Article

The Role of Pro-Environmental Behavior, Environmental Knowledge, and Eco-Labeling Perception in Relation to Travel Intention in the Hotel Industry

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Abstract: Due to increasing concern about climate change and its impact on the tourism sector, it is vital to understand tourists' decision-making process in relation to staying in green accommodations. Many factors influence tourists' decision-making process; however, little research has been conducted on examining the antecedents of travel intention in relation to the hotel industry. Accordingly, the aim of the paper was to test the relationship among three antecedents of travel intention and tourists' intention to stay in hotels with eco-labels. This was performed on a sample of tourists staying in hotels in Adriatic Croatia from July through August 2021. A self-complete questionnaire was used for data collection. Data processing included univariate statistics, multivariate analysis, and structural equation modeling. This research provided evidence that tourists' eco-labeling perception and pro-environmental behavior influence their travel intention, that general environmental knowledge was positively related to tourists' pro-environmental behavior and tourists' eco-labeling perception, and that eco-labeling influences pro-environmental behavior. By examining indirect effects, it was determined that pro-environmental behavior mediates the relationship between environmental knowledge and travel intention and that eco-labeling perception mediates the relationship between environmental knowledge and travel intention and the relationship between environmental knowledge and pro-environmental behavior. The findings suggest that tourists' pro-environmental behavior includes different consumer cost-effective behavior-related aspects.

Keywords: pro-environmental behavior; environmental knowledge; eco-labeling perception; green travel intention; hotel industry

1. Introduction

Climate changes are becoming an essential factor on a global level that affects different human activities. Their impact is also evident in the tourism industry, which faces numerous challenges; therefore, tourism business entities need to adapt their business models to make their business more sustainable. The behavior and actions of all tourism stakeholders, including tourists, public authorities, and tourism business entities, need to change [1,2] to reduce the anthropogenic environmental impact of tourist activities (e.g., greenhouse gas emissions), which significantly contributes to climate change [3] and hinders sustainability promotion in the tourism industry. In the long term, the tourism industry's adaptation to new challenges, namely climate changes, by implementing sustainable principles, will address the main sustainability threats in tourism [4]. However, to reduce the negative impact of climate changes on the tourism industry, a shift in consumer, i.e., tourist, behavior is essential [5,6] because tourists' behavior prompts tourism business entities to action. With the increase in different environmentally related problems, a change in consumer behavior, namely tourist behavior, is needed [7].

Eco-certification programs have been developed and implemented to reduce the negative impact of human actions on the environment [8]. The negative impact that human activities have on the environment is also reinforced by the tourism industry [9].

The eco-certification program concepts are promoted to consumers through a label that usually includes a graphic symbol and/or descriptive text [10], which supplies information to consumers about different environmental-related product/service aspects [10]. In tourism, there are currently more than 200 eco-labels [11] intended for almost all types of accommodation [12,13].

However, the environment of tourist destinations is under increasing pressure from tourist activities, which results in various environmental problems such as waste generation, exhaustion of natural resources, and biodiversity loss [14–16]. Given that human behavior contributes to environmental problems [15], efforts to solve them should focus on tourists' behavior, which will either reduce environmental damage or actively protect the environment [16]. More precisely, it is necessary to encourage pro-environmental tourist behavior to minimize various ecological problems in tourist destinations [16,17]. The tourist decision-making process is under the influence of different factors [18,19]; however, those factors can be categorized as various motivators and other determinants that include knowledge and perceptions [20]. Consumer knowledge and perception of specific products or services and their behavior can affect their purchase intentions [21–24], which in tourism settings often translate as travel intentions [25]. Travel intentions in relation to green accommodation, namely accommodations with eco-labels, have been explored to a certain extent [26–29] suggesting that there is a relationship between eco-labeled accommodation and those that implement green practices with respect to tourists' travel intentions.

Tourist pro-environmental behavior could be considered an excellent way to minimize the negative impacts that tourists have on tourism destination resources [30,31]; however, at the same time, tourism business entities need to be aware that tourists' pro-environmental behavior impacts their decision-making process [32], resulting in purchasing of environmentally acceptable products and services in tourism destination [33]. Nevertheless, there is a lack of research regarding tourists' general pro-environmental behavior in relation to their travel intentions to stay in green accommodations. Since the tourist decision-making process is a complex mechanism, this paper examines this process by focusing on the role of pro-environmental behavior, environmental knowledge, and eco-labeling perception in relation to travel intentions in hotel settings. Namely, the aim of the paper is to test the direct and indirect effects of pro-environmental behavior, environmental knowledge, and eco-labeling perception in relation to travel intentions to stay in hotels with eco-labels.

