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**CONSUMERS' PERCEPTIONS OF TRAVEL AGENCIES' ENVIRONMENTAL
SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATION**

Finnish tourists traveling to Greece for package tours

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ABSTRACT

Sustainability has become a global raising trend, which has also reached the tourism industry: travelers are increasingly searching for a way to minimize the environmental and social impacts of their travels. Sustainability communication is a way for companies to inform consumers about the companies' actions regarding their sustainability practices. This thesis evaluates consumers' perceptions of environmental sustainability communication in the context of travel agencies.

This research examines the effectiveness of the environmental sustainability communication of the anonymous commissioner company of the thesis. The aim of this thesis is to analyze how the sustainability communication of this company is perceived by its customers.

The theoretical framework of the thesis is based on the Theory of Reasoned Action supported by academic literature from the fields of sustainable tourism and green marketing. The collection of the research data was conducted with a mixed-method approach, by conducting a questionnaire that included both quantitative and open-ended text questions. The sample of the study was focused on Finnish tourists traveling to Greece with the commissioner company's package tours.

The questionnaire conducted in the Webropol platform gained 487 responses. The results of the study indicate that different demographic variables, such as gender and the respondents' subjective environmental awareness, seem to impact the way respondents react to sustainability communication and thus, their rebooking and word-of-mouth intentions. Furthermore, while looking at the results, it can be noticed that the respondents connect values such as locality, responsibility and respect for nature with travel agencies' sustainability communication.

Keywords: sustainability, environmental awareness, travel agencies, package tours, tourism

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research phenomenon

Sustainability has become a critical issue globally; for instance, United Nations has listed its Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) to emphasize the growing awareness of sustainability and demand for environmentally and socially responsible practices (United Nations, 2024). The SDG's include goals related to different aspects of sustainability, such as clean water and energy, gender equality and economic growth (United Nations, 2024). Businesses across different industries, including the travel industry, have started to adapt to these shifts by integrating sustainability as a part of their operations and communication strategies.

Travelers nowadays are increasingly aware of the environmental impact of traveling and are seeking more ethical travel options. Many travelers have a desire to explore the world with minimal environmental impact but also simultaneously respecting the local culture and community. Digitalization and the rise of social media has led to the fact that information about sustainable tourism is more easily accessible. In addition, digitalization has enabled consumers to gather information about traveling from online channels. Advances in technology have forced businesses into a process of digital transformation, also in the tourism and hospitality industry (Bekele & Raj, 2025, p. 895).

As the number of online travel agencies has increased, the amount of traditional travel agencies has simultaneously decreased (Abrate et al., 2020, p. 777). Therefore, according to Abrate et al. (2020, p. 777), travel agencies need to rethink their role in the constantly changing field of tourism and hospitality. Furthermore, while acknowledging the changes in customer needs, travel agencies have started to consider the sustainability of their activities. Therefore, travel agencies are increasingly focusing on their environmental and social responsibilities.

Effective communication is critical for businesses. Poor communication about sustainability matters can lead to, for example, accusations of greenwashing (Montgomery et al., 2023), while clear and authentic communication about sustainability matters can enhance consumers' trust (Monfort et al., 2025, p. 6). According to Szabo and Webster (2021, p. 719),

greenwashing affects companies' profitability and results in ethical harm. In addition, Chen and Chang (2013) found in their study that greenwashing can significantly increase consumer skepticism and reduce trust in green claims. Therefore, it is important for businesses to design their sustainability communication in a more transparent and authentic way.

Sustainability communication (SC) is a way of spreading knowledge to the consumers about the companies' actions regarding their sustainability practices. According to Kapoor et al. (2021, p. 950), the aim of sustainability communication is to "inform travelers about the availability of sustainable products and services, demonstrate how these offerings meet the sustainability criteria and to stimulate pro-sustainable purchases".

Another widely used term is green marketing; according to Chan (2014, p. 915) green marketing is a way of appealing to the needs and desires of customers who are concerned about environmental issues. According to Szabo & Webster (2021, p. 719), green marketing strategies can help companies to gain competitive advantage and appeal to consumers that are ecologically conscious.

The negative environmental effects of tourism include, for instance, the emissions from transportation, the garbage created by visitors, and the damage caused to landscape (Mason, 2015, p. 31). However, according to Mason (2015, p. 34) the impacts of tourism are not always solely either positive or negative, since the impacts of tourism are complex and often consist of economic, social and environmental elements combined.

To mitigate the harmful impacts of tourism, different businesses in the industry have begun to design their product and service offering in a more sustainable and responsible way (Moscardo & Murphy, 2014, p. 2538). There are multiple different ways for travel companies to include sustainability as a part of their practices. For instance, carbon offset programs, partnerships with charitable organizations, and different sustainability certifications are examples of different ways to include sustainability to the travel companies' practices.

1.2 Research gap

The topic of sustainability communication has grown significantly in the past 15 years, and it is becoming an important research topic in the field of marketing (Braga et al., 2024, p.

306). Sustainability communication plays an important role in corporate sustainable development (Braga et al., 2024, p. 295). For instance, Braga et al. (2024, p. 305) point out that examining the impact of sustainability communication in the attitudes and behavioral changes of consumers should be examined more thoroughly in the future.

Sustainability and its promotion as online communication has been researched in the latest years. In their literature review, Marchi et al. (2024, p. 873) analyze the online communication about sustainable tourism and the stakeholders involved in the communication. Marchi et al. (2024, p. 881) suggest that future research on the topic could examine how the communication strategies are adopted to transfer destination sustainability regarding policies and plans.

Bogren and Sörensson (2021) have examined the topic of sustainability communication in the field of tourism. In their article, Bogren and Sörensson (2021, p. 488) analyzed how Swedish-based tourism companies communicate about their sustainability initiatives. In this research, it was found out that sustainability is a value that can be communicated to the stakeholders (Bogren & Sörensson, 2021, p. 488). The authors suggest that tourism businesses should communicate their sustainability initiatives to their stakeholders, to be able to create value (Bogren & Sörensson, 2021, p. 475).

Research in the field of sustainability communication is still underdeveloped, especially regarding the factors that make the sustainability messages effective (Tölkes, 2018, pp. 10-11). The focus of the research in the field of tourism is often on marketing green hotels and environmental sustainability, excluding the other dimensions of sustainability (Tölkes, 2018, pp. 12-13). Furthermore, there is limited amount of research on the role of sustainability communication on the attitude-behavior gap among travelers (Tölkes, 2018, pp. 19-20).

Christina Tölkes (2020, p. 126), has found out that tour-operators' communication about sustainability is not as impactful as it could be. To reach the potential customer segments with the help of sustainability communication, sustainability messages should be designed as subjectively relevant, visible and value-consistent (Tölkes, 2020, p. 126).

Melo and de Farias (2018, p. 36) have examined the impact of sustainability communication in the context of consumers' intention to travel to a tourist destination. In their research, Melo and de Farias (2018, p. 36) analyzed how the rational and hedonic nature of sustainability messages moderated with the consumers' emotions, involvement and environmental awareness impacted their intention to travel to a tourist destination. The

results of the study show that consumers with high ecological awareness are more responsive to rational sustainability messages, while those with low ecological awareness are more responsive to hedonic appeals (Melo & de Farias, 2018, p. 42). The authors suggest that future research on the topic would include other tourism contexts and different types of sustainability messages (Melo & de Farias, 2018, p. 42).

More specifically, there is a lack of research in the field of travel agencies' sustainability connected with trust, word-of-mouth intention and repurchase intention (Kusumawati et al., 2020, p. 273). There is also a lack of research about environmental awareness in relation to sustainability and behavior intention (Kusumawati et al., 2020, p. 273).

Considering these gaps in the existing literature mentioned above, this study contributes to the body of knowledge about sustainability and environmental awareness in the context of travel agencies. The aim is to produce information that not only fills in a gap in the research field, but also helps the chosen anonymous commissioner company to identify effective communication strategies. This is to help the company to reach the potential market segment with their sustainability communication.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The aim of the study is to analyze how sustainability communication of the chosen case company is perceived by its customers. Furthermore, the goal is to evaluate the sustainability communication's influence on booking decisions in the context of package holidays. In addition, the third purpose of the study is to identify effective sustainability communication strategies for travel agencies.

In other words, this study gains knowledge about the values and orientations of the case company's customers, for the company to be able to develop their sustainability communication. The purpose is to find out what kind of information about environmental sustainability the customers of the company value while making purchase decisions on package holidays.

The information gained from this study may be used to develop a more effective sustainability communication strategy for the chosen case company and in general, to find out what kind of information about environmental sustainability consumers tend to pay

attention to. The societal purpose of the study is to encourage consumers to make more sustainable decisions while traveling.

The sample of the study consists of 487 respondents. The sample of the study was limited to the chosen company's customer base that had booked a package holiday to Greece. The aim was to examine the customers traveling to a specific country, since the company has multiple destinations around the world. This also allowed to ask destination-specific questions in the questionnaire. These include questions about for example the climate tax in Greece.

Looking at the background of the research phenomenon and the lack in the previous research about this specific phenomenon, the following research questions were created based on the theoretical framework of the research:

RQ1: What are the key factors that influence consumers' perceptions of environmental sustainability communication, and how do the consumers' different demographic characteristics influence these perceptions?

RQ2: What kind of information about environmental sustainability matters do consumers value while booking a package holiday through a travel agency?

This study has a mixed-method approach to the subject, and therefore the first research question will be answered by using quantitative research methods. Correspondently, the latter will be addressed with qualitative research methods, which, in this case, will be the open-ended questions included in the structured questionnaire.

To support the research questions for the study, the following research objectives were created:

1. to analyze how sustainability communication of the chosen commissioner travel agency is perceived by its customers
2. to evaluate the sustainability communication's impact on booking decisions in the context of travel agencies
3. to recognize what kind of information about environmental sustainability the consumers value whilst booking a package holiday

1.4 Structure of the study

This study is composed of eight main chapters. In the introduction of the study, the thematical background with the previous research and the purpose of the study are outlined. Furthermore, the first chapter of the study also briefly introduces the anonymous commissioner company of the thesis.

The second chapter focuses on the theoretical framework of the study; this includes an introduction to the concepts of sustainable tourism, environmental awareness and word-of-mouth intention. It also provides information about previous research in the fields of sustainability communication and green marketing.

The third chapter focuses on the research background and the hypotheses of the study, while the fourth chapter emphasizes the methodology of the study; in other words, explains how the study was conducted. The fifth chapter is dedicated to the statistical analysis - the quantitative results of the study. Furthermore, the sixth chapter is focused on the qualitative results of the study, based on the open-ended questions from the structured questionnaire.

The seventh chapter, discussion, covers results of both the quantitative and the qualitative analysis in relation to current academic literature. Lastly, the eighth chapter of the study – conclusion – culminates the findings of the research; it also includes the limitations and the managerial implications of the study.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Previous studies on sustainable tourism

The topic of sustainable tourism has become popular among researchers since the 1980s (Liu, 2003, p. 459). The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines sustainable tourism development as the following: “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities” (UNWTO, 2024). In other words, sustainable tourism could be defined as a form of tourism where the current travelers also take the future travelers into consideration.

The worldwide tourism supply chains have been mentioned to create approximately eight percent of the global carbon emissions (Khan et al., 2021, p. 1). According to Moisey et al. (2008, p. 291), the reaction of the tourism industry to its contribution to global carbon emissions will be one of the key issues that will describe the industry’s dedication to a more sustainable environment.

Tiago et al. (2021, p. 27) argue that the relevance of sustainability in the field of tourism is inevitable. According to Tiago et al. (2021, p. 27), it has been realized that both local and global movement towards a more sustainable future in tourism is necessary, which has led to the development of different kinds of strategies, plans and principles in different tourism organizations. Even though tourism businesses have increased the aspect of sustainability in the range of their offerings, not all companies communicate about their achievements in sustainability (Tiago et al., 2021, p. 27).

The impacts of sustainable tourism can be categorized into different elements. For instance, Hall and Lew have categorized the impacts in three dimensions, which are the following: economic, socio-cultural and the environmental and natural resource dimension (Hall & Lew, 2009, p. 92). These dimensions are illustrated visually in Figure 1. According to Hall and Lew (2009, p. 92) the aim of environmental sustainability is to maintain the capacities of the biophysical surroundings. Economic sustainability aims to maintain the capital and ensure monetary equality, while social sustainability refers to ensuring capabilities of wellbeing not only for the present, but also the future generations (Hall & Lew, 2009, p. 92).

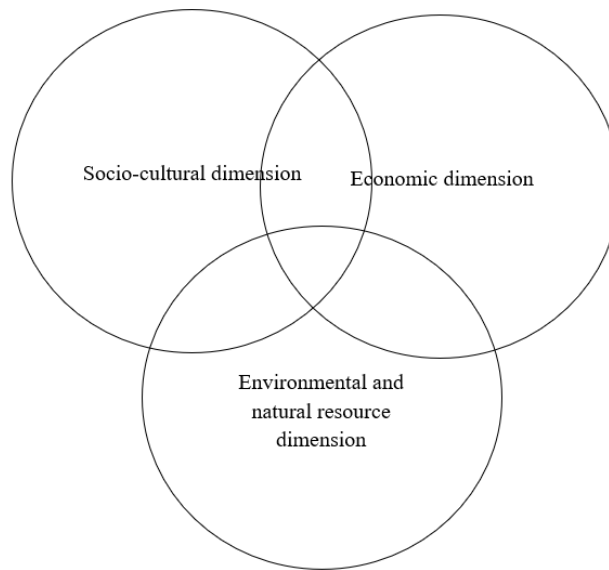


Figure 1. The dimensions of sustainable tourism. Adapted and simplified from Hall and Lew (2009, p. 70).

Tourism impacts the local economy and community in the tourism destinations; the development of tourism causes both direct and indirect benefits to the local communities (Bohdanowicz & Zientara, 2009, p. 147). Bohdanowicz and Zientara (2009, p. 147) state in their article that international hotel businesses have a significant role in the development of the host communities. It is difficult to quantify how tourism affects the local communities, since it depends on many different factors (Bohdanowicz & Zientara, 2009, p. 148).

