

# Chapter 13

## The Influence of Involvement and Attribute Importance on Purchase Intentions for Green Products



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**Abstract** Consumer interest is driving growth in the use of greener products, such as those using recycled materials. However, several outstanding questions remain regarding purchase intentions for green products. One current debate regards the role of age, with some findings showing older consumers are more willing to purchase green products, and other studies to the contrary. There are also a number of studies with differing results regarding the role of product involvement. We conduct an experiment and use conjoint analysis to test for the influence of age and involvement on purchase intentions for green products. We find that younger consumers are more likely to purchase green products if they are affordable. We also observe that being green can directly lead to higher purchase intentions for a low involving affordable product, whereas the green attribute is one of several attributes a consumer evaluates for a high involving affordable product.

**Keywords** Green purchase intentions · Product involvement · Environmental concern · Conjoint analysis · Age

### 13.1 Introduction

Environmentally friendly products are increasingly important for consumers and societal welfare. This is mirrored by a growing popularity and number of products made from recycled products (Polyportis et al. 2022). For example, IKEA the Swedish furniture giant is actively working toward sourcing and using only renewable and recycled materials by 2030 (Ikea 2022). A subset of available resources for recycling resides in the sea. Plastic in our oceans, or marine plastics, is a growing and major problem, as it kills wildlife and enters the human food chain (Parker 2019).

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Waste fishing gear, such as fishing nets, is one of the major sources of marine plastics. Attempts to recover and recycle fishing gear are underway, but markets must be found to sell products made from this recycled material if the process is to be sustainable (Milios et al. 2018; Polyoportis et al. 2022). In its most recent annual report, Interface, an over \$1 billion office carpet manufacturer, lists the use of recycled material as central in reducing its environmental impact (Interface 2021). The recycled material used in their carpets is partly made from recycled fishing gear, and the use of this material is driven by customer demand (Interface 2021). Hence, we can see an increased interest in the use of recycled materials in the production of new and more environmentally friendly products. Other illustrations of this include the NextWave consortium which includes several companies collecting and using recycled fishing gear in their products, such as IKEA, Interface, Dell, MillerKnoll, and Trek Bicycle (NextWave 2022). Aquafil, which produces Econyl, a fabric produced from recycled material including fishing nets, lists over 500 apparel and interior brands that use their recycled Econyl nylon in their products, including Speedo, Burberry, Mercedes-Benz, H&M, Tom Dixon, and Tarkett (Econyl 2022). Aquafil, the manufacturer of Econyl, states that for every 10,000 tons of Econyl they create, they save 70,000 barrels of oil and 65,100 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, with a resulting 90% reduction in greenhouse gases by producing recycled rather than new, virgin nylon (Econyl 2022). Nofir, another collection company, notes that they have helped recover almost 55,000 tons of waste fishing nets which are then recycled (Nofir 2022).

Prior research shows that the use of environmentally friendly or, *green*, products can differentiate and be a competitive advantage among at least some consumer segments (He and Deng 2020). Those who are more concerned about the environment are shown to be more likely to purchase green products (Tanner and Wölfling Kast 2003; Taufique et al. 2017). This is also the case when consumers perceive a product to be more relevant, or involving, for them (Vermeir and Verbeke 2006). However, the interplay of product involvement and purchase intentions for green products can vary, with increased involvement leading to higher purchase intentions for some product categories, but not others (Rahman 2018). There is also an ongoing debate regarding the role of age in purchasing green products, with some studies finding that older consumers are more likely to purchase green products and others observing the opposite (Coderoni and Perito 2020; Zhao et al. 2014).

In this study, we look further into the role of consumer age and involvement for purchase intentions for green products to add to the discussion regarding both. We conduct an experiment and utilize conjoint analysis to uncover preferences and test the influence of age and involvement on purchase intentions for typical products made from recycled materials. In the next section, we review the relevant literature and present the hypotheses. This will be followed by a description of the methods employed, presentation of results, and a general discussion including implications, limitations, further research, and conclusion.

## 13.2 Literature Review

We will now review product opportunities for products made from recycled fishing gear, followed by a discussion of purchase intentions for such products and develop hypotheses.