2. Literature Review

To achieve sustainability in the tourism industry, the economic, socio-cultural, and environmental aspects should be included in tourism planning and development because they will balance the development and consequently result in well-being in the destination [34,35]. In this process, the communication of sustainability is an essential factor for tourism business entities because it enables them to signal their sustainability efforts to their target market by promoting sustainable practices they implement and eco-certification programs they participate in [34]. Eco-certificates are one of the essential tools for communicating sustainability to third parties and, consequently, achieving sustainability in tourism [34]. There are many eco-labels available to tourism business entities [11], with Blue Flag, Green Key, EU Eco-label, and Ecocamping being some of the best-known eco-labels in the world. Each eco-label communicates to tourists a different sustainability message. For example, the Blue Flag, as an international eco-certificate for beaches and marinas, focuses on various beach-related indicators, enabling a timely response to the negative tourism impacts on beach degradation [36] and fostering beach revisiting intention [37]. Additionally, Ecocamping, as a well-known campsite eco-label, promotes sustainability in campsites, including electricity and water-related savings, avoiding soil, water, and air pollution, and implementing sustainable forms of transport [38]. On the other hand, the EU Eco-label is a certification program intended for products and services in general and the tourism industry, spread throughout the European Union, and aimed at encouraging environmental sustainability [8]. Finally, the Green Key is an

international eco-label intended mainly for accommodation and hospitality facilities in tourism but also for tourist attractions, and it promotes the sustainable operation of certified facilities [39].

All those eco-certification programs support sustainable tourism development efforts by providing appropriate information to tourists. Due to different factors, tourists are increasingly interested in visiting destinations that care about the environment, and they try to behave ecologically responsibly upon their arrival at the destination [40]. Consequently, their behavior encourages tourist facilities to communicate their awareness of environmental problems and their willingness to solve them [41]. Indirectly, eco-labels raise awareness of environmental issues, provide ecological information, and encourage tourists to intensify their interest in environmental issues [42]. In addition, they can influence the change in the behavior of tourists during the trip so that their behavior is more environmentally friendly during their stay in the destination [43]. Therefore, several eco-label studies related to the tourism industry were focused on understanding the tourists' behavior, i.e., their decision-making processes such as eco-label perception and its influence in relation to tourists' behavior [36,44–46], eco-label importance regarding visit intentions [9,37,47–51], and willingness to pay a higher price for tourism services that are ecologically certified [52].

The signals that eco-labels communicate to tourists can influence their purchase and travel intentions [26,29]. Consumer purchase intention is a concept derived from marketing [53], and it refers to a behavioral intention to perform a possible behavior. It is often closely related to the behavior of tourists [54] and refers to tourists' intentions to buy certain products or services, while travel intentions are related to tourist travel behavior [25]. Although purchase intention may not always translate to actual behavior [55–57], its good understanding may help tourism business entities to develop suitable customer-related strategies [58]. Research on purchase intention in tourism is mainly focused on the following: various purchase intention determinants such as attitudes, enjoyment, and advertising design [59–62]; purchase intent to buy certain tourism-related products such as souvenirs [63,64] and services, for instance, accommodation [65,66], and intention to buy different type of foods, such as traditional food or food preferred by a specific religion [67–69]. On the other hand, travel intention is predominantly researched in the context of various influential factors such as destination advertising awareness [70], destination familiarity [71], storytelling blogs [72], local food consumption motivation [73], crime risk perception [74], and COVID-19 vaccination intentions [75].

