory variables are grouped as follows. Socio-demographic attributes are gender, age, employment, type of community, and children, and other variables are quality, frequency of shopping, trust, and Environmental attitude and concern. The dataset is processed by STATA 19.5. applying binomial logit as an appropriate data processing approach for a dichotomous dependent variable as formulated further.

Table 1 summarizes frequencies of different sales channels reported by respondents.

Table 1. Frequency of buying the EU Ecolabel product across sales channels: *Q5: Where do you most frequently buy products with the EU Ecolabel?*

Selected answers				Frequency of observations
Supermarkets	**Organic Stores**	**Online**	**Other**	
✓	✓	✓	✓	1
✓	✓	✓		15
✓	✓		✓	0
✓		✓	✓	0
✓	✓			60
✓		✓		19
✓			✓	3
✓				248
	✓	✓	✓	3
	✓	✓		13
	✓		✓	2
	✓			81
		✓	✓	2
		✓		19
			✓	19
Don't know				94
TOTAL				579

Source: Elaboration of the Flash Eurobarometer 535 dataset

The majority of respondents reported supermarkets as the only sales channel. Focus of this study are the consumers in organic stores. It can be noticed in Table 1 that 60 respondents most frequently buy products with the EU Ecolabel in both supermarkets and organic stores, while 81 respondents most frequently buy them only in organic stores. It is supposed that these are distinctive groups of consumers and further analysis targets traits of the latter group, that is, of consumers who most frequently buy products with the EU Ecolabel only in organic stores.

Many respondents "do not know", while 81 respondents only selected "organic stores". The aim of this research is to obtain insights into distinctive attributes of buyers of products with the EU Ecolabel who only list organic stores. Therefore, a dependent dummy variable is constructed as follows: organic_store is 1 if the only answer is organic store; organic_store is 0 otherwise.

Socio-demographic attributes considered in this paper are: gender, age, employment, type of community and children. Income is not considered because there is no corresponding question in the questionnaire. Variable Employed takes value 1 if a respondent reports to be self-employed, employee or manual worker, and 0 otherwise (answers to question D5a). Variable Children takes value 1 if respondent reports positive number of children under the age of 15 living in her/his household and 0 otherwise (answers to question D23).

Importance of quality (measured by question DX1_3; *How important are the following aspects when making decision on what products (goods or services) to buy: The quality of the product*. Variable *quality* is generated such that quality=1 if quality of the product is very important; 0 - otherwise). Frequency of shopping is measured by question: Q3_2 *How often do you buy products with the EU Ecolabel?* Trust is measured by question Q7_1 *"To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? I trust that products with the EU Ecolabel truly have a lower environmental impact than similar products on the market"*. Variable *trust* is generated such that trust=1 if strongly agree; 0 - otherwise). Variables environmental concern and environmental attitude are introduced inspired by Recio-Román et al. (2024.). Environmental concern is measured by question DX2_1 ranging 1 - strongly disagree to 4 – strongly agree. Environmental attitude is measured by question DX2_2 ranging from 1 - strongly disagree to 4 – strongly agree. Observations with answer "Don't know" to question DX2_1 and/or DX_2 (9 in total) are removed in order to numerical stability and obtain comparable logit models. Thus, total number of observations further analysed is 570. Descriptive statistics of the listed variables is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics

	Summary
N	**570**
Organic store	80 (14.0%)
Age	
15 - 24 years	67 (11.8%)
25 - 39 years	138 (24.2%)
40 - 54 years	163 (28.6%)
55 years and older	202 (35.4%)
Males	282 (49.5%)
Employed	386 (67.7%)
Children	196 (34.4%)
Type of community	
A rural area or village	121 (21.2%)
Small or medium-sized town	240 (42.1%)
Large town/city	209 (36.7%)
Quality of the product very important	285 (50.0%)
Often	48 (8.4%)
Sometimes	323 (56.7%)
Rarely	199 (34.9%)
Trust in the EU Ecolabel	218 (38.2%)
Environmental concern	
Strongly agree	249 (43.7%)
Somewhat agree	263 (46.1%)
Somewhat disagree	42 (7.4%)
Strongly disagree	16 (2.8%)
Environmental attitude	
Strongly agree	122 (21.4%)
Somewhat agree	282 (49.5%)
Somewhat disagree	121 (21.2%)
Strongly disagree	45 (7.9%)

Source: Elaboration of the Flash Eurobarometer 535 dataset

4. Results

Since the dependent variable is a binomial dummy variable that takes value 0 or 1, an appropriate regression model would be logistic regression also estimated in Recio-Román et al. (2024, p. 17). For more detail about this estimation technique, please consult Long and Freese (2006, p. 227).