### 13.2.1 *Green Product Opportunities from Recycled Fishing Gear*

There are a growing number of products made from recycled fishing gear. Econyl is a regenerated nylon product made from recycled fishing nets, carpet, pre-consumer, and other waste and is used by over 500 apparel and interior brands (Econyl 2022). Products made from Econyl are often used in formfitting apparel, sportswear, swimsuits, rope, and carpet (Sewport 2022). Another actor, the NextWave consortium, brings together several large firms to use recycled fishing nets in their products. Their members include CPI Card Group, Dell Technologies, HP Inc, Humanscale, IKEA, Interface, Logitech, MillerKnoll, Prevented Ocean Plastic, Shinola, Solgaard, #tide, Trek Bicycle, and Veritiv, and they develop products from office chairs, laptop components, backpacks, watch bands, payment cards, bicycle parts, shoes, stereo components, printer ink cartridges, packaging, cosmetics, tablecloths, to carpet tiles (NextWave 2022). Other firms, such as PartnerPlast (2022), Vartdal Plast (2022), and Plasto (2022), are using recycled fishing gear in developing marine components, such as electronic buoys, tools, car chargers, construction materials, and insulated packaging. Companies like Bracenet (2022), Planet Love Life (2022), and Kettle Cove Enterprises (2022) are creating small items like bracelets, earrings, baskets, and keychains from recycled fishing nets. Bureo (2022) and Fishpond (2022) produce outdoor, clothing, and sporting goods products from recycled fishing gear. The existence and increasing development of these green products suggest that there is market interest, yet research regarding purchase intentions for green products is not conclusive (Park and Lin 2020; Polyportis et al. 2022; Rahman 2018).

### 13.2.2 *Purchase Intentions for Green Products*

Many studies have examined purchase intentions for green products (for reviews, see Groening et al. 2018; Wijekoon and Sabri 2021; and Zhuang et al. 2021). Commonly cited drivers of green purchase intentions include attitudes, such as environmental concern (Newton et al. 2015; Taufique et al. 2017), knowledge of environmental issues (Kanchanapibul et al. 2014; Kang et al. 2013), green product attributes (Park and Lin 2020), and demographics (D'Souza et al. 2007; Diamantopoulos et al. 2003; Zhao et al. 2014), among others (Groening et al. 2018).

Demographics, such as higher income and education, have been shown to have a positive influence on purchase intentions for green products (D'Souza et al. 2007; Diamantopoulos et al. 2003; Zhao et al. 2014). However, the role of age in green purchase decisions is unclear. It has been established in the literature that younger consumers are more likely to be concerned about environmental issues (Buttel 1979; Liere and Dunlap 1980), though there is debate regarding whether this leads to an increased willingness to purchase sustainable products (D'Souza et al. 2007; Zhao et al. 2014). Often, price is more important for a purchase than a product's environmental credentials (Gleim et al. 2013; Mansuy et al. 2020; Wang et al., 2022). However, some recent research has shown a negative relationship between age and willingness to purchase green products (Coderoni and Perito 2020). Furthermore, Diamantopoulos et al. (2003) have argued that although younger consumers may be more concerned about the environmental impact of their purchases, they do not have the income to purchase more green products because they tend to be more expensive. This latter research suggests that the reason for the gap between environmental concern and purchase intentions for younger consumers is due to the price level, where price is a barrier. Hence, if we remove this barrier by presenting consumers with products that are inexpensive, we should observe a negative relationship between age and purchase intentions for green products. Hence, affordable green products, that is, products that are not expensive for younger consumers, should be more likely to be purchased by younger, relative to older, consumers. The above discussion leads us to our first hypothesis:

*H<sub>1</sub>: Younger consumers will be more likely to purchase affordable green products than older consumers.*

Product involvement, defined as “a person's perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests” (Zaichkowsky 1985), has been shown to influence how we make decisions (Cacioppo and Petty 1984; Petty et al. 1983). When products are lower involving, hence less relevant to us, we pay less attention to information we are given about a product and tend to use quick heuristics to make a choice (a non-compensatory process); often based on a single attribute such as price. When a product is more involving, we tend to pay more attention to the information given to us about it and evaluate the product based on a weighting of different attributes (i.e., a compensatory process