In general, consumer purchase intention is directly linked to consumers' environmental knowledge [23,76,77]. However, research regarding the consumers, i.e., tourists' environmental knowledge and its influence on products and services purchased in tourism destinations and/or travel intentions, is mixed [29,78–80]. This situation could be linked to the type of environmental knowledge. As a rule, consumers' knowledge refers to the information individuals have about a certain topic before deciding to purchase a particular product or service [81]. However, consumers' environmental knowledge is centered on different environmental-related issues, key relationships and influences, and the capabilities of an environmental system [82]. Research on consumers' environmental knowledge distinguishes between objective and subjective knowledge [24,76], and general and context-specific knowledge [83]. Subjective knowledge corresponds with the consumer's self-assessed knowledge, while objective knowledge refers to consumers' actual knowledge about a specific topic [24,76,84]. Furthermore, consumers may obtain general knowledge about specific issues, which, in this case, is defined under the umbrella of consumers' environmental knowledge definition; however, their knowledge can be more context-specific so that it also includes sub-topics such as eco-certification [21,83,85–87].

With this in mind, the authors of [29] have detected that eco-labels, as context-specific knowledge, can influence tourists' purchase decisions in a specific segment interested in green products and services. The authors of [78] have determined that there is a direct link between perceived environmental knowledge and intention to visit green hotels. Additionally, the authors of [79] have determined a direct link between general environmental

knowledge and tourists' intention to recommend green' hotels. On the other hand, the authors of [80] did not confirm that environmental knowledge directly influenced guests' intention to visit green hotels. However, general consumer research mostly supports the link between environmental knowledge and purchase intentions [23,24,77,88]. Research centered on eco-labeling and purchase intentions generally supports this link [21,22,77,87], and these results are also confirmed in tourism studies [86]. Additionally, [86] suggests that eco-labeling could indirectly affect the relationship between general environmental knowledge and purchase intention. Based on these assumptions, the following hypotheses are proposed (Figure 1):

H1: *Environmental knowledge is positively linked to travel intentions.*

H2: *Eco-labeling perception is positively linked to travel intention.*

H3: *Environmental knowledge is positively linked to eco-labeling perception.*

H4: *Eco-labeling perception mediates the relationship between environmental knowledge and travel intention.*

Due to various environmental problems caused by the tourism industry, environmental tourism-related research is increasing. Tourists' environmental knowledge is essential in forming tourists' pro-environmental behavior in a specific destination [89–91], and pro-environmental behavior is positively associated with purchase intention [76,92]. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed (Figure 1):

H5: *Pro-environmental behavior is positively linked to travel intention.*

Pro-environmental behavior relates to an action intended to reduce the negative impacts humans have on natural resources or to increase the quality of the environment [93]. Research on pro-environmental behavior began in the 1960s; it still intensified in the early 1970s within the framework of environmental psychology, spreading later to all areas of human activity, including consumer behavior in the tourism industry [15,93,94]. Today, the pro-environmental behavior of an individual is studied in the context of everyday behavior and behavior during tourist travel [17], and it includes different types of environmental behavior [95]. However, pro-environmental tourists behavior research topics include measurement issues [15,96,97], literature review [16,94], identification of factors influencing pro-environmental behavior [17,93,98], and predicting pro-environmental behavior in the context of different behavior models [14,99–101]. Furthermore, pro-environmental behavior is associated with eco-certification programs [21,102]. General consumer research suggests that environmental knowledge, either general [83,85,103] or context-specific, such as eco-labeling [21,104], influences pro-environmental behavior. However, results obtained in [90] did not confirm the link between environmental knowledge and pro-environmental behavior but did confirm that other variables mediate this relationship. Based on these results, the following hypotheses are proposed (Figure 1):

H6: *Environmental knowledge is positively linked to pro-environmental behavior.*

H7: *Eco-labeling perception is positively linked to pro-environmental behavior.*

H8: *Pro-environmental behavior mediates the relationship between environmental knowledge and travel intention.*