One way to communicate regarding businesses' commitments towards sustainable development are different certifications about sustainability. According to Dragomir et al. (2020, p. 119), an ecotourism certification refers to a procedure that a business undergoes and thus obtains a written guarantee that the item meets specific standards. The aim of the sustainability certification is to show that the specific requirements that are set for the certification are achieved (Dragomir et al., 2020, p. 119). According to Rodriguez-Garcia et al. (2023, p. 4), based on the publication of Sustainable Hospitality Alliance, the most recognized international sustainability certifications for accommodation establishments include for instance Earth Check, Green Globe, Green Key and Travelife.

Environmental awareness as a concept refers to the perspectives of the tourists about environmental conservation leading towards a higher quality of life (Khan et al. 2022, p. 75).

According to Khan et al. (2022, p. 76), the environmental awareness of tourists can affect sustainability because of its relationship with the elements of sustainability.

Furthermore, Mazhenova et al. (2016) have researched the topic of environmental awareness from the point of view of international tourists' perspectives towards green hotels' environmental responsibility and sustainability programs. In their study, Mazhenova et al. (2016) found that environmental awareness of the international tourists acts as a predictor, thus modifies their attitudes and therefore impacts their purchasing behavior. The authors' findings suggest that environmental awareness should be considered as an important concept while strategizing the future of the tourism and hospitality, especially the lodging industry (Mazhenova et al. 2016, p. 143). In addition, the findings suggest that the tourists' awareness about sustainability matters should be enhanced by providing detailed information about the businesses green initiatives and activities; that will help to target the consumers who are concerned about the surrounding environment (Mazhenova et al., 2016, p. 144).

Moreover, Lee and Moscardo (2005) have analyzed tourists' environmental attitudes and behavioral intentions in the context of environmentally friendly tourism resorts. The authors' findings suggest that ecologically friendly tourism resorts should provide more efficient communication and possibilities for the tourists to gain knowledge about sustainability matters (Lee & Moscardo, 2005, p. 563). It was also found that satisfaction has a relationship with environmental awareness and involvement, which also emphasizes the importance of making the tourists aware of sustainable behavior possibilities (Lee & Moscardo, 2005, p. 563).

Sustainable tourism can and should be measured in different ways (Miller & Torres-Delgado, 2023). In their article, Miller and Torres-Delgado (2023) stated why and how sustainable tourism should be measured with different kinds of indicators. According to the authors, it is crucial to consider why the measurements are being made; it is also important to recognize that the indicators and measurements should not act as only guidelines for the development of sustainable tourism (Miller & Torres-Delgado, 2023, p. 1493). It is important to gain accurate data, but the crucial part is to understand how the data can be exploited and applied to its actual purpose (Miller & Torres-Delgado, 2023, p. 1493); which is, in this case, the sustainable development of the tourism and hospitality industry.

2.2 Previous studies on sustainability communication and green marketing

Dolnicar and Ring (2014, p. 44) have examined the development of tourism marketing. In their literature review, Dolnicar and Ring defined tourism marketing as the following, based on the definition of marketing by Grönroos (2006, p. 407) and the World Tourism Organization's definition of tourism:

customer focus that permeates organizational functions and processes and is geared towards, 1) making promises relating to products and services required when travelling to and staying in places outside one's usual environment for leisure, business and other purposes for less than one year; 2) enabling the fulfilment of individual expectations created by such promises; and 3) fulfilling such expectations through support to customers' value-generating processes (Dolnicar & Ring, 2014, p. 44)

In other words, tourism marketing refers to making promises regarding travel experiences, ensuring that those experiences meet the promises made and lastly, to helping customers to enjoy and create value during their travels.

Since sustainability is a theme that concerns businesses of all fields, many companies have started to integrate sustainability as part of their communication strategies. Sustainability communication is an emerging topic in tourism research (Tölkes, 2018, p. 19). Voci & Karmasin (2024, p. 16) define the concept of sustainability communication as "a process in which arguments, options for action and/or (contrasting) positions on social development are discussed forward-looking from an economic, ecological, social and cultural view".

Sustainability communication (SC) has been approached from multiple theories, research approaches and methods from different scientific fields such as marketing and advertising (Golob et al., 2023, p. 49). By researching the topic of sustainability communication, current environmental and business issues can be addressed (Golob et al., 2023, p. 49). Since nowadays, tourists are increasingly interested in traveling sustainably, it is important that communication about sustainability to the consumers is clear, effective and persuasive. According to Christina Tölkes (2018, p. 10), sustainability communication aims to increase the consumers' awareness about sustainable travel products, to inform consumers about these products meeting their needs and to encourage consumers to make pro-sustainable purchases.

Sustainability communication can be approached from different kinds of perspectives. Font and McCabe state in their article that since the tourism industry is now in a turning point, there is a growing need to create more sustainable tourism offerings that can be marketed to consumers in a successful way (Font & McCabe, 2017, p. 879). According to Font and McCabe (2017, p. 872) sustainability marketing in the field of tourism can be viewed from two perspectives: market development and product development approaches. The aim of the market development approach is to increase the amount of sustainable products to a small group of environmentally aware consumers, while focusing on changing consumer behavior. The product development approach, however, refers to making regular products more sustainable and selling them to all consumers (Font & McCabe, 2017, p. 872).

Another term used widely along sustainability communication is the concept of green marketing. Correia et al. (2023, p. 1) have researched if the consumers' attention to green marketing communication of different companies affects their green purchase behavior. According to Correia et. al, there is no specific definition for the term "green marketing" (Correia et al., 2023, p. 2). However, there are studies where detailed definitions for this concept have been developed.

The first definition that can be associated with the concept of green marketing dates to the 1970s, and over time, more and more definitions have been provided and developed for the concept (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017, p. 1264). According to Dangelico and Vocalelli (2017, p. 1265) there are several definitions of green marketing and related concepts.

In their literature review, Dangelico and Vocalelli (2017, p. 1274) differentiate the concepts of green marketing and greenwashing from each other. They define green marketing as the following: marketing with "environmental sustainability as the third aim beyond consumers' satisfaction and company profitability". Greenwashing is defined as follows: "positive communication about environmental performance despite poor environmental performance" (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017, p. 1274). To clarify, green marketing and greenwashing, despite the similar nature of the names of the concepts, are not synonyms, and the concepts do have different meanings.

Green marketing gives value not only to the consumers, but also to the companies and to their stakeholders. Chen and Chang (2012, p. 503) pointed out five reasons why businesses should start to practice green marketing: 1) to take advantage of green opportunities, 2) to build corporate images, 3) to increase product value, 4) to enhance competitive advantages

and 5) to take part in environmental trends. According to Chen and Chang (2012, p. 503), since green products are more popularly sold in the market, green marketing has also increased its importance lately.

Furthermore, the benefits of green marketing to the businesses has become a popular research topic in the latest years. According to Chung (2020, p. 734), green marketing can help consumers to understand the green value of different businesses; it can also help businesses to target green-enthusiast consumers. Green marketing strategies can also help the companies to stand out from their competitors and to help the companies to change their business image (Chung, 2020, p. 734). Furthermore, green marketing helps to achieve loyalty among customers (Chung, 2020, p. 735).

Villarino and Font (2015, p. 326) argue that some businesses with a strong green focus sometimes underline some aspect of their sustainability credentials rather than responding to the needs of the customers, which can be called as the “sustainability marketing myopia”. According to Villarino and Font (2015, p. 333) the sustainability marketing myopia is a result against the possible accusations of greenwashing; therefore, many companies tend to avoid negative attention from the consumers by for example only focusing on functional and informative content rather than being customer focused. While looking at sustainability marketing messages, Villarino and Font (2015, p. 332) found that significant improvements could be made to sustainability communication; the sustainability actions are often emphasized, but the persuasiveness of the sustainability messages is often lacking in the companies’ marketing communication.

Green marketing has also been researched in the context of tourism. According to Khan et al. (2021, p. 1), worldwide, the shift towards more sustainable consumption practices have pushed companies to develop green product branding and expand the green product lifecycles to mitigate the effects of international tourism. For instance, Chin et al. (2018) have analyzed tourists’ perspectives towards green marketing tools in the context of rural tourist destinations. In their article, Chin et al. (2018, p. 273) recognized that there are three elements of green marketing tools that affect the green buying behavior of tourists in rural tourist destinations. The elements of green marketing tools are the following: eco-brand, eco-label and environmental, or green advertisement. It was found that these tools have an effect on the rural tourists’ attitudes and consequently, their green buying behaviors (Chin et al., 2018, p. 273).

The marketing of sustainable tourism has also been viewed from the perspective of consumers' value orientation. For instance, Vinzenz et al. (2019) have analyzed the role that the consumers' value orientation, be it biospheric-altruistic or self-enhancement, plays on their reactions towards sustainable tourism marketing messages. The first value orientation, biospheric-altruistic, refers to the consumers with high knowledge about sustainability matters, while the latter refers to the consumers who tend to react to a self-referential, positive marketing messages related to sustainability (Vinzenz et al., 2019, p. 1664). For the businesses to reach a broader group of consumers with their marketing strategies, the marketing messages should be designed in a way that the consumers' value-orientations are also acknowledged (Vinzenz et al., 2019, p. 1677).

The rise of social media has changed the way consumers behave and gain information about products and services online. Saeed et al. (2019, p. 14) have researched how information about sustainability available on social media influences consumers' purchase behavior. In the research, the authors found out that social media can influence the consumers purchase intention (Saeed et al., 2019, p. 14). It was also found out that consumers who depend on social media are more likely to purchase sustainable products (Saeed et al., 2019, p. 14).

Thus, in the era of social media and digitalization, it is important to design marketing communication in an appealing and effective way. Hanna et al. (2018, p. 36) researched how consumers interpret and process the marketing communication of sustainability messages. According to Hanna et al. (2018) the communication about sustainability should emphasize the overall experience and benefits of travel, rather than trying to convince the consumer with sustainability-focused messages. This approach is more effective in shaping the purchasing decisions of the consumers (Hanna et al., 2018).

Akram et al. (2024, p. 453) examined the roles of green marketing tools, such as green advertising and eco-labelling, and green motives on the travelers' purchase intention within the context of sustainable tourism destinations. In their article, Akram et al. (2024, p. 453) have defined green marketing as the following: "strategic process of creating and advertising goods or services to minimize any adverse effects on the natural environment". The authors recognized that previous research on the field has shown that environmentally friendly marketing tools significantly influence the green buying decisions of the customers (Akram et al., 2024, p. 453). In their quantitative research conducted in China and India, Akram et

al., (2024, p. 453) found out that green marketing tools positively affect green brand image and trust.

Furthermore, the role of green marketing in consumers' purchase decisions has been gaining scientific attention in the latest years. For instance, Tan et al. (2022) have examined the topic from the perspective of the effect of green marketing elements in the consumers' purchase intentions. In their research, Tan et al. (2022, p. 10) found that the different components of green marketing, including green brand knowledge, attitude and environmental knowledge, do have a meaningful impact on consumers' purchase intentions. It was also found that these components have an impact on green image and green trust (Tan et al., 2022, p. 11).

The role of green marketing tools in shaping travelers' environmentally friendly attitudes and behavior has also been researched in the latest years. For instance, Šagovnović and Stamenković (2023) have analyzed the impact of green marketing tools, more specifically the green branding and packaging, in travelers' eco-friendly attitudes and consequently, their actual behavior. The authors found that tourists' eco-friendly attitudes positively affects their behavior. To enhance tourists' positive attitudes about the environment, businesses should design their marketing communication in a way that it emphasizes how the tourism destination conserves the environment and its natural resources (Šagovnović & Stamenković, 2023, p. 495).

2.3 Previous research on consumers' purchase behavior in the context of tourism

The nature of consumer behavior in tourism is complex, since the purchase decision includes different services and emotional aspects (Pinto & Castro, 2019, pp. 8-9). However, understanding the consumer behavior of tourists is one of the key issues in the field; by acknowledging the motivations behind the tourists' purchase processes, the service providers can better address the needs of the tourists (Pinto & Castro, 2019, p. 8). This also helps the businesses to design their marketing communication in a way that the marketing responds to the wishes of the consumers (Pinto & Castro, 2019, p. 8). According to Pinto and Castro (2019, p. 18), information about the consumers' purchase decision and the market segments can help the marketers to identify efficient strategies in the context of online travel agencies.

Tourists' purchase behavior is a topic that has great managerial implications; it is gaining popularity among the researchers in the field (Wang & Li, 2022, p. 1). According to the quantitative analysis conducted by Wang and Li (2022, p. 6), the purchase intention and the purchase behavior are generated in different ways; the purchase intention is created more rationally, while the purchase behavior is generated more emotionally and context-specifically. To clarify, purchase intention and purchase behavior refer to two different activities.

The topics of sustainable consumption and green purchase behavior have also gained popularity as research topics in the field of tourism and hospitality. For instance, Nekmahmud et al. (2022) have analyzed the topic of green purchase behavior and sustainable consumption from the point of view of European and non-European tourists. In their study, Nekmahmud et al. (2022, p. 12) noticed that there is a relationship between tourists' internal perceptions and behavior towards purchasing both green products and services. The authors suggest that the focus in service development should shift towards designing more environmentally sustainable services (Nekmahmud et al., 2022, p. 12).