After estimating a full model (Model 1), factors that turned out statistically not significant were excluded and a reduced model was estimated excluding employment types of settlement, quality of the product, trust and environmental concern and attitude (Model 2). Both models are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Logistic regression – odd ratios

VARIABLES	**Model 1**	**Model 2**
Dependent variable: Organic store		
Age (omitted: 15-24 years)		
25 - 39 years	0.448*	0.406**
	(0.188)	(0.166)
40 - 54 years	0.533	0.469*
	(0.215)	(0.182)
55 years and older	0.438**	0.415**
	(0.179)	(0.154)
Male=1 (0 otherwise)	0.441***	0.458***
	(0.117)	(0.119)
Employed = 1 (0 otherwise)	0.934	
	(0.302)	
Children = 1 (0 otherwise)	0.506**	0.487**
	(0.157)	(0.148)
Type of community (omitted: A rural area or village omitted)		
Small or medium-sized town	0.877	
	(0.303)	
Large town/city	1.152	
	(0.392)	
Quality of the product very important = 1 (0 otherwise)	0.665	
	(0.178)	
How often do you buy products with the EU Ecolabel (omitted: Often)		
Sometimes	0.507*	0.534
	(0.207)	(0.206)
Rarely	0.476	0.452*
	(0.217)	(0.187)
trust = 1 (0 otherwise)	0.946	
	(0.263)	
Environmental concern (omitted: Strongly agree)		
Somewhat agree	1.063	
	(0.320)	
Somewhat disagree	1.320	
	(0.720)	
Strongly disagree	0.684	
	(0.755)	
Environmental attitude (omitted: Strongly agree)		
Somewhat agree	0.817	
	(0.275)	
Somewhat disagree	0.510	
	(0.233)	

VARIABLES	Model 1	Model 2
Strongly disagree	0.533	
	(0.347)	
Constant	1.644	1.069
	(1.020)	(0.477)
Observations	570	570
Percentage of total correctly classified observations (threshold 0.5)	85.79%	85.96%

***, **, * indicate significance levels at 1%, 5% and 10%; standard errors in parentheses

Source: Elaboration of the Flash Eurobarometer 535 dataset

Statistical properties of two models are compared in Table 4. McFadden R^2 decreases by 0,014 in Model 2 compared to Model 1. However, relatively low McFadden R^2 values suggest low predictive power of both models. AIC and BIC of Model 2 is lower providing a strong support for selecting Model 2.

Table 4. Goodness-of-fit measures

Test	Model 1	Model2	Difference
Log-likelihood	-215.070	-218.244	-3.174
LR chi^2(df=18/7/-11)	32.244	25.895	-6.349
Prob > chi^2	0.021	0.001	
McFadden R^2	0.070	0.056	-0.014
AIC	468.140	452.489	-15.651
BIC	550.707	487.254	-63.453

Source: Elaboration of the Flash Eurobarometer 535 dataset

Results of Model 2 can be interpreted in the following way. At 5% statistical significance, belonging to the age group between 25-39 decreases odds of most frequently buying products with the EU Ecolabel only in organic stores by 59% compared to a baseline age group (less than 25 year old). Belonging to the age group between 40 and 54 years decreases the odds of buying those products by 53% compared to the baseline group (less than 25) at 10% statistical significance. Belonging to an age group of 55 and above decreases the odds of most frequently buying products with the EU Ecolabel only in organic stores by 58% compared to the odds for the baseline group (less than 25 years old) at 5% statistical significance.

Males have 54% lower odds of most frequently buying products with the EU Ecolabel only in organic stores compared to females at 1% statistical significance, while having children is also associated with a lower odds of most frequently buying products with the EU Ecolabel only in organic stores by 51% compared to respondents without children (at 5% statistical significance). Finally, respondents who rarely buy products with the EU Ecolabel have 55% lower odds of most frequently buying them exclusively in organic stores compared to buyers who often buy products with the EU Ecolabel (at 10% statistical significance).

Based on presented results it can be concluded that factors that increase the likelihood of most frequently buying products with the EU Ecolabel only in organic stores are gender, age,

number of children and frequency of buying those products. On the other hand, this study did not identify statistically significant effects of employment, residential setting, trust in the EU Ecolabel, and environmental concern and attitude on likelihood of most frequently buying products with the EU Ecolabel only in organic stores.