H9: *Eco-labeling perception mediates the relationship between environmental knowledge and pro-environmental behavior.*
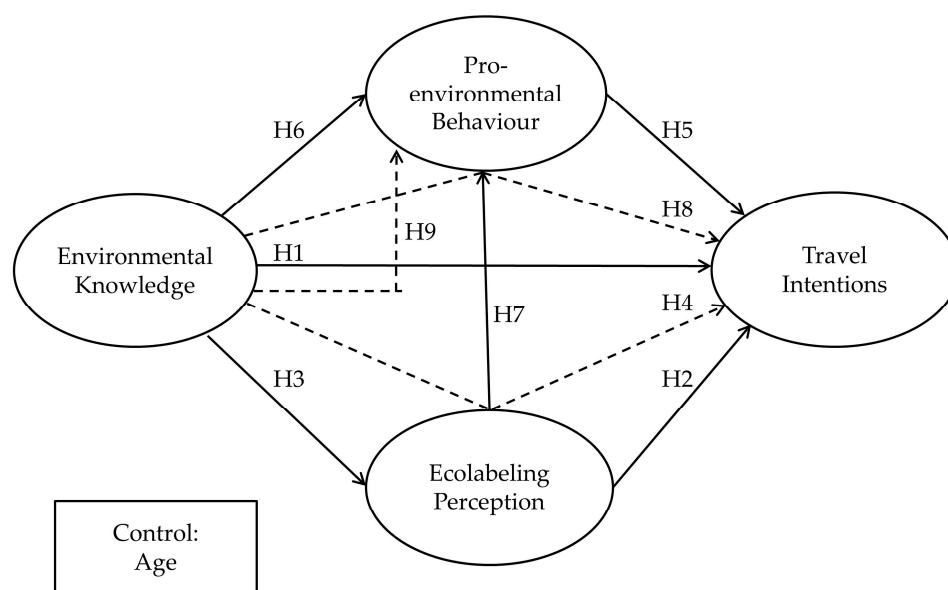
Figure 1. Theoretical framework.

3. Materials and Methods

The research study was conducted from July through August 2021. Tourists staying in eco-labeled hotels located in Adriatic Croatia were the target population. As a first step in the sample design process, a list of accommodation facilities [105] was obtained. Then, hotel category and capacity were used to design the sample, and 20 hotels were selected. Before selecting the hotels, where research was carried out, eco-labeled hotels were identified. Previous research identified a total of 10 eco-labels in Croatia's tourism industry, namely Blue Flag, Ecocamping, EU Eco-label, Green Mark, Green Key, Sustainable Hotel Certificate, Travelife, White Flag International, Environmentally Friendly, and EarthCheck [106]; however, the focus was placed on those labels that were appropriate for hotels (including Travelife, EU Eco-label, and EarthCheck). During the on-site data collection process, the researchers approached hotel guests. In the on-site data collection process, the respondents were mobile while the researchers were stationary [107]. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, researchers had to abide by several limitations regarding on-site data collection. First, data collection was only allowed during two summer months because protective measures were less rigid due to there being fewer infected people. Additionally, researchers had to wear masks and gloves during the data collection process, and contact between hotel guests and researchers had to be short; therefore, during the conversation with guests, researchers had to provide only basic information about the survey, and the questionnaire had to include the optimal number of questions related to the theme.

The survey was anonymous, and data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire. It was initially designed in Croatian language and then back-translated into four foreign languages: English, German, Italian, and Slovene. Through back-translation, only differences related to the usage of different synonyms were detected; therefore, no changes to the original translations were needed. The questionnaire contained a total of 14 questions divided into sections: climate change issues, eco-labeling and green practices in hotels, edible wild plants, and respondents' socio-demographic characteristics (including age, gender, country of origin, income level, occupation, and traveling party) and trip characteristics (including a number of previous visits and length of stay). A five-point Likert scale was used to measure the constructs.

This paper analyzes the relationship among four construct variables: consumer environmental knowledge, hotel eco-labeling perception (as a form of context-specific environmental knowledge), travel intentions, and pro-environmental behavior (see Appendix A for more details). For the purpose of data processing, statistical methods consisting of descriptive statistics (to provide a general sample description), factor analyses (confirmatory

and explanatory factor analyses), and path analysis were used. As a first step in the data analysis process, the individual items were checked for accuracy of data entry, missing data, and distribution. The missing value cases were replaced using the MCMC method for item imputation. Then, the dataset was randomly split into two parts. The first part of the sample (15% of respondents) was used to conduct the exploratory factor analysis, while the second part (85% of respondents) was utilized to carry out the confirmatory factor analysis. The exploratory factor analysis was performed on ten items measuring hotel eco-labeling perception adapted from [84,108], five items measuring consumer environmental knowledge [84], six items measuring pro-environmental behavior [109–112], and three items measuring travel intentions adapted from [44,108,111,113] using maximum likelihood factor analysis and Promax rotation with an eigenvalue of 1.00 or more to identify potential factors. After the factor structure was established, internal reliability was determined by computing Cronbach's alpha coefficients, which varied from 0.879 to 0.958. From the initial 26 items, 24 items were retained (two items measuring pro-environmental behavior were not retained), and the four factors accounted for 68.438% of the accumulated variance.