In the last couple of decades, the phenomenon of e-commerce in tourism has grown rapidly. E-commerce in the field of tourism and hospitality can only be beneficial if the online purchase behavior of tourists is researched and acknowledged (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2013, p. 505). The topic of online travel booking has interested researchers in the field of tourism in the latest decades, and there is a large amount of research conducted about the topic (Amaro & Duarte, 2013, p. 780). Nunkoo and Ramissoon (2013) have researched the topic of tourists' attitudes and their connection towards e-purchasing intentions. The authors found that tourists' attitudes towards e-commerce can act as an explanation for e-purchasing intentions. Therefore, tourism service providers should design their e-commerce in a way that improves the tourists' attitudes towards e-commerce; this can be done by, for example, improving the perceived functionality, reducing the feeling of risks and enhancing the tourists' trust in e-purchasing. (Nunkoo & Ramissoon, 2013, p. 521)

Trust plays a crucial role in the purchase decisions of consumers. Bonsón Ponte et al. (2015, p. 286) found in their research that the consumers' perceived value and trust have an impact on their online purchase intentions. The perception of trust among consumers consists of the perceived quality of the information provided, and the perceived feeling of security (Bonsón Ponte et al., 2015, p. 286). The results of the study suggest that to enhance the perceived

trust in consumers, the tourism businesses should provide valid and timely information in their websites; in addition, the role of perceived security should be considered while designing online platforms (Bonsón Ponte et al., 2015, p. 299).

Authenticity and source credibility have also been found to be important factors in developing consumer trust in tourists' online travel agency booking process. For instance, Chen et al. (2022, p. 572) found in their study that consumers' perceptions of source credibility play an important role in building trust towards both the tourism destination, and the online booking platform. It was also found that authenticity can act as an explanator for the feeling of source credibility among consumers (Chen et al., 2022, p. 572).

In addition, Jhawar et al. (2024) have examined the effect of materialism in tourists' environmentally friendly purchase behavior. The findings of the study suggest that the materialistic nature of travelers does not impact their environmental responsibility (Jhawar et al., 2024, p. 852). Thus, tourism businesses should provide information and educate the tourists about environmental issues and promote sustainable consumption in tourism destinations (Jhawar et al., 2024, p. 852).

Han (2021) has analyzed the theories and concepts related to sustainable consumer behavior in tourism and hospitality industry. In their literature review, Han (2021, p. 1036) recognized ten key elements that impact environmentally sustainable consumer behavior. Those key elements are illustrated in Figure 2. According to Han (2021, p. 1035), researchers in the field of tourism have a meaningful role in mitigating the environmental effects of consumer behavior by promoting a more environmentally sustainable way of consumption.

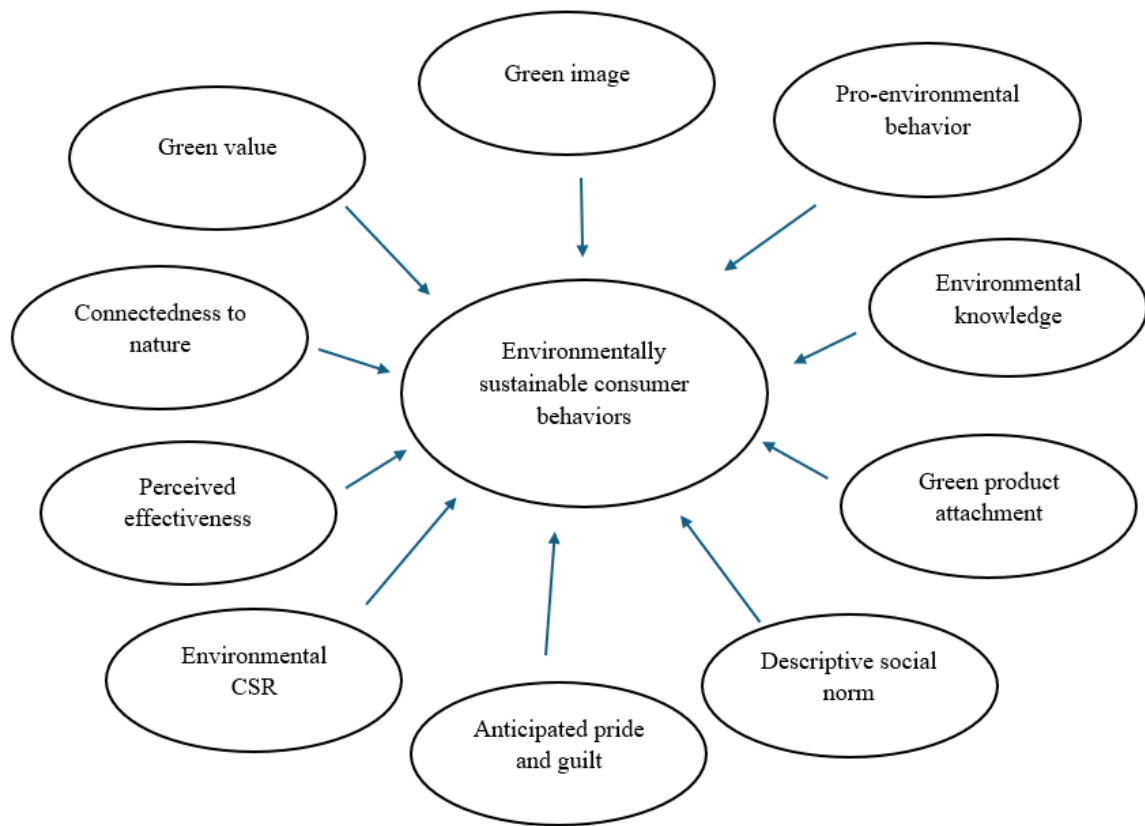


Figure 2. Categorization of the key elements of environmentally sustainable consumer behaviors. Source: Han, 2021, p. 1028.

Travel agencies can act as vanguards for the development of sustainable tourism. More specifically, Sung et al. (2021) have researched the topic of green trust's impact on the travel agencies' intentions to market environmentally friendly tours for sustainable development. The authors state that travel agencies' commitment towards developing low-carbon tourism can be a crucial way to help mitigate carbon emissions (Sung et al., 2021, p. 1195). In their research, Sung et al. (2021, p. 1196) encourage marketers to design low-carbon marketing strategies to improve their competitiveness.

The theoretical framework of this study includes scientific literature from the fields of sustainable tourism, sustainability communication and green marketing. In this thesis, the academical literature related to these topics will be the base of mixed-method research and the questionnaire that was created based on the theoretical framework.

Table 1. Definitions of the key constructs used in this thesis.

Concept	Definition	Source
<i>Environmental awareness</i>	Individuals' perspectives about environmental matters and environmental conservation; perspectives regarding conserving the surroundings for better living	Khan et al., 2022, p. 76 Kusumawati et al., 2020, p. 276
<i>Sustainable tourism</i>	Tourism that addresses the needs of the visitors, the industry, the environment and the local community; consists of impacts that can be categorized into three dimensions; economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts	UNWTO, 2024 Hall & Lew, 2009, p. 92
<i>Tourism marketing</i>	Marketing that includes making promises regarding tourism products and services, fulfilling those promises and supporting customers' value-creation processes	Dolnicar & Ring, 2014, p. 44; based on the definition of marketing by Grönroos (2006, p. 407) and the UNWTO's definition of tourism
<i>Sustainability communication</i>	A process where social development is acknowledged from economic, environmental, social and cultural viewpoints; communication which aims to increase awareness about sustainable travel products and encourages consumers to make pro-sustainable choices while traveling	Voci & Karmasin, 2024, p. 16 Tölkes, 2018, p. 10
<i>Green marketing</i>	Marketing with an emphasis on environmental sustainability while acknowledging customer satisfaction and business profitability; communication with a strategic aim to minimize the product and service offerings' impacts on the natural environment	Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017, p. 1274 Akram et al., 2024, p. 453
<i>Greenwashing</i>	Communication about environmental performance in a positive way, without actual evidence of environmentally sustainable actions	Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017, p. 1274

Table 1 summarizes the key constructs of this thesis. The constructs mentioned in the table form the theoretical framework of the study, and act as a base for the mixed-method research and the questionnaire that was created to collect the research data. The purpose of the table is to distinguish the different sustainability- and marketing-related concepts from each other, since despite the similar names of the concepts, the concepts do have different meanings attached to them.

3. RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

3.1. Research approach and paradigm

According to Pansiri (2006, p. 223), there is a need for mixed-method type of research in the field of tourism. Combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods can help to gain knowledge about complicated phenomena that can be faced in tourism research (Pansiri, 2006, p. 223). Understanding the importance of research paradigms plays a crucial role in mixed method research, since that forms the base for both the research planning and also the interpretation of the findings of the study (Khoo-Lattimore et al., 2019, p. 1543). According to Khoo-Lattimore et al. (2019, p. 1533), the use of mixed-method approach in research has a great number of different advantages, and this has also been continuously discussed by multiple researchers in the field. The researchers that tend to use mixed-method approaches to their research processes have, for instance, recommended post positivism, pragmatism and constructivism as suitable paradigms for this type of research (Khoo-Lattimore et al., 2019, p. 1540).

3.2 Theoretical background: Theory of Reasoned Action

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) created by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) is a scientific model explaining how individuals' attitudes and social norms affect their behavioral intentions, which then impacts their actual behavior. TRA is a widely used behavioral theory, especially in the fields of social psychology and consumer behavior. According to Fishbein and Ajzen, an individual's intention to perform a behavior is the most important determinant of the behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

In TRA, the intention of the individual is shaped by two key factors, which are 1) attitude towards the behavior and 2) perceived social norm. The first factor can be defined as the individual's positive or negative evaluation about performing the behavior. This is based on the thoughts about the possible outcomes of the behavior and the evaluations of those outcomes (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010, pp. 368-369). The second factor is the social norm, which refers to the social pressure perceived by the individual to perform or not to perform

the behavior. This depends on the individual's beliefs about what others think about their engagement in this specific behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010, pp. 368-369). To summarize, the Theory of Reasoned Action is based on the idea that individuals make rational decisions based on the available information and that their behavior is under voluntary control (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

The Theory of Reasoned Action has been applied widely to different types of research topics, and it has also been applied to the context of tourism. For instance, Poudel and Niyaupane (2017) have examined the environmentally responsible behavior of ecotourists from the approach of the Theory of Reasoned Action. In their study, Poudel and Niyaupane (2017, p. 348) found that the Theory of Reasoned Action can be used to explain ecotourists' environmental behavior. It was also found that the reasoned action model can act as a helpful tool in promoting environmentally responsible behavior for consumers (Poudel & Niyaupane, 2017, p. 349).

In addition, this theory can be applied to the concept of tourists' revisit intention. For instance, Song et al. (2022, p. 1654) have researched the topic of Chinese golf tourists' revisit intention by applying the Theory of Reasoned Action to find out about the golfers' perceptions about golf-course employees and furthermore, their revisit intentions. In their study, Song et al. (2022, p. 1668) found that the golfers' perceptions of the employee attitudes has an impact on both the golf tourists' place attachment and their intentions for revisiting the destination.

Furthermore, the Theory of Reasoned Action has also been utilized in the context of hotels' online booking systems. For example, Langroudi et al. (2025) have examined the relationships between hotel websites' characteristics and consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions. In their study, Langroudi et al. (2025, p. 59) applied the Theory of Reasoned Action to their research context by providing different antecedents of attitudes towards online hotel purchases, which were acting as drivers to use different kinds of online hotel booking systems. As a result of the study, it was found that usefulness, playfulness, clear communication and compatibility have a positive impact on the consumers' attitudes towards online hotel booking systems (Langroudi et al., 2025, p. 59).

3.3 Hypotheses of the research

The following research hypotheses were formed based on the objectives of the study. The first hypothesis is about the impact of clear and transparent sustainability communication on the booking process of package holidays. This hypothesis is developed based on a literature review which examined the influence of sustainability communication in the gap between consumers' positive attitudes towards sustainable tourism and consequently, their actual booking behaviors (Tölkes, 2020, p. 117). It has been found that creating sustainability messages that align with travelers' values, feel personally relevant and visible can help to maximize the potential of the sustainable tourism sector (Tölkes, 2020, p. 126). The study by Bhattacharyya et al. (2023, pp. 1946-1947) suggests that while communicating about sustainability performance, the tourism providers should clearly document the progress that they have made regarding sustainability issues. More specifically, highlighting the enhancement in sustainability initiatives has been found effective while communicating about sustainability performance to travelers (Bhattacharyya et al., 2023, p. 1947). Based on these assumptions, the first hypothesis is formed:

H₁: The travel agency's clear sustainability communication has a positive impact on attitudes towards booking a package holiday.

The connection between sustainability communication and consumers' word-of-mouth intention has not been widely researched – Kusumawati et al. (2020, p. 277) were the first researchers to explore the connection. According to Kusumawati et al. (2020, p. 277), a logical explanation for the connection between sustainability and WoM intention would be the fact that if travelers have a positive perception of the destination's sustainability, they would most likely say positive things to other travelers about the destination. In their study, the authors found that the perceptions of sustainability have an impact on the word-of-mouth intention of foreign tourists (Kusumawati et al., 2020, p. 286). Based on this information provided above, the following hypothesis is created:

H₂: A positive attitude of the travel agency's sustainability communication increases customers' willingness to recommend it to others (word-of-mouth intention).

According to Kusumawati et al. (2020, p. 278), no research has been conducted about the impact of sustainability on travelers' revisit intention in tourist destinations. In their study, Kusumawati et al. (2020, p. 282) found that sustainability has a significant impact on tourists' revisit intention. However, this study examines the customers' purchase behavior, and therefore, the concept of revisiting is replaced with the concept of repurchasing or, in other words, re-booking of a package holiday. Razak et al. (2014) have researched the influence of trust on tourists' repurchase intention in the context of online travel booking among Malaysian consumers. In their study, Razak et al. (2014, p. 581) found that consumers' online trust influences their online repurchase intention. Therefore, in this study, the relationship between the consumers' attitudes towards the travel agency's sustainability communication and their repurchase intention will be examined. Therefore, the third hypothesis is the following:

H₃: A positive attitude of the travel agency's sustainability communication increases customers' willingness to use the same travel agency again (repurchase intention).

The fourth hypothesis is formed based on the research conducted by Kusumawati et al. (2020), in which were found out that tourists with higher environmental awareness are more influenced by sustainability efforts and consequently, are more likely to revisit destinations that prioritize sustainability. Kusumawati et al. (2020, p. 283) also discovered that travelers with lower environmental awareness are less affected by sustainability in their revisit intentions. Furthermore, also Bhattacharyya et al. (2023) examined the effectiveness of sustainability communication in travelers' behavioral intentions in their research. According to Bhattacharyya et al. (2023, pp. 1934-1935), sharing businesses' sustainability initiatives positively influences travelers' decision-making and in addition, the authors found out that lack of transparency in reporting can lead to consumer skepticism. Based on these findings, the following hypothesis is created:

H₄: Travelers with high environmental awareness pay more attention to travel agencies' sustainability communication when making a purchase decision.