5. Discussion

Most of the reviewed articles, such as Zamkova et al. (2018), Šugar and Brščić (2020), Kranjac et al. (2017), Alonso González et al. (2025), report that average buyers of organic products are middle aged while Neumayr (2022) and Hwang and Chung (2019) mention that older buyers are more likely to buy organic food. However, we find that older groups of buyers are less likely to most frequently buy products with the EU Ecolabel exclusively in organic stores. This finding suggests that generally and in the context of organic food we can expect to find middle age or older buyers as the most relevant. However, the marketing policies for products with the EU Ecolabel in organic stores should increasingly pay attention to buyers of age up to 25. It would be interesting to investigate robustness and reasons for this result.

Our finding that males are less like to shop products with the EU Ecolabels in organic store is consistent with the finding of Zamkove et al. (2018) that male buyers purchase organic food in malls and supermarkets and Neumayr (2022) who finds that females are more likely buyers in organic stores. Also, the majority of cited papers report females as representative buyers of organic food or products (Kranjac et al., 2017; Mitić and Čolović, 2022; Gonzales et al., 2025).

Unlike the findings of Ngoba and Jean (2012) employment status was not statistically significant in the initial model and thus was excluded in the final model. Also having children turned out to be a statistically significant factor in our model that negatively affected buying products with the EU Ecolabel exclusively in organic stores unlike the finding of Neumayr (2022) from the literature review that having children is positively associated with shopping organic food.

Residential setting was a statistically significant factor for demand of products with ecolabels in Recio-Román et al. (2024.) but it turned out not to be significant in explaining purchases of products with the EU Ecolabel in organic stores. On the other hand, frequency of purchases is a statistically significant factor in our model in line with Sirieix and Schaer (2005). Other factors like trust and quality (Šugar and Brščić, 2020; Neumayr, 2022), as well as environmental concern and attitude (Recio-Román et al, 2024) result as being not statistically significant in our model. A possible cause may be in the data sample that solely consists of respondents who buy products with the EU Ecolabel so that there are no substantial differences among them with respect to trust in the EU Ecolabels, or environmental concern and attitude. Also, one may suspect that the respected variables have not been addressed adequately in the proposed model. For example Song et al. (2019) in their model suggest only a direct link between environmental concern and green purchase while green attitude affects green purchase directly and indirectly through the effect on environmental concern. On the contrary, Recio-Román et al. (2024) model the effect of environmental concern on ecolabel buying behavior as direct and indirect through the effect on environmental attitude. While it

suggested that environmental attitude only directly affects eco label buying behavior. Therefore, further investigation might shed light on the relevance of direct and indirect connections between environmental attitude and concern in the context of EU Ecolabels across various sales channels.

Although relying on the existing studies on factors determining demand for organic products, this study investigates a particular segment of the organic market and those are products with the EU Ecolabel with focus on organic stores. A need to differentiate specific market segments has been already pointed out by Zamkova et al. (2018) and Neumayr (2022).

Presented findings are relevant for managers of organic stores as well as for designers of eco-labeling schemes and corresponding regulation. The results indicate that, in Croatia, buyers of products with the EU Ecolabel most frequently buying them exclusively in organic stores are more likely to be young female consumers without children who often buy products with the EU Ecolabel. This may inform organic store managers on product supply, as well as producers who intend to implement and sell products with the EU Ecolabel.

However, further research might be conducted in order to extend knowledge about buyers of products with the EU Ecolabel at the other sales channels, and also in the other EU countries. Furthermore, it would be interesting to check if the findings differ conditional on types of goods. Also, the existing empirical approach can be improved by considering a multinomial regression framework.

Finally, most of the literature on organic stores and in general on organic products very often focuses on organic food while this research devotes to products with the EU Ecolabel in organic stores.

6. Conclusion

Literature review suggests that there is a lack of knowledge about consumer behavior of organic products across various sales channels. Intention of this research was to contribute to the gap in the literature by investigating a specific setting of a market for products with the EU Ecolabel in Croatia. The Flash Eurobarometer 535 is exploited to answer a question about factors which are related to shopping those products in organic stores in Croatia. Binomial logit regression was estimated with a dummy dependent variable that takes value 1 if respondent selects an organic store as the only most frequent place of purchasing products with the EU Ecolabel.

The results suggest that factors that increase likelihood of most frequently buying of products with the EU Ecolabel only in organic stores are female gender, young age, no children, and frequent purchase of those products in general. However, trust in EU Ecolabel, environmental concern and attitudes, as well as residential setting, were not identified as statistically significant predictors.

This research contributes to the knowledge about buyers of products with the EU Ecolabels across sales channels in Croatia. Limitations of this research reflect in variables design and improved operationalisation of the investigated concepts might be improved. Finally, an application of other regression models for categorical variables might be considered.

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