4. Results

In total, 1124 questionnaires were used for the analysis purpose. The proportion of male respondents (47.3%) was slightly lower than that of females (52.7%). The respondents were generally between 34 and 44 years of age (26.1%). Most respondents had some form of higher education (65.9%). Generally, they were full-time employees (41.7%). The respondents' country of origin was usually Germany (23.8%) or Austria (10%), and almost 21.3% were domestic tourists. The most frequent monthly net income was between EUR 1000 and EUR 2000 (27.1%). Respondents mostly stayed in the hotel for the first time (63%), but most (70.5%) had already visited the region.

The confirmatory factor analysis was carried out to examine the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the scales measuring consumer environmental knowledge, hotel eco-labeling perception, travel intentions, and pro-environmental behavior (Table 1). All measurement model fit indices were acceptable (χ^2 = 648.96; DF = 164; *p*-value = 0.000; SRMR = 0.04; RMSEA = 0.05; CFI = 0.96; PClose = 0.01), and all indicators were higher than 0.50 and significantly loaded onto their respective latent construct. The estimated composite reliability of each construct (Table 2) exceeded the value of 0.60 and had an extracted variance higher than the recommended threshold of 0.50 [114]. The factor correlations showed that all measurement scales were interrelated; all were positive but were not excessive. The final measurement model included four factors. In general, the means of all observed variables were higher than 3.0. The respondents assessed their environmental knowledge as rather high (item means varied from 4.08 to 4.19). Items measuring pro-environmental behavior also received relatively high scores (item means varied from 3.62 to 3.89), while items measuring hotel eco-labeling perception and travel intentions had similar means.

Table 1. Confirmatory factor analysis results.

Factor	Item	Mean	SD	Standard Load
Hotel Eco-labeling Perception	More favorable opinion of hotels with an eco-label	3.61	0.977	0.865
	Eco-labels inform about the hotel's environmental safety	3.58	0.971	0.856
	Eco-labels are a reliable source of information (including hotel environmental quality and performance)	3.57	0.937	0.809
	Belief in the truthfulness of an eco-label claim about a hotel	3.59	0.921	0.83
	Credibility of eco-labels	3.57	0.962	0.813
	More positive attitude toward the hotel with an eco-label	3.66	0.979	0.855
	Hotels with eco-labels comply with quality environmental standards	3.61	0.933	0.853

Table 1. *Cont.*

Factor	Item	Mean	SD	Standard Load
Environmental Knowledge	Know the meaning of the term "eco-friendly"	4.10	0.899	0.913
	Know the meaning of the term "organic"	4.11	0.909	0.925
	Know the meaning of the term "energy efficient"	4.08	0.944	0.883
	Know the meaning of the term "recycled"	4.19	0.888	0.836
Pro-Environmental Behavior	Low-energy light bulb usage	3.89	0.978	0.838
	Trying to recycle	3.82	0.961	0.798
	Waste amount reduction	3.75	0.921	0.741
	Usage of own shopping bag to reduce the use of plastic bags	3.93	0.988	0.766
	Water-saving device and fixture usage	3.62	0.999	0.644
	Minimizing energy consumption (turning off appliances when not in use)	3.90	0.972	0.804
Travel Intentions	The importance that the hotel has an eco-label	3.54	0.961	0.849
	Willingness to stay at the hotel with an eco-label	3.60	0.961	0.875
Hotel Eco-labeling Perception	Trying to stay at a hotel with an eco-label	3.60	0.964	0.918

Table 2. Scales' reliability and discriminant validity.

	CR	AVE	Hotel Eco-Labeling Perception	Environmental Knowledge	Pro-Environmental Behavior	Travel Intentions
Hotel Eco-labeling Perception	0.944	0.706	**0.840**			
Environmental Knowledge	0.938	0.792	0.276 ***	**0.890**		
Pro-Environmental Behavior	0.895	0.589	0.481 ***	0.665 ***	**0.768**	
Travel Intentions	0.912	0.776	0.694 ***	0.244 ***	0.436 ***	**0.881**

Note: * significant at 0.05, ** significant at 0.01, *** significant at 0.001; bold figures in diagonal are the square root of the AVE.