The fifth and the last hypothesis of the study is based on existing research about the importance of transparent communication. It has been found that emotional appeals, personal benefits and clear messaging are more effective in affecting consumer behavior than abstract sustainability claims (Tölkes, 2018, p. 17). However, the impact of the communication about the Greek climate tax in travelers' purchase decisions has not been widely researched before.

Therefore, in this study, the relationship between the Greek climate tax and the attitudes towards travelers' purchase intentions will be examined. The last hypothesis of the study is the following:

H₅: Clear communication about the Greek climate tax has a positive impact on the attitudes towards the consumers' perceptions about the travel agency's responsibility.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Empirical setting

The research was conducted in cooperation with the anonymous commissioner company of the thesis. The commissioner company is a travel agency operating in Nordic countries, and the agency organizes package tours abroad, inside and outside Europe. Package tour, in this context, refers to a holiday that is purchased as a single entity and that contains both flights and accommodation at a tourist destination (Statistics Finland, 2025). In addition to the package tours, the company also offers, for example, flights and cruise holidays. Greece is one of the most popular destination countries of this company, and therefore this research was focused specifically on tourists traveling to Greece.

Background information of the company's environmental sustainability efforts was gained by looking into the sustainability-related content on the company's website and social media accounts. The researcher had also an opportunity to familiarize herself with the company's internal sustainability reports.

In the following analysis, the anonymous commissioner company is referred to as travel agency X, to ensure the anonymity of the company while referring to the research analysis and results.

4.2 Mixed-method approach as a research tool

This research has a mixed-method approach to the subject. Mixed-method approach in this context means that the structured questionnaire that was designed to collect the research data, did not only include quantitative questions, but also text open-ended questions that were analyzed using qualitative research methods. According to Malina et al. (2011, p. 59), mixed method approaches can often be the most convenient type of research tool to address phenomena that are still evolving and not thoroughly understood and researched. This type of approach can help to combine both qualitative, in-depth information and quantitative, generalizable information (Malina et al. 2011, pp. 61-64). The mixed-method approach uses both approaches to create research results that are stronger than what either of the methods

would create individually, and therefore, the combined methods provide an opportunity to analyze complex concepts (Malina et al., 2011, p. 61).

While conducting research, it is important to consider the validity and reliability of the research results. According to Viglia and Dolnicar (2020, p. 3) a good research design produces not only valid but also reliable results. Reliability refers to the fact that the research measures are free from error and thus create consistent results; in other words, anyone can expect to obtain similar results by repeating the same research with similar testing instruments (Lakshmi & Mohideen, 2013, p. 2753). Validity, on the other hand, refers to the fact that the research is measuring what it is supposed to measure (Lakshmi & Mohideen, 2013, p. 2755). To conduct reliable and valid research, the researcher should aim for reporting data in a reliable way, founding the scientific constructs with strong theoretical bases and operationalizing the constructs (Lakshmi & Mohideen, 2013, p. 2756).

However, despite the strengths of mixing both qualitative and quantitative research methods, it has been noticed that there is sometimes an issue of legitimation in mixed-method research (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006, p. 60). In the mixed-method approach, it can sometimes be difficult to evaluate the validity of the research. Therefore, the validity of the research in the context of mixed-method approach can be referred to as “legitimation”, since this term can be applied to both quantitative and qualitative type of research (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006, p. 60).

4.3 Data collection and analysis of the research data

A structured questionnaire was distributed to the customer base of the chosen commissioner company to quantify the impact of the company’s sustainability communication on customers’ attitudes and purchasing decisions. The questionnaire included single-select and multi-select questions, and open-ended questions to measure, 1) customer awareness of the environmental sustainability practices, 2) the perceived importance of sustainability in customers’ travel decisions and 3) the influence of sustainability communication on their purchase intentions.

The questionnaire was conducted through Webropol, and access to the Webropol platform was given by the University of Lapland. The aim was to target a sample size of approximately 200 customers, with responses expected from diverse demographic

backgrounds. The sample must be large enough to be able to accomplish what is intended by the analysis (Gorard, 2003, p. 60).

The link to the Webropol questionnaire was distributed as a part of the company's email newsletter, to the customers who have already purchased a package holiday to Greece with the commissioner company. The data collection took place during the month of June in 2025, and the questionnaire was open for three consecutive weeks. The questionnaire was available both in Finnish and in English, since most of the customers of the chosen case company speak Finnish. The sample of the study was limited to the commissioner company's customers who had already booked a package holiday to Greece for the summer season of 2025.

An incentive was used to increase the number of responses: to the participants in the study there was a raffle where a gift card for the commissioner company's product offering - for 70 euros - was given to one participant of the questionnaire. This was to encourage the customers to complete the questionnaire, and to also make sure that customers from different segments would participate in the questionnaire. Without the raffle, there could have been a possibility that only the customers who are interested in sustainability matters would have answered the questionnaire, and this could have distorted the research results.

The data were analyzed quantitatively by using the IBM SPSS software as the tool for statistical analysis. The hypotheses of the study were tested by analyzing frequencies and crosstabulations out of the different variables. In addition, a Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) was conducted to test hypotheses 2 and 3. The Multiple Correspondence Analysis is a way to examine a set of observations that are described by several nominal variables (Abdi & Valentin, 2007, p. 2). The MCA analysis has been invented approximately 90 years ago, and it has been developed over the years (Di Franco, 2016, p. 1299). The MCA analysis can either be used independently or in connection with the ANOVA feature in the SPSS program (Lolle, 2008, p. 104).

The qualitative data gained from the open-ended questions was analyzed with inductive methods, by recognizing main themes from the research data. The qualitative data analysis process is further explained in chapter 6.1.

4.4 Research ethics

While conducting research, it is important to consider the ethical aspects of the whole research process. The ethical guidelines of this research were based on the instructions provided by Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK, 2019). One of the key aspects of participation in research is the fact that the individuals participating in the research process should be able to choose whether they want to participate or refuse to participate in the process (TENK, 2019, p. 9). In addition, the participants should have the right to withdraw from the research during any part of the process (TENK, 2019, p. 9). The participants should also be informed about the purpose and the content of the research, and the information should be provided in a language that the participants understand (TENK, 2019, p. 9).

In the beginning of the questionnaire, the participants were provided with information about the research: for instance, the name of the researcher and the supervisor were mentioned. Also, both of their contact details were provided, in case the participants had any questions about the research process. In addition, it was emphasized that participation in the research is completely voluntary, and the participants were able to withdraw from filling the online questionnaire, at any point of the process. It was also mentioned that participation in the gift card raffle was voluntary.

5. RESULTS OF THE QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

5.1 Data description

The structured questionnaire, that was distributed to the customer base of the anonymous commissioner company, received a total number of 487 respondents. Since not all the questions in the questionnaire were mandatory, each question received a changing number of answers. Therefore, the number of responses gathered in each type of question is mentioned while referring to the questionnaire results.

The questionnaire consisted of six short parts. The first part included background questions about the respondents' traveling habits and their environmental awareness. The second part consisted of general questions regarding travel agencies' sustainability communication. The third part focused on the visibility and clarity of the anonymous commissioner company's sustainability communication. The fourth part of the questionnaire emphasized the role of the company's sustainability communication in the consumers' holiday booking processes. The fifth part included destination-specific questions about Greece and its climate tax, while the last part consisted of the open-ended questions, the respondents' demographic background questions such as their age group and educational background. Lastly, the respondents had the opportunity to participate in the gift card raffle by leaving their email address in the designated text box.

Table 2. Background information of the respondents.

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Categories</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Gender (n= 485)</i>	Male	140	28,9
	Female	337	69,5
	Other / Not specified	8	1,6

<i>Age (n =484)</i>	Under 25	12	2,5
	24-34	35	7,2
	35-44	63	13,0
	45-54	135	27,9
	55-64	127	26,2
	65 or higher	112	23,1
<i>Education level (n= 480)</i>	Comprehensive school	28	5,8
	High school / Vocational school	189	39,4
	Undergraduate degree	168	35,0
	Master's degree or higher	95	19,8
<i>Awareness about environmental issues (n= 484)</i>	Very aware	135	27,9
	Somewhat aware	311	64,3
	A little aware	35	7,2
	Not at all aware	3	0,6
<i>How often the respondent is traveling with package holidays (n= 485)</i>	Almost never	30	6,2
	More rarely than once a year	86	17,7
	Once a year	208	42,9
	2-3 times a year	158	31,5
	More than 3 times a year	8	1,6

Table 2 describes the background information of the respondents. This includes the demographic background questions that were asked from the respondents, to gain better understanding of the backgrounds of the people participating in the questionnaire. From the table, it can be seen that a majority (69,5%) of the respondents were female, while 28,9% of the respondents were men. This indicates that there is some imbalance between the genders represented in this data. The remaining 1,6% of the respondents represented other genders or preferred not to reveal their gender.

Table 3. Frequency table describing the respondents' age (n=484).

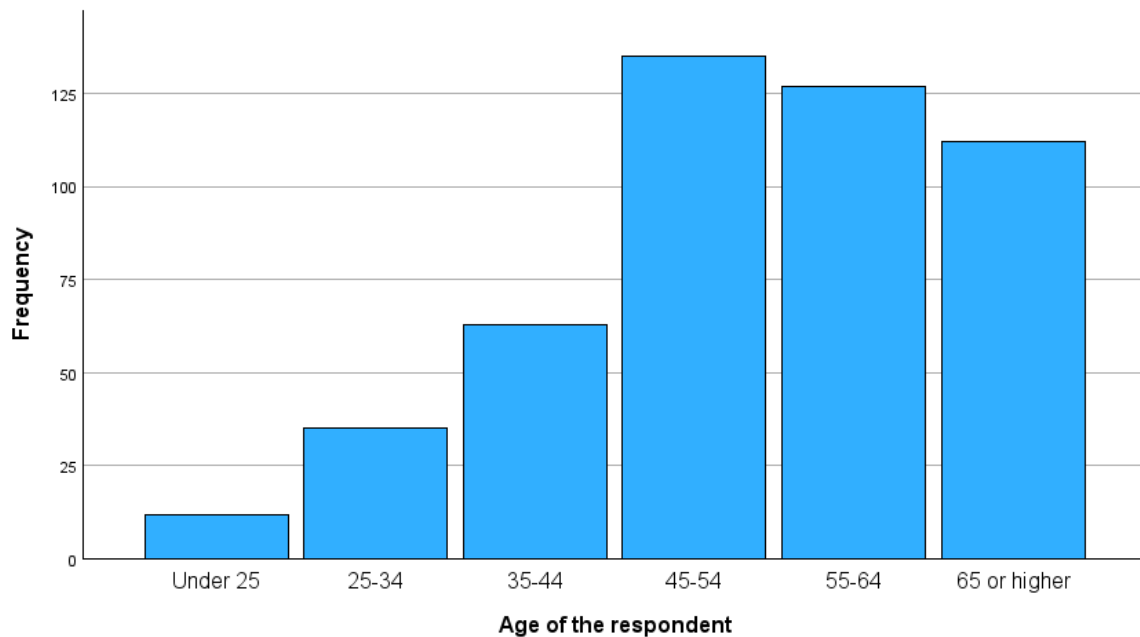


Table 3 demonstrates the distribution of the ages of the respondents. From Table 3, it can be seen that a majority of the respondents represent the ages of 45 or higher. Referring to Table 2 describing the respondents' demographic background information, while only 2,5 percent of the respondents were under 25 years old of age, a great majority of the respondents fell between the age range of 45-64 years. In addition, nearly one fourth of the respondents (23,1%) were 65 or older. This means that out of different generations, generation X (individuals born in the years of 1965-1979) and the Baby Boomer generation (born 1946-1964) are the most represented in this data, while generation Z (born 1995-2012) is quite underrepresented in this data (USCLibraries, 2025).

The respondents had different kinds of education levels: a great amount of (39,4%) of the respondents had either finished high school or vocational education as their highest level of education, while 35% of the respondents had finished an undergraduate degree. Nearly one fifth of the respondents (19,8%) had completed a master's degree or a higher degree of education.

The background questions also included a question that measured the respondents' recognition about environmental issues and climate change. The question was called "How aware do you feel about environmental issues and climate change?" and the aim was to find

out the level of the respondents' environmental awareness. More than one fourth (27,9%) of the respondents mentioned that they are very aware of these issues, while a majority of the respondents (64,3%) stated that they are somewhat aware of the issues. Only 7,2 % of the respondents mentioned that they are a little aware of the issues and just 0,6% of the respondents stated that they would not be aware of the environmental issues at all.

The last question measuring the demographic background of the respondents was how often the respondents tend to travel with package holidays. Majority of the respondents (42,9%) travel with package holidays once a year, while many also seem to travel more often, 2-3 times a year (31,5%). However, only 1,6% of the respondents mentioned traveling with package holidays more than 3 times a year. Correspondingly, only 6,2% of the respondents said that they do not tend to travel with package holidays at all. It can be noticed that most of the respondents do have experience with traveling with package holidays.

Table 4 describes the relationship between the respondents' gender and their subjective awareness about environmental issues and climate change. From Table 3, it can be noticed that a majority of both males (59,4%) and females (66,4%) consider themselves as somewhat aware of environmental issues. More than a quarter of males (30,4%) and females (26,8%) assessed that they are very aware of environmental issues and climate change.

Table 4. The respondents' awareness about environmental issues and climate change (n=482).

	Gender								Total	
	Male		Female		Other		I prefer not to answer			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Very aware	42	30,4	90	26,8	3	75,0	0	,0	135	28,0
Somewhat aware	82	59,4	223	66,4	1	25,0	3	75,0	309	64,1
A little aware	12	8,7	22	6,5	0	,0	1	25,0	35	7,3
Not at all aware	2	1,4	1	,3	0	,0	0	,0	3	,6
Total	138	100,0	336	100,0	4	100,0	4	100,0	482	100,0

Table 5 describes the relationship between the respondents' tendency to travel with package holidays and their gender. From table 5, it can be seen that more than a half of the male respondents (54,0%) tend to travel with package holidays once a year. For females, the corresponding percentage was 39,3%. Only 2,2% of the males and a 6,8% of the females mentioned that they do not travel with package holidays nearly at all.

Table 5. The respondents' tendency to travel with package holidays and their gender (n=483).

		Male		Female		Other		I prefer not to answer		Total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
How often do you travel with package holidays?	Almost never	3	2,2	23	6,8	2	50,0	0	,0	28	5,8
	More rarely than once a year	17	12,2	67	19,9	0	,0	2	50,0	86	17,8
	Once a year	75	54,0	132	39,3	0	,0	1	25,0	208	43,1
	2-3 times a year	41	29,5	110	32,7	1	25,0	1	25,0	153	31,7
	More than 3 times a year	3	2,2	4	1,2	1	25,0	0	,0	8	1,7
Total		139	100,0	336	100,0	4	100,0	4	100,0	483	100,0

5.2 The impact of sustainability communication in consumers' booking processes

This study has five hypotheses, which will be tested in this section of the thesis. The first hypothesis consists of the impact of a travel agencies' sustainability communication's clarity in the attitudes towards booking a package holiday. The hypothesis was tested by creating a crosstabulation of the following questions: question number 12 (How clear do you feel that the sustainability communication is in travel agency X's communication channels?) and question number 13 (Has travel agency X's sustainability communication affected your decision to book a package holiday?). The crosstabulation was also supported by a Chi-square test that gave information about the statistical significance of the impact between these variables.

Table 6. The impact of sustainability communication's clarity and transparency in attitudes towards booking a package holiday (n=480).

		How clear do you feel that the sustainability communication is in [travel agency X's] communication channels?										Total	
		Very clear		Somewhat clear		Neutral		Somewhat unclear		Very unclear			
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Has [travel agency X's] sustainability communication affected your decision to book a package holiday?	Yes, strongly or somehow	21	87,5	75	50,7	24	9,0	2	6,5	0	,0	122	25,4
	Only a little	2	8,3	46	31,1	91	34,0	9	29,0	2	22,2	150	31,3
	Not at all	1	4,2	27	18,2	153	57,1	20	64,5	7	77,8	208	43,3
Total		24	100,0	148	100,0	268	100,0	31	100,0	9	100,0	480	100,0

The crosstabulation of these above-mentioned variables is demonstrated in table 6 above. From the crosstabulation, it can be noticed that most of those respondents whose holiday

booking decision has been strongly or somehow affected by the travel agency X's sustainability communication find the travel agency X's sustainability communication either very clear (87,5%) or somewhat clear (50,7%). Those respondents, whose booking decisions are not at all affected by the travel agency X's sustainability communication find the travel agency's sustainability communication often neutral (57,1%) or somewhat unclear (64,5%).

It can be noticed that there is a trend in the responses – those respondents who find the sustainability communication (SC) very or somewhat clear tend to be more highly affected by the sustainability communication in their booking decisions. Simultaneously, those respondents who find the SC neutral or somewhat unclear often feel that their booking decisions are not at all affected by the travel agency X's sustainability communication. Therefore, it can be noticed that there is a connection between the attitudes towards booking a package holiday and the travel agency's sustainability communication's clarity.

In addition to the crosstabulation, a Chi-square test was conducted. The Chi-square test can be found in the Appendix section of this thesis (Appendix 2). The Chi-square test indicated that the impact is statistically significant, since the p-value is $<0,001$.

Based on the information provided in table 6, the Chi-square test and the interpretation above, the first hypothesis, *H₁: The travel agency's clear sustainability communication has a positive impact on attitudes towards booking a package holiday*, can be accepted.

The second hypothesis of this study concerned the word-of-mouth intention and its relationship to the travel agencies' sustainability communication. Question number 8 (Would you recommend a travel agency if it emphasized sustainable tourism in its communication?) in the questionnaire measured this matter.

From figure 3 describing the frequencies of the responses, it can be noticed that more than a half of the respondents would be likely to recommend a travel agency if it emphasized sustainable tourism in its communication. Nearly a fourth of the respondents answered that they would definitely recommend a travel agency based on their sustainability communication. Only a limited number of respondents stated that they would definitely not recommend a travel agency based on their SC, while approximately one fifth of the respondents mentioned that they would probably not recommend a travel agency based on their sustainability communication.

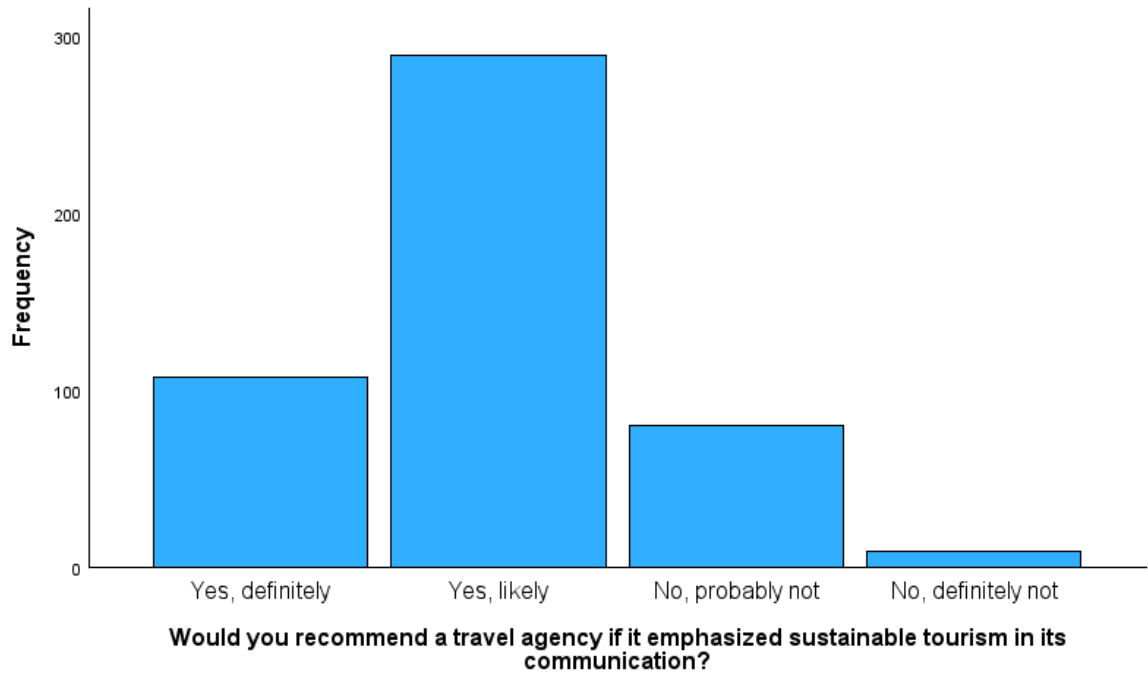


Figure 3. Frequency distribution of the respondents' word-of-mouth intentions based on the travel agency's sustainability communication.

The third hypothesis of the study measured the consumers' repurchase intentions. In the questionnaire, question number 9 measured this matter in the following way: "Does the travel agency's sustainable travel communication affect whether you would book a trip through the same travel agency again?". This question received 483 responses. From this question, a majority (51,3%) of the respondents stated that travel agencies' sustainability communication likely impacts whether they would rebook a holiday with the same travel agency. Furthermore, 11,5% of the respondents answered that their rebooking intentions are definitely affected by the travel agencies' SC. Nearly one third (32,2%) of the consumers answered the SC does probably not affect their rebooking intentions, while only 4,5% of the respondents stated that their rebooking intentions are definitely not affected by the travel agencies' sustainability communication.

Based on these interpretations, it seems like hypotheses 2 and 3 could be accepted, however, the demographic background variables that affect the respondents' perceptions of the sustainability communication are further discussed in chapter 5.3.

The fourth hypothesis of this study is the following: "Travelers with high environmental awareness pay more attention to travel agencies' sustainability communication when making

a purchase decision”. In the questionnaire, question number 1 measured the respondents’ subjective environmental awareness and question number 11 measured their attention towards travel agencies’ SC while making purchase decisions. The connection between the respondents’ environmental awareness and their attention towards sustainability communication was explored by creating a crosstabulation between the two variables. This was also supported by a Chi-square test that provided information about the statistical significance of the impact between the variables.

Table 7. Crosstabulation describing the relationship between the respondents’ subjective environmental awareness and their attention towards sustainability communication (n=480).

		How aware do you feel about climate change and environmental issues?						Total	
		Very aware		Somewhat aware		A little or not at all aware			
		n	%	n	%	n	%		
Have you paid attention to sustainability communication in [travel agency X's] communication channels (website, social media, advertisements)?	Yes, often	12	9,0	15	4,9	0	,0	27	5,6
	Yes, sometimes	68	51,1	134	43,4	6	15,8	208	43,3
	Rarely	31	23,3	118	38,2	20	52,6	169	35,2
	No, never	22	16,5	42	13,6	12	31,6	76	15,8
Total		133	100,0	309	100,0	38	100,0	480	100,0

From table 7 above, it can be noticed that a majority (51,1%) of those respondents who consider themselves as very aware of environmental matters, do sometimes pay attention to the SC in the travel agency X’s communication channels. However, only 9,0% of those respondents who consider themselves as very aware of environmental issues answered that they do often pay attention to the SC of travel agency X. Furthermore, a majority (309) of all respondents (n=480) seem to consider themselves as somewhat aware of environmental issues. Out of these respondents, most of the consumers seem to either sometimes (43,4%) or rarely (38,2%) pay attention to the travel agency X’s sustainability communication. In addition, there was also a group of consumers who consider themselves as little or not at all aware of environmental issues and never pay attention to the travel agency’s sustainability communication (31,6%).

It can be noticed that there is a trend in the answers – those consumers who consider themselves as very or somewhat aware of environmental issues tend to often or sometimes pay attention to the travel agency’s sustainability communication. Correspondently, those consumers who do not feel aware of environmental issues seem to be more likely to never or barely pay attention to the travel agency’s sustainability communication.

In addition to the crosstabulation, a Chi-square test was conducted. The Chi-square test can be found as Appendix 3 at the end of this thesis. The Chi-square test indicated that the impact is statistically significant, since the p-value is $<0,001$.

Based on the information provided in table 7, the Chi-square test and the interpretation above, the fourth hypothesis: *H₄: Travelers with high environmental awareness pay more attention to travel agencies' sustainability communication when making a purchase decision*, can be accepted.

5.3 The impact of sustainability communication in the consumers' perceptions about the climate tax in Greece

The fifth and the last hypothesis of this study was about the consumers' reactions towards the climate tax in Greece and their perceptions about the travel agency's responsibility. In the questionnaire, question number 20 measured the consumers' attitudes towards the sustainability communication about the climate tax – whether the consumers responded to the travel agency's SC about the climate tax positively, neutrally or negatively. The last option given to the respondents was “I'm not sure / No opinion”.

Out of these four options, a majority of the respondents (53,2%) stated that the SC about the climate tax in Greece affects their perception about the travel agency's responsibility positively. Approximately one third of the respondents (33,6%) had a neutral attitude towards the matter and mentioned that the communication about the climate tax does not affect their perceptions about the travel agency's sustainability. Only 4,7% of the respondents reacted negatively towards the SC about the climate tax, while 8,5% mentioned that they are either not sure or have no opinion on the matter.

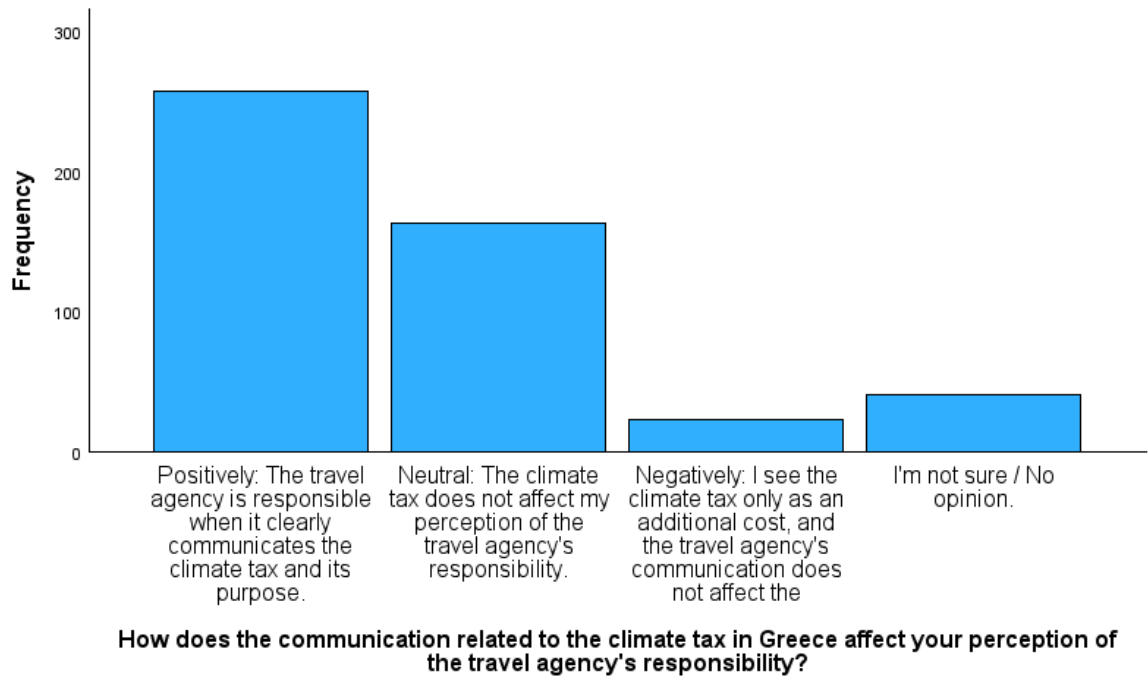


Figure 4. Frequency distribution describing the respondents' perceptions about the Greek climate tax.