Structural equation modeling was carried out to explore the relationships between the main constructs in the proposed model (Figure 2). The model fits the data well (Table 3). Environmental knowledge was positively linked to pro-environmental behavior and eco-labeling perception, the eco-labeling perception was positively linked to travel intention and pro-environmental behavior, while pro-environmental behavior was positively linked to travel intention. The study also tested the effect of the control variable, namely the respondents' age, in relation to pro-environmental behavior. Results show that age was statistically significant in relation to pro-environmental behavior ($\beta = 0.097$, $p > 0.01$).

The three mediation hypotheses (H8: pro-environmental behavior mediates the relationship between environmental knowledge and travel intention, H4: eco-labeling perception mediates the relationship between environmental knowledge and travel intention, and H9: eco-labeling perception mediates the relationship between environmental knowledge and pro-environmental behavior) were tested next (Table 4). Through bootstrapping analysis, the indirect effect of environmental knowledge on travel intention and pro-environmental behavior was determined, and the effects were both significant and positive.

Table 3. Structural model results.

H	Relationship	β	R^2	Decision
H1	Environmental knowledge → travel intentions	−0.029		Not supported
H2	Eco-labeling perception → travel intention	0.551 ***	0.444	Supported
H5	Pro-environmental behavior → travel intention	0.199 ***		Supported
H6	Environmental knowledge → pro-environmental behavior	0.578 ***	0.610	Supported
H7	Eco-labeling perception → pro-environmental behavior	0.307 ***		Supported
H3	Environmental knowledge → eco-labeling perception	0.414 ***	0.172	Supported

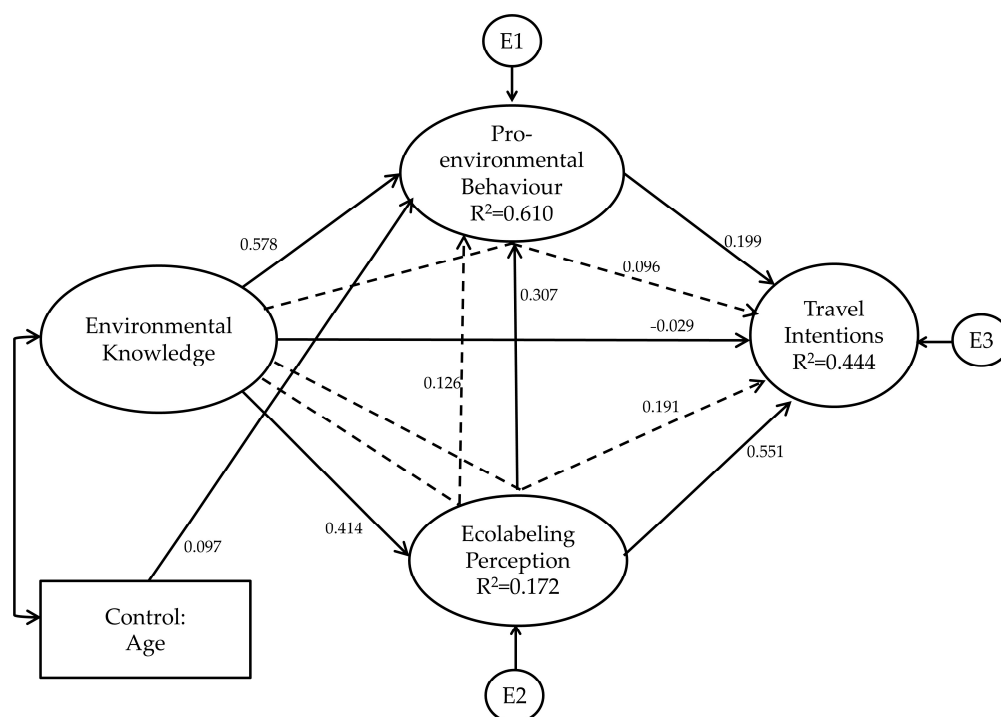Note: * significant at 0.05, ** significant at 0.01, *** significant at 0.001.

Figure 2. Structural equation model output.