Figure 4 visualizes the frequency distribution between the different answer options. From figure 4, it can be noticed that a majority of the respondents stated that the SC about the climate tax in Greece impacts their perceptions about the travel agency's responsibility positively, and only a small minority reacted to the matter negatively. Since over a half of the respondents stated that the clear communication about the climate tax and its purpose affects their perception about the travel agency's responsibility in a positive way, hypothesis 5, "*Clear communication about the Greek climate tax has a positive impact on the attitudes towards the consumers' perceptions about the travel agency's responsibility*" can be accepted.

5.4 Do demographic variables have an impact on the consumers' word-of-mouth and rebooking intentions based on travel agencies' SC?

To find out which demographic background variables have an impact on the respondents' perceptions about travel agencies' sustainability communication, a Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA) was conducted. More specifically, the aim was to explore which

demographic background variables have an impact on the respondents' word-of-mouth and rebooking intentions, based on the travel agencies' sustainability communication.

The MCA analysis was conducted in the IBM SPSS software. For the MCA analysis, the following variables were chosen:

- 1) Environmental awareness
- 2) Gender
- 3) Age group
- 4) Sum variable: Word-of-mouth and rebooking

Figure 5 (below) demonstrates the explanatory variables and the according numbers of observations for the subgroups (n). The explanatory variables consist of the background variables of the respondents: gender, age group and the respondents' subjective environmental awareness. The sum variable consists of two variables: word-of-mouth and rebooking. The sum variable was formed by first running a factor analysis, which resulted in one factor. The sum variable was named "word-of-mouth and rebooking", since it consists of the variables that measure the respondents' willingness to recommend and to rebook package tours based on the travel agency's sustainability communication. The sum variable (WoM and rebooking) has values on a scale from 1 to 4, where 1 stands for high tendency to recommend and rebook, and 4 stands for low tendency to recommend and rebook.

The figure also demonstrates the group means and the beta coefficients for the variables. The statistical significances of the beta coefficients are marked in the figure in the following way: *** = $p < 0,001$, ** = $p < 0,01$ and * = $p < 0,05$. The coefficient of determination (Goodness of Fit) in the SPSS software for the MCA analysis is 14,9%.

Furthermore, the background variable that measured how often the respondent travels with package tours, was tested to be included in the MCA analysis, but since the mean was not statistically significant, the variable was chosen to be left out from the final MCA analysis.

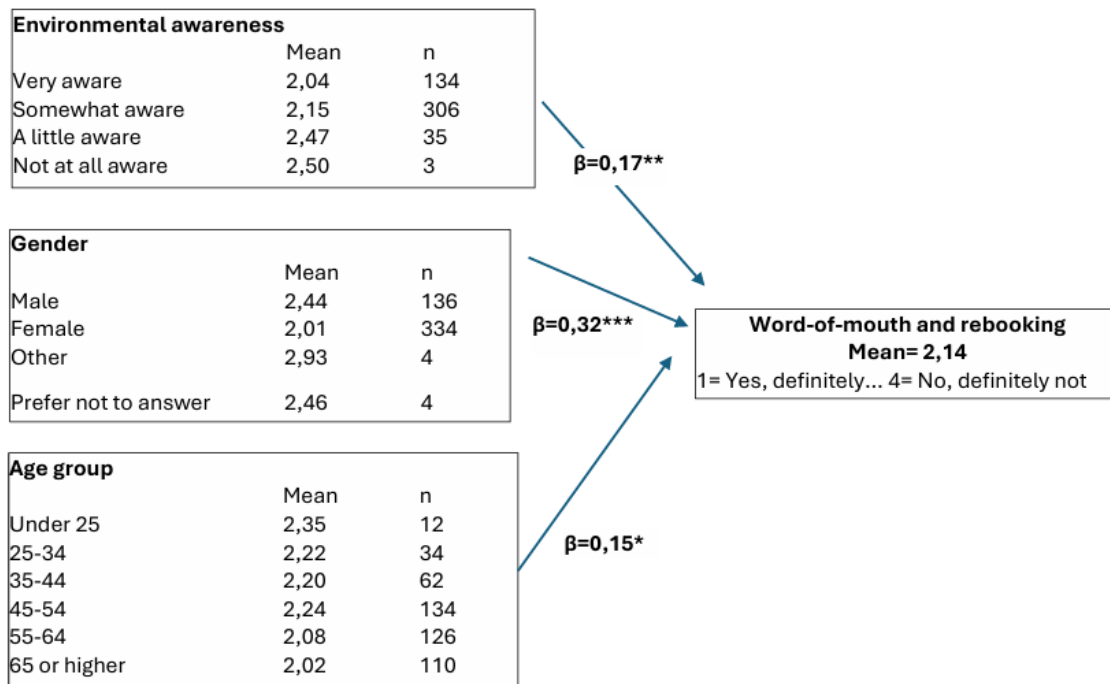


Figure 5. Visualization of the results of the MCA analysis.

From figure 5, it can be noted that gender has the most statistically significant influence on the respondents' probability to rebook a tour or recommend the travel agency. The beta coefficient for the gender is 0,32, and the p-value is $<0,001$, which means that the means between the genders differ from each other statistically very significantly. The mean for the males (2,44) is higher than the mean for the females (2,01). The sum variable has values on a scale from 1 to 4, where 1 stands for high tendency to recommend and rebook, and 4 stands for low tendency to recommend and rebook - this means that since the mean for the males is higher (2,44), the males are less likely to recommend and rebook based on sustainability communication. Meanwhile, the lower mean for women (2,01) indicates that women are more likely to base their word-of-mouth and rebooking behavior based on the sustainability communication of travel agencies.

Furthermore, from figure 5, it can be seen that the respondents' subjective environmental awareness has a statistically significant impact on their word-of-mouth and rebooking intentions. The beta coefficient for the environmental awareness variable is 0,17 and the p-value is $<0,01$ which means that the result is statistically significant. While looking at the different categories of environmental awareness, it can be noticed that the means differ from

each other. The ones who categorize themselves as very aware of environmental issues and climate change, seem to have the lowest mean for word-of-mouth and rebooking (2,04). This indicates that the ones who are very aware of environmental issues tend to be likely to recommend and rebook package tours based on the SC of travel agencies. Correspondently, the ones who are a little aware (2,47), or not at all aware (2,50), seem to have a higher mean for word-of-mouth and rebooking – in this case, indicating that they are less likely to recommend and rebook based on the SC of a travel agency. However, it is worth noting that only 3 of the respondents stated that they are not at all aware of environmental issues, making the subcategory quite small, compared to the other categories.

In addition, the respondents' age group seems to affect their word-of-mouth and rebooking intentions based on the travel agency's sustainability communication. The beta coefficient for the age group variable is 0,15 and the result is statistically significant, since the p-value is $<0,05$. There seems to be a trend in the different means in the age groups: the age group that consists of respondents under 25 years old seem to have the highest mean (2,35), while the group of respondents that are 65 years old or older seem to have the lowest mean (2,02). This indicates that the respondents' age group seems to explain the respondents' word-of-mouth and rebooking intentions based on the travel agency's sustainability communication. It can be noticed that the younger respondents are less likely to base their word-of-mouth and rebooking intentions in the travel agency's SC, while the older respondents, referring to the respondents aged 55 and older, are more likely to recommend and rebook holidays based in the travel agency's sustainability communication.

This MCA analysis provides information about how the respondents' demographic background factors, such as their age group, subjective environmental awareness and gender affect the way they perceive sustainability communication and thus, their word-of-mouth and rebooking intentions.

Based on this analysis and the visualization of the results in figure 5, it can be noticed that demographic background factors seem to affect the way the respondents perceive the SC and thus, how they tend to recommend and rebook package tours. The results provided in this section provide additional support for the hypotheses 2 and 3, which are the following:

H₂: A positive attitude of the travel agency's sustainability communication increases customers' willingness to recommend it to others (word-of-mouth intention).

H₃: A positive attitude of the travel agency's sustainability communication increases customers' willingness to use the same travel agency again (repurchase intention).

The MCA analysis and its interpretation provide in-depth information about which demographic background variables affect the attitudes towards the travel agency's sustainability communication. Therefore, instead of the analysis answering directly to the hypotheses that were set for the research, the analysis provides additional information that helps to explain why and how the positive attitude towards a travel agency's sustainability communication is formed, in this particular research setting.

It can be noticed that the respondents' subjective environmental awareness, age group and gender all seemed to affect their reaction towards sustainability communication and thus their rebooking and word-of-mouth intentions. Out of these demographic background variables, gender had the most statistically significant influence on the respondents' probability to rebook a tour or recommend the travel agency.

6. RESULTS OF THE QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

6.1 Conducting the qualitative analysis

The questionnaire contained three open-ended questions, which were optional to the respondents. Open-ended questions often provide additional information about topics that are either not easily defined or topics that arise multiple different kinds of answers among the respondents (Rouder et al., 2021, p. 1). These types of questions can help to complement quantitative data analysis, since they can help to understand the background behind the respondents' quantitative answers (Rouder et al., 2021, p. 1).

The answers from these open-ended questions were analyzed by using qualitative methods. Qualitative analysis consists of describing, classifying and combining the research phenomenon to the concepts of the research (Graue, 2015, p. 8). The answers were qualitatively analyzed by using color-coding as a method to recognize different main themes from textual data. The qualitative method used in this analysis was inductive; the key themes were recognized by using the research questions as the basis for the analysis (Azungah, 2018, p. 393).

6.2 Consumers' perceptions of the Greek climate tax

The first open-ended question was called "What kind of thoughts does the Greek climate tax evoke in you?". From this question, 167 answers were received. The answers were categorized based on the respondents' attitudes towards the climate tax.

Negative and/or doubtful attitude towards climate taxation

From these answers, the first sub-category can be named as the "negative and/or doubtful attitude towards climate taxation". This attitude represents the responses that reflected negative thoughts towards the Greek climate tax and tourism taxation overall. For instance, some of the respondents felt that tourism taxation is often an extra expense to the holiday. Simultaneously, many of the respondents were worried if the money collected from the climate tax is benefiting the Greek nature and local people against the negative consequences

of climate change. For instance, this respondent was doubtful whether the tax makes a difference into the climate matters:

“The word 'tax' has a bad meaning to it. The fact that it goes into the state treasury does not mean it is used for activities that match the name of the tax.”

Positive attitude towards climate taxation

The second sub-category can be named the “positive attitude towards climate taxation”. In these types of responses, the respondents were emphasizing that they feel that the climate tax is part of the holiday expenses. In addition, many mentioned that they feel that by paying the climate tax, they can mitigate the harmful environmental impacts of their holiday. For instance, this respondent mentioned that they are okay with paying the tax, since that is an act of contribution to a more sustainable way of traveling:

“Great thing! Tourism always puts a strain on the environment and contributes to the spread of wildfires or the damage caused by floods, it's good that travelers participate in covering the costs in the form of taxes.”

This respondent stated that they are willing to pay for the tax, since it is a way of protecting the destination’s environment:

“I am happy to pay for it if it protects Greece's nature and develops slightly more ecological tourism...”

Unawareness of the tax and its purpose

The third sub-category could be named the “unawareness of the tax and its purpose”. This category involves the responses that were not aware of the climate tax. These respondents either were aware of the tax, but were not aware that the tax is, in fact, a climate tax, or were not aware of the tax at all. Many of the respondents also mentioned that the tax should be included in the price of the package tour, since for some of the respondents, the additional fee in the destination has been a surprise. Furthermore, some of the respondents pointed out that the climate tax should be better informed in the booking process on the travel agency’s communication channels:

“I didn't know that the additional fee charged by the hotel is an environmental tax. I think it should be clearly stated. If the tax indeed goes towards climate change, then it's a good thing.”

6.3 Climate change – do individuals' actions matter?

The question “Does climate change worry you? If yes, how has this worry affected your traveling habits?” evoked 208 answers among the respondents. From these answers, six main themes could be recognized. The themes are the following: 1) worry about the rise of temperature and natural disasters, 2) worry about the future generations, 3) reducing the amount of travel and flying, 4) making changes in mundane life, 5) individuals' actions do not matter and 6) no worry nor effect in traveling habits.

Worry about the rise of temperature and natural disasters

The first theme that could be brought up from the answers is “worry about the rise of temperature and natural disasters” due to climate change. These include the answers that pointed out that for instance in the countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, the temperature tends to get very high during the summer months. This has affected many of the respondents' traveling habits; many of them mentioned that they have chosen to travel in early summer or early autumn to avoid the high temperatures during summer. Some mentioned that the high temperatures have made them either cancel their holiday plans or change their travel destination:

“The intense heat waves in Greece and the related wildfires have affected the timing of booking my trip. I have also been considering other possible destinations as an alternative.”

Quite many of the respondents were also worried about natural disasters caused by climate change, such as earthquakes and wildfires. Some of the respondents had even witnessed the wildfires in Greece during their previous holidays in the latest years. In general, extreme temperatures, wildfires and earthquakes were the natural disasters that were most mentioned in the answers. Some of the respondents also mentioned that they are concerned about the

shortage of water in the destinations. The uncertainty caused by the natural disasters was something that concerned many of the respondents:

“Yes, it worries me, because the consequences are already visible and cause concern. Traveling becomes more uncertain, and you cannot know what awaits at the destination due to climate change, extreme weather conditions, or other unexpected changes compared to what it used to be before.”

Worry about the future generations

The second theme is called the “worry about the future generations”. Some of the respondents pointed out that they are concerned about what the future will hold for their children or grandchildren, if the impacts of climate change cannot be tackled. The respondents who were worried about the future generations seemed to feel that they have a responsibility to contribute to a better living for their descendants and therefore have made changes to their traveling habits:

“Of course it worries me, because I am a mother of three young adults, and I wonder what kind of world I will leave for my children and grandchildren and the generations to come. Travel habits have changed, for example, our family has an electric car for domestic trips, longer work trips are largely done by train, and long-distance travel is clearly less than, for example, 20-30 years ago, although this is also affected by the rising costs of trips and flights. We have made slightly fewer flights within Europe than before.”

Reducing the amount of travel and flying

“Reducing the amount of travel and flying” is the third theme that can be recognized from the answers. Many of the respondents pointed out that they have reduced the amount of traveling abroad for leisure purposes. Reducing the amount of flying was also a topic that was constantly repeated in the answers. Some of the respondents also mentioned that they have decided only to travel inside Europe instead of traveling to continents further away from Finland. Many tended to avoid flying for holidays shorter than a week, and many also expressed their interest in extending their stay at the destination for multiple weeks. Some of the respondents also pointed out that they have increased the amount of domestic travel

and decreased the amount of international travel. Compensating flight emissions was also brought up in some of the answers. One of the respondents pointed out that traveling by plane is often a more affordable option than traveling by land, and thus affects their decision-making:

“I feel guilty about the emissions caused by travel, and I always try to carefully consider (leisure) travel. I always try to check alternatives to flying, but they are often more expensive than flying, which is why I end up/feel forced to choose the cheaper option purely for economic reasons.”

Making changes in mundane life

The fourth theme was named “making changes in the mundane life”. Many of the respondents who expressed their worry about climate change mentioned that they are not hesitant to travel, since they try to compensate for their travels by making changes in their everyday lives. For instance, many mentioned that they do not either own a car or prefer to use public transportation. Therefore, the respondents felt that their everyday contribution towards sustainable development is compensating for their holidays abroad and the flight emissions of these holidays:

“I take environmental and climate issues into account in everyday choices, including when it comes to travel.”

“I am somewhat worried. It has not affected travel habits, because I take climate change-related issues into account in my everyday life, e.g. I don't drive much in my everyday life, I travel by foot.”

Some respondents also mentioned that they tend to mitigate the amount of carbon emissions at home, but during their holidays they do not worry about the matter. For some, holidays abroad can be considered as an escape from the mundane:

“I minimize emissions at home in my everyday life and I don't think about it when traveling other than by not wasting water or anything else.”

Individuals' actions do not matter

The fifth theme that was recognized from the textual data is called “individuals' actions do not matter”. This theme included the thoughts of the consumers who were either not worried about climate change or who were slightly worried about the matter, but who felt that individuals' actions towards sustainability cannot stop climate change from proceeding. Some of the respondents mentioned that countries with larger numbers of inhabitants should be the ones making the changes, and that they as individuals cannot, therefore, make an impact:

“I don't worry too much. As a single Finnish person, I can't really influence major emissions.”

Some of the respondents had already lost hope in sustainability matters and felt that making changes as an individual cannot change anything, since climate change is already affecting the planet in many ways:

“(I) don't really worry. I've accepted that the game is already lost.”

No worry nor effect in traveling habits

The last theme that could be recognized from the data is called “no worry nor effect in the traveling habits”. Many of the respondents stated that they are not worried about climate change and that they feel that climate change does not affect their traveling habits in any way. Some of the respondents stated that they do not believe in the phenomenon – some even felt that climate change does not exist at all – and therefore it does not have an impact on the way they travel.

6.4 Sustainable tourism: Recycling, respect and responsibility

From the second open-ended question, “What does sustainable traveling mean to you?”, 126 answers were received. From these answers, five main themes could be recognized. The themes are the following: 1) respect for local communities, nature and animals, 2)

considering the timing and the way of travel, 3) recycling and saving energy, 4) prioritizing responsible local operators and 5) no expressed interest in sustainable tourism.

Respect for local communities, nature and animals

The first theme can be named the respect of local communities, nature and animals. This theme includes the viewpoints of customers who emphasize the importance of their own behavior in the tourism destination. For instance, the customers pointed out that local habits should be respected and that their own way of behavior matters. One customer pointed out that equality and the destination's contribution to better human rights are especially important for them:

“In addition to climate change, other ethical areas of the destination country are also important, such as equality and commitment to international human rights standards.”

The respect of nature and animals was also raised as one of the themes in this open-ended question. Some respondents mentioned that conserving natural resources and nature overall is an important value for them. One respondent pointed out that they treat the tourism destination as it was their own yard, which means respecting nature, conserving natural resources, such as water and following the local habits:

“Taking care of the destination as if it were our own yard. We follow the rules and do not destroy or throw litter in the nature, waste water, etc.”

Many of the respondents were worried about the wellbeing of animals in the tourism destinations. Some of the respondents mentioned that they feel that some tourism products that involve animals, such as donkeys or horses, are suspicious and they tend to avoid them. This worry about the rights of animals had encouraged some of the customers to do charity work with animals, such as volunteering at a local dog shelter:

“... I helped at a local dog shelter. I am going to return there. ... the dogs stole my heart.”

Considering the timing and the way of travel

The second theme that could be recognized from the answers is called “considering the timing and way of travel”. This means that the customers tend to consider what time they would like to travel to the destination and also consider the way of traveling to the destination. Many respondents mentioned that they prefer to travel off-season, and avoid traveling in the busiest summer months, such as July and August. Some respondents also mentioned that they avoid traveling during the summer, since that is when there can be a shortage of water and the temperature is very high in the travel destinations.

Some people noted that they have reduced the number of vacations abroad and many also mentioned that they are trying to reduce flying. Someone brought up that they try to extend their stay at the destination for longer, for instance, they tend to stay at the destination for multiple weeks instead of just one. Some respondents pointed out that they are considering whether traveling by airplane is necessary:

"In the future, (air) travel will be a luxury treat for the few. Not all the billions of people in the world can travel by airplane. Therefore, I strive even now to travel thoughtfully and to destinations where environmental issues are considered."

Compensating flight emissions was also mentioned, and choosing to fly using airplanes that use more environmentally friendly fuel was also found important. Someone also indicated that they try to avoid flying, and if flying is necessary, then they try to choose direct flights to the destination instead of having multiple layovers.

Recycling and saving energy

The third theme that could be recognized from the answers can be named “recycling and saving energy”. Plenty of respondents were worried about recycling in the destination, and especially the amount of plastic used in the tourism destinations. Many mentioned that they try to avoid using single-use plastic, such as plastic cutlery at the hotel breakfasts or plastic shopping bags in local supermarkets. In addition, recycling waste and trying to reduce the amount of litter was constantly mentioned in the answers. Not throwing trash into nature and collecting the trash left behind by other tourists was something that some of the respondents also emphasized:

"I try to make an impact on-site (recycling, collecting trash from the beach)"

The use of energy was a topic that was concerning many of the respondents. Some of the respondents were worried about the consumption of water and energy. Many also mentioned that they try to use water in moderation and avoid making unnecessary laundry in the accommodation. For instance, some of them expressed their worry about the excessive consumption of energy:

“Natural resources should be used sparingly (water/electricity), and nature should not be consumed through our behavior. All travelers should contribute to sustainable tourism. Travel agencies could campaign on this topic with hotels, for example, that towels do not necessarily need to be changed every day, etc.”

Prioritizing responsible local operators

The fourth theme that raised in the answers is called “prioritizing responsible local operators”. This refers to the tourists’ behavior of supporting local small businesses and supporting the local community. For instance, some respondents mentioned eating in restaurants that offer locally produced food and buying souvenirs rather from local producers than larger supermarkets. Some people also mentioned supporting local businesses’ products and services and preferring smaller, family-owned hotels over larger hotel chains. For example, the following answer emphasized the importance of making local choices and following the local guidelines and rules:

“Sustainable tourism means to me that tourists respect keeping the host country's environment clean and consider sustainable tourism in all their local choices that can nurture the climate and nature. The host country and its environment should be respected and efforts should be made to preserve it as a worthy tourist destination by making environmentally friendly choices and actions. As a tourist, I must follow the guidelines, rules, and laws that protect and conserve nature, the climate, and its natural resources, so that the tourist destination remains a worthy place for tourism... “

No expressed interest in sustainable tourism

The last recognized theme from the answers is “no expressed interest in sustainable tourism”. This refers to the respondents who stated that sustainable tourism does not mean anything to them or that they are not interested in the topic. Some respondents mentioned that they do

not have an opinion on the matter, and some felt that sustainable tourism does not mean much to them, because traveling, in their opinion, cannot be sustainable:

“Not much. Essentially, traveling is not sustainable.”

7. DISCUSSION

The results of this mixed-method study can be connected to previous academic discussion in the field. The quantitative analysis of this study was based on academic literature on the topic of sustainability communication. All the hypotheses that were formed for this study were based on previous scientific literature. For instance, connection between sustainability and consumers' word-of-mouth intentions had already been discussed by Kusumawati et al. (2020, p. 277). It is worth noting that the topic had not been widely researched before, and that Kusumawati et. al (2020) were the first ones to explore the matter. The results of this research reveal that demographic background variables, such as gender and the respondents' subjective environmental awareness, do affect the respondents' rebooking and word-of-mouth intentions based on the travel agencies' sustainability communication.

Furthermore, Bhattacharyya et al. (2023, pp. 1934-1935) had examined the topic of sharing sustainability initiatives, and how unclear reporting about sustainability matters can lead to skepticism among consumers. In the quantitative analysis of this research, it could be noticed that there is a connection between the attitudes towards booking a package tour and the travel agency's sustainability communication's clarity. In other words, it was found that those respondents who find the travel agency's SC very or somewhat clear seemed to be more highly affected by the sustainability communication in their booking decisions.

In addition, Christina Tölkes (2018, p. 17) had found that rather than approaching the sustainability communication from a generic and abstract perspective, it is, in fact, more appealing to aim for clear messaging, and evoke emotions and emphasize consumers' personal benefits. This study approached the topic of sustainability communication also from the perspective of the Greek climate tax. The results of this study indicate that a majority of the respondents stated that the SC about the climate tax in Greece affects their perception about the travel agency's responsibility positively.

The results of the quantitative analysis revealed that all the five hypotheses that were set for the quantitative analysis were accepted. However, the limitations of this study should also be considered while looking at the results of the study. The limitations of the study are further discussed in chapter 8.2.

The qualitative analysis of the study was based on the open-ended questions of the questionnaire. From this inductive analysis, each question's answers could be divided from three to five different main themes or categories. All these categories and themes are further explained in the previous chapter 6. The recognized categories and themes are visualized in table 8 below.

Table 8. The recognized main themes and categories from the open-ended questions based on the inductive analysis.

Open-ended question regarding environmental sustainability communication	Recognized main themes/categories from the answers
<i>Greek climate tax</i>	1) negative and/or doubtful attitude towards climate taxation 2) positive attitude towards climate taxation 3) unawareness of the tax and its purpose
<i>Relationship to climate change and environmental issues</i>	1) worry about the rise in temperature and natural disasters 2) worry about future generations 3) reducing the amount of travel and flying 4) making changes in mundane life 5) individuals' actions do not matter 6) no worry nor effect in traveling habits
<i>Sustainable traveling's meaning in one's life</i>	1) respect for local communities, nature and animals 2) considering the timing and the way of travel 3) recycling and saving energy 4) prioritizing responsible local operators 5) no expressed interest in sustainable tourism

However, these open-ended responses can also be viewed from another point of view. For instance, the answers can also be thematized based on the idea of whether the response reflects the consumers' attitudes towards sustainability, or actual behavior due to the worry about climate change and environmental issues. Many of the responses reflected consumers' attitudes towards sustainability, although these attitudes had not led to any pro-sustainable behavior among these respondents. Pro-sustainable behavior, in this case, refers to behavior that reflects the individual's pro-environmental attitudes (Wyss et al., 2022, p. 1). For example, these following respondents mentioned that they are somewhat worried about environmental issues, however, this worry has not affected their amount of international travel significantly:

“(It is) somewhat worrying. It hasn't affected the number of trips, but I don't want to travel anywhere in southern Europe in July-August.”

“Yes, it's a concern, but it hasn't affected my travel because all in all, I travel quite a little”

Correspondently, some of the respondents have changed their behavior due to the worry caused by climate change and environmental issues. For instance, the following respondent mentioned that they have changed their behavior by, for example, recycling:

“I try to behave in travel destinations in a way that I at least don't litter. I take care of recycling, etc.”

Many of the respondents also mentioned that their worry about environmental issues has influenced their choice of travel destinations:

“Yes, it worries me. I try to choose destinations with fewer tourists and less environmental impact on nature.”

Another viewpoint could also be comparing the self-centered attitude with the altruistic-centered attitude towards pro-sustainable behavior, which can be noticed from the responses. Altruistic-centered, also referred to as other-centered behavior, can be defined as behavior that is mostly motivated by the interests and orientations of others (Bajde, 2006, p. 313). In other words, this can mean prioritizing others' wellbeing over one's own. On the contrary, many of the responses reflect the attitudes of an individual trying to make the most out of their holiday, to gain something of the holiday for themselves.

As an example, some of the respondents tended to avoid traveling in the hottest summer months to avoid the excessive heat in the destination, since traveling during the heat is uncomfortable for them. For instance, this following respondent mentioned that they travel since they need the warmth and the sun for themselves a few times a year:

“It worries me, but since we live in Finland where it's always cold, I need the sun/heat a couple of times a year. I try to focus on sensible options and things that burden the planet as little as possible then back home in Finland”

Simultaneously, some of the responses reflect the attitudes of individuals trying to act in a more sustainable way to ensure more sustainable surroundings for future generations. Therefore, the answers could be divided based on whether the focus is on the individual themselves or other-centered behavior. This worry about environmental issues had often made the individuals change their traveling behavior, so that they could ensure better living for their children or grandchildren. A few of the respondents mentioned that they are not worried about themselves but are worried about what the situation will be like for the upcoming generations. For instance, this type of acknowledging the others reflects an altruistic-centered behavior:

“Yes, climate change worries me, after all, I have three children, so I worry about them too.”