Table 4. Indirect effect results.

H	Relationship	β	Confidence Interval		Decision
			Lower	Upper	
H4	Environmental knowledge → eco-labeling perception → travel intention	0.191 **	0.162	0.224	Supported
H8	Environmental knowledge → pro-environmental behavior → travel intention	0.096 **	0.056	0.133	Supported
H9	Environmental knowledge → eco-labeling perception → pro-environmental behavior	0.126 **	0.103	0.151	Supported

Note: * significant at 0.05, ** significant at 0.01, *** significant at 0.001.

5. Discussion

This research explores the tourist decision-making process by considering the relationships among tourists' pro-environmental behavior, environmental knowledge, and eco-labeling perception in relation to travel intention in hotel settings. First, it assesses the applicability of four measurement scales (tourists' pro-environmental behavior, tourists' tourists' general environmental knowledge, tourists' eco-labeling perception, and travel intention related to hotels with eco-labels). Second, it empirically tests the impact of three different antecedents of travel intention in hotel settings.

The four items measuring the consumers' pro-environmental behavior scale proposed by the authors of [109] loaded significantly onto the factor measuring tourists' pro-environmental behavior, partially supporting their findings. However, two items, namely usage of public transport and purchase of a more fuel-efficient car, did not load significantly onto this factor, suggesting that these behavior aspects were not important for measuring tourists' pro-environmental behavior, probably because tourists mostly use their cars to come to Croatia and the purchase of a more fuel-efficient car could be a considerable investment. On the other hand, the usage of water-saving devices [110] and the usage of tourists' own shopping bags [111,112] were confirmed as behavior aspects that were essential components of tourists' pro-environmental behavior. Therefore, this study suggests a scale for measuring tourists' pro-environmental behavior that includes energy, water, and waste management consumer behavior-related aspects that may also be considered cost-effective at the same time. Furthermore, the items used for measuring consumer environmental knowledge proposed in [84] and those used for measuring traveling

intention [44,108,111,113] in hotel settings loaded significantly onto their respective factors, confirming the initially proposed scales. Additionally, using the scale of [84] for measuring consumers' eco-labeling perception coupled with findings from [108], an adapted version of the eco-labeling perception scale centered on hotels as one type of accommodation facility was established. As a result, this study proposes a tourists' eco-labeling perception scale applicable to hotels, i.e., a type of environmental context-specific knowledge scale.

By testing the direct effects that tourists' general environmental knowledge (H1), tourists' eco-labeling perception (H2), and tourists' pro-environmental behavior (H5) have on purchase intention related to hotels with eco-labels, this study determined that tourists' eco-labeling perception and pro-environmental behavior influence their purchase intention, confirming the results of [21,22,87,92]. However, the direct effect of general environmental knowledge on purchase intention was not determined, contrary to the findings of [23,24,76,77]. On the other hand, general environmental knowledge was positively related to tourists' pro-environmental behavior (H6), supporting the findings of [85] and disagreeing with the conclusions of [90]. Additionally, general environmental knowledge was positively related to tourists' eco-labeling perception (H3), opposing the results and assumptions of [83,102] but confirming the relationship between environmental knowledge and eco-labels determined in [86]. Moreover, this study confirms the findings of [21] that eco-labeling influences pro-environmental behavior (H7). By examining indirect effects, this study determined that pro-environmental behavior mediates the relationship between environmental knowledge and purchase intention (H8) and that eco-labeling perception mediates the relationship between environmental knowledge and purchase intention (H4) and the relationship between environmental knowledge and pro-environmental behavior (H9), supporting the implications of [86,90].

6. Conclusions

The tourism industry in the 21st century will face many challenges, one of them being climate change; therefore, tourism business entities need to adapt promptly to these changes. To reduce the negative impact of tourism on the tourist destination environment, a synergy between different stakeholders is required. Tourists play a crucial role in this process because tourism business entities develop and adapt their products and services in accordance with the needs of their target market. This paper tested the direct and indirect effects of pro-environmental behavior, environmental knowledge, and eco-labeling perception in relation to travel intention in hotel settings. This research provided evidence that tourists' general environmental knowledge does not directly influence their travel intentions regarding their stay in hotels with eco-labels; however, it highlighted the fact that this relationship was mediated by tourists' pro-environmental behavior and eco-labeling perception as a form of context-specific environmental knowledge. Although tourists' general environmental knowledge directly influenced their pro-environmental behavior, this relationship was also mediated by eco-labeling perception as a form of context-specific environmental knowledge. Eco-labeling perception and pro-environmental behavior influenced tourists' travel intention to stay in hotels with eco-labels, and both variables were directly impacted by general environmental knowledge. Additionally, the findings suggest that tourists' general pro-environmental behavior is relatively cost-effectively oriented, namely that their behavior is affected by the government that introduces specific measures to reduce human impact on the environment.

The study finding brings forth some implications for tourism managers regarding the tourists' decision-making process that may aid them in adapting to climate changes and making their business models more sustainable. Concern for the environment is a fact that most tourists are aware of since they place some importance on all items measuring their pro-environmental behavior, general environmental knowledge, eco-labeling perception, and purchase intention related to hotels with eco-labels. However, although eco-labeling perception and pro-environmental behavior influenced their intention to stay in hotels with eco-labels, they did not consider this a vital element in their decision-making process.

Tourists' rated their subjective environmental knowledge as relatively high, and even though their general environmental knowledge did not have a direct influence on their purchase intentions, a mediating effect of their pro-environmental behavior and eco-labeling perception suggests that all three purchase intention antecedents have an essential role in the tourists' decision-making process. Therefore, additional efforts to better promote sustainability issues in tourism destinations are advisable if tourism managers would like to support sustainable tourism development in tourist destinations.

This study has certain limitations. Its primary focus was placed on hotels, as one type of many accommodation facilities available to tourists. Since eco-certification programs offer certification possibilities to different kinds of accommodation and catering facilities, future research could center on them to determine if other types of accommodation and catering facilities influence tourists' decision-making process concerning eco-labeling. The sample included tourists that stayed in Adriatic Croatia. Tourism in Adriatic Croatia is highly seasonal, and therefore, the results could not be generalized to Croatia's overall tourism market. Future studies could examine these relationships in different tourism-related settings, such as various types of special-interest tourism forms and tourist destinations. Lastly, the data were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the research was not related to the then-ongoing pandemic, no variables regarding the pandemic were part of the questionnaire. Additionally, there were slight changes regarding respondents' origin, namely country of origin, because ca. 20% of respondents were domestic tourists. That could have had an impact on the results; therefore, the research could be repeated to test if the results differ due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Appendix A. Extract from the Questionnaire

Consumer environmental knowledge
Please assess your knowledge of the following terms
(1—strongly disagree, 2—partially disagree, 3—neutral, 4—somewhat agree, 5—strongly agree)
I know the meaning of the term "bio-degradable"
I know the meaning of the term "recycled"

I know the meaning of the term "eco-friendly"

I know the meaning of the term "organic"

I know the meaning of the term "energy-efficient"

Hotel eco-labeling perception

To what extent do you agree with the following sentences?

(1—totally disagree, 2—partially disagree, 3—neutral, 4—somewhat agree, 5—totally agree)

Most of what eco-labels say about the hotel is true

Eco-labels are a reliable source of information about the environmental quality and performance of a hotel

If an eco-label makes a claim about a hotel, that claim is probably true

I have a more favorable opinion of hotels that feature an eco-label

My attitude toward the hotel is more positive when it features an eco-label

Hotels endorsed by eco-labels comply with quality environmental standards

Eco-labels inform consumers about the environmental safety of a hotel

Traveling intentions

To what extent do you agree with the following sentences regarding your vacation?

(1—totally disagree, 2—partially disagree, 3—neutral, 4—somewhat agree, 5—totally agree)

It is very important to me that the hotel has an eco-label

I am more willing to stay at the hotel, which has an eco-label

I will make an effort to stay at a hotel that has an eco-label

Pro-environmental behavior

To what extent do you agree with the following sentences?

(1—totally disagree, 2—partially disagree, 3—neutral, 4—somewhat agree, 5—totally agree)

I have bought a more fuel efficient car

I often use public transport

I try to recycle as much as possible

I reduced the amount of waste I used to produce

I use low-energy light bulbs

I turn off lights/fans/electrical appliances when they are not in use

I use water-saving devices and fixtures

I bring my shopping bag to the store to reduce the use of plastic bags

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