This qualitative data gained from the open-ended questions can help to answer the second research question of this study: *What kind of information about environmental sustainability matters do consumers value while booking a package holiday through a travel agency?*

It can be noticed that sustainability, for many of the respondents, means not only respect for the local environment but also for the local people and culture. According to the answers from the open-ended questions, recycling and saving natural resources is also very important. Minimizing carbon emissions by considering the way of travel was also something that was emphasized in the qualitative data. Many of the consumers tended to prioritize responsible and above all, local products and services.

While looking at the consumers' worries regarding environmental issues and climate change, many of the respondents were especially worried about the rise in temperature and the growing number of natural disasters. The worry for future generations also stood out from the answers. Many of the respondents had changed their behavior due to these worries; it could be seen both in their everyday lives and in their changed traveling habits. However, it is worth noting that there were also respondents who stated that they are either not worried about climate change or the worry does not affect their behavior at all.

The Greek climate tax evoked different kinds of opinions among the respondents. Part of the respondents reacted positively to the tax, while part of the respondents had a negative attitude towards the tax, often doubting either the purpose or the intended use of the tax. There were

also respondents who were not aware of the tax either at all or who were not aware that the tax is related to climate issues.

From this qualitative data, it can be noticed that environmental issues and sustainability matters evoke versatile opinions and emotions among consumers. The environmental sustainability communication of travel agencies can act as an opportunity not only to inform consumers about sustainability matters, but also to encourage the consumers to make more environmentally friendly changes in their travel habits.

Overall, many of the consumers were worried about climate change and environmental issues. Sustainable tourism was an important value issue for many consumers; however, it could be noticed that there was also a group of consumers to whom sustainable tourism does not mean much at all. The consumers, who were keen on sustainability issues, seemed to associate values such as locality, responsibility and respect for nature towards the concept of sustainable tourism.

8. CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Conclusions and managerial implications of the study

The results of this study can be applied into practice in the field of tourism marketing. The results indicate that consumers have versatile perceptions of environmental sustainability communication in the context of travel agencies. While looking at the results, it can be noticed that important values regarding sustainability for the consumers are values such as locality, responsibility and respect for nature.

The information gained from this study can be used to develop a more effective sustainability communication strategy for the anonymous commissioner company. This research also provides in-depth information about what kind of information about environmental sustainability matters the consumers tend to pay attention to. Furthermore, this study contributes to a societal level by identifying how consumers could make more sustainable decisions while traveling. The choice of a mixed-method approach to sustainability communication helps to examine the topic from a relatively new perspective and therefore creates methodological contribution to the discussion in the field.

Travel agencies' environmental sustainability communication should aim to provide information for the consumers who are already aware of the environmental issues, but also to educate those consumers who are not yet concerned about the environment and a more sustainable way of traveling. The environmental sustainability communication should not only be clear and informative, but also reliable and persuasive, to also target those consumers who are not yet interested in sustainability matters. This can be done in versatile ways.

To mention ways to target those consumers who are not keen on sustainability matters, they could be reached by, for example, emphasizing other consumers' feedback and comments regarding the travel agency's and/or accommodation providers' commitment towards sustainability matters. For the consumers who tend to get convinced about concrete actions, emphasizing the travel agencies' commitment to sustainability by pointing out sustainability certificates that the company has received could encourage them to consider more sustainable travel options. Furthermore, clear and transparent sustainability reports should be easily accessible for the consumers on the travel agencies' website, for the consumers to

familiarize themselves with the concrete actions that the company has taken to enhance sustainability. This is a way for the company to gain trust among their consumers and a way to help them commit to the company values.

It is also important for companies to pay attention in their marketing communication to the consumers who are already keen on sustainability matters. To satisfy this consumer segment, it could be an option to offer travel packages that have a reduced carbon footprint, such as working with accommodation operators that have received sustainability certificates and airlines that have committed to reducing their carbon footprint. In addition, emphasizing collaboration with local operators could also help to meet the needs of the consumers who appreciate locality and want to support the local culture and communities. Committing a section on the company website for sustainable travel could be a way for the sustainability-interested consumers to access this type of information easily. One option could also be embedding a search tool for accommodation options that have received sustainability certificates on the holiday booking platform, to make it easier for consumers to filter the different options by their commitments towards sustainability.

8.2 Limitations of the study

It is worth noting that there are several limitations to this study. Firstly, this study was conducted by a questionnaire that received 487 responses. The customer base of the anonymous commissioner company is much larger, and therefore the results of the study cannot be generalized to the whole customer base. It is also worth noting that the age and the gender distribution among the respondents was a little uneven, with some age groups quite underrepresented with most of the respondents (69,5%) being females. One limitation of the study is also the fact that the questionnaire was only distributed to the consumers who had booked a package holiday to Greece, leaving out consumers who travel to the other travel destinations offered by the company.

Furthermore, the chosen commissioner company operates in other Nordic countries as well as in Finland – by researching the customers from other countries could have provided greater insight into the matter. In addition, this study was limited to the customer viewpoints, leaving out the company's perspective to the matter. It is also worth mentioning that this study only examined the customers who had already booked a package tour with the

commissioner company's travel packages, leaving out the consumers who had chosen not to book the tours.

Another limitation of the study is that this was the researcher's first mixed-method study ever conducted. The inexperience of the researcher could have caused some misunderstandings in the data analysis process. Also, it should be considered that this mixed-method study included both quantitative and qualitative analyses, out of which it is possible that the inductive qualitative analysis could have been influenced by the researcher's subjective thoughts. While conducting qualitative analysis, a researcher should be aware of their "subjective I" that often affects not only their research interests and questions, but also the chosen approaches and the utilized methodologies (Kalu, 2019, p. 97).

Furthermore, the questionnaire, that was distributed to the respondents was available in both Finnish and English. Most of the respondents answered to the questionnaire in Finnish. This leads to the fact that the translations of especially the open-ended answers from Finnish to English could have led to some misapprehensions due to the language skills of the researcher.

8.3 Suggestions for future research on the topic

This study has also suggestions for other researchers in the field. Firstly, this study was limited to consumers' perceptions towards environmental sustainability communication of travel agencies. This left out the other dimensions of sustainability – the economic and the socio-cultural dimensions of sustainability should also be considered in future research. In addition, future research could be more specifically dedicated to, for example, the impact of social media marketing communication in the consumers' perceptions of sustainability communication. One aspect of future research on the topic could also be considering the impact of artificial intelligence and virtual reality on sustainable tourism marketing.

It could be also worth exploring how the attitudes towards sustainability communication vary between different generations and which type of communication channel would be the most effective way to reach consumers of different ages. Future research could also be emphasized in the consumers' environmental values – a purely qualitative study about this topic could produce in-depth and nuanced information about the thoughts of the consumers regarding sustainability matters. This study could also be repeated within another country or within another company's customers; while this study was conducted in Finland, a similar

study conducted in another country or with different customers could, in fact, give very different results.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Questionnaire

Questionnaire: The impact of sustainability communication in booking a package holiday

Hi,

My name is Hulda Haapamäki, and I am a Master's degree student at the University of Lapland. I am currently working on my master's thesis on the impact of communication related to sustainable tourism on consumers' package holidays' booking decisions. UNWTO, the World Tourism Organization under the UN, defines the concept of sustainable tourism as follows: "tourism that takes into account current and future economic, social and ecological impacts, and which focuses on taking into account the needs of tourists, businesses, the environment and the local population" (UNWTO, 2025). My thesis supervisor is Markku Vieru (email address: markku.vieru@ulapland.fi)

As a part of my thesis, I have created a survey, which aims to gain information about the insights of *[commissioner company's name]* customers regarding sustainability communication. The survey has been distributed to the *[commissioner company's name]* customers who have booked a package holiday to Greece for the summer season of 2025. Participating in the survey is completely voluntary and answering it takes about 5-10 minutes.

The survey mainly contains multiple-choice questions, and a few open questions have also been included in the survey. For the success of my research, every answer is important! One 70-euro *[commissioner company's name]* travel gift card will be drawn among those who answered the survey. You can participate in the raffle by leaving your email address in the answer field at the end of the survey. You can find the rules of the raffle from this following link: *[link to the commissioner company's website]* It is possible to answer the survey until June 27, 2025.

Thank you in advance for your participation and have a sunny summer vacation!

Best regards,
Hulda Haapamäki
huhaapam@ulapland.fi

Part 1: Demographic background questions

The first questions concern your background information. After that, the survey proceeds in a total of six short parts, including questions about your relationship to sustainable tourism and sustainability communication.

The survey contains a few open questions, which you can skip if you wish, as answering them is not mandatory.

1. How aware do you feel about climate change and environmental issues?

Very aware

Somewhat aware

A little aware

Not at all aware

In the following question, package holiday refers to a holiday that is purchased as a single entity and that usually includes at least flights and accommodation at the destination (Statistics Finland, 2025).

2. How often do you travel with package holidays?

Almost never

More rarely than once a year

Once a year

2-3 times a year

More than 3 times a year

Part 2: General questions related to travel agencies' sustainability communication

3. How do you usually get information about travel agencies' activities related to sustainable tourism? (Select all options that apply)

Websites

Social media (for example Instagram, Facebook)

Email / Newsletters

Travel agencies' customer service

Somehow else, how?

4. How important do you consider the role of communication related to sustainable tourism in choosing a travel agency?

Very important

Quite important

Neutral

Not very important

Not at all important

5. Do you trust travel agencies' promises related to sustainable tourism?

Yes, completely

Somewhat yes

Not very much

Not at all

6. How do you usually check a travel agency's claims related to sustainable tourism?

By checking the certificates given to the company (for example Travelife, Green Key)

By reading reviews written by other travelers

By checking the company's website

By contacting the travel agency

I do not usually check the claims related to sustainable tourism

7. What would increase your trust in the sustainable tourism actions of travel agencies?

Different sustainability-related certificates

Transparency in sustainability communication

More detailed sustainability reports

Positive customer reviews of the travel agency's sustainable development activities

Something else, what?

8. Would you recommend a travel agency if it emphasized sustainable tourism in its communication?

Yes, definitely

Yes, likely

No, probably not

No, definitely not

9. Does the travel agency's sustainable travel communication affect whether you would book a trip through the same travel agency again?

Yes, definitely

Yes, likely

No, probably not

No, definitely not

10. Have you ever chosen a travel agency over another because of its sustainable travel communication?

Yes, which travel agency?

No

Part 3: Visibility and clarity of sustainability communication in [commissioner company's name] communication channels

11. Have you paid attention to sustainability communication in [commissioner company's name] communication channels (website, social media, advertisements)?

Yes, often

Yes, sometimes

Rarely

No, never

12. How clear do you feel that the sustainability communication is in [commissioner company's name] communication channels?

Very clear

Somewhat clear

Neutral

Somewhat unclear

Very unclear

Part 4: The role of [commissioner company's name] sustainability communication in booking a package holiday

13. Has [commissioner company's name] sustainability communication affected your decision to book a package holiday?

Yes, strongly

Yes, somehow

Only a little

Not at all

14. Which aspects of sustainable tourism are most important to you when booking a package holiday? (Choose max. 3)

Environmentally friendly accommodation options (e.g. hotels representing the principles of sustainable development, energy saving measures)

More sustainable transport options (e.g. electric vehicles, emission credits)

Nature conservation (protection of biodiversity)

Reducing waste (e.g. recycling and reducing the use of plastic in the destination)

Something else, what?

Part 5: Destination (Greece) -specific questions

15. Have you traveled to Greece in the last five years?

Yes

No

16. How important do you consider the principles of sustainable tourism when traveling to Greece?

Very important

Quite important

Not very important

Not at all important

17. Have the phenomena related to climate change (e.g. heat waves, wildfires) influenced your decision to book a trip to Greece?

Yes, I have sometimes left a holiday completely unbooked due to climate reasons

Yes, the timing of my booking or the destination I chose was affected by climate concerns

No, but I've thought about it

No, climate change has not affected my decision

In Greece, there is a climate tax (Climate Crisis Resilience Charge), which is added to the price of accommodation at the destination. The amount of the tax depends on the level of accommodation and is 2-15 euros per night and per room or apartment.

18. How does the climate tax in Greece affect your travel decision?

It affects significantly

It affects somehow

It affects a little

It does not affect my decision at all

19. How do you think travel agencies should communicate about the climate tax in Greece?

Clearly already at the booking stage, so that customers are aware of the additional costs

Mention the climate tax in travel documents or booking confirmation

It is not necessary to emphasize it separately, because it is part of the travel expenses

I do not know / I have no opinion on the matter

20. How does the communication related to the climate tax in Greece affect your perception of the travel agency's responsibility?

Positively: The travel agency is responsible when it clearly communicates the climate tax and its purpose.

Neutral: The climate tax does not affect my perception of the travel agency's responsibility.

Negatively: I see the climate tax only as an additional cost, and the travel agency's communication does not affect the matter.

I'm not sure / No opinion.

21. What kind of thoughts does the Greek climate tax evoke in you? (Answering to this question is voluntary.)

Part 6: Open questions and travel gift card draw

22. Does climate change worry you? If so, in what ways has this worry affected your travel habits? (Answering to this question is voluntary.)

23. What does sustainable traveling mean to you? (Answering to this question is voluntary.)

24. Your age

Under 25

25-34

35-44

45-54

55-64

65 or higher

25. Gender

Male

Female

Other

I prefer not to answer

26. Education level

Comprehensive school

High school / Vocational school

Undergraduate degree

Master's degree or higher

27. One 70-euro giftcard to [commissioner company's name] service offering will be drawn among all the respondents. If you want to participate in the raffle, please write your email address in the box below. (Participating in the raffle is voluntary).

Email address

Appendix 2. Chi-Square test result from the crosstabulation (Table 6).

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	161,113 ^a	8	<,001
Likelihood Ratio	163,580	8	<,001
Linear-by-Linear Association	130,305	1	<,001
N of Valid Cases	480		

a. 3 cells (20,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2,29.

Appendix 3. Chi-square test from the crosstabulation (Table 7).

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	30,088 ^a	6	<,001
Likelihood Ratio	32,853	6	<,001
Linear-by-Linear Association	15,107	1	<,001
N of Valid Cases	480		

a. 1 cells (8,3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2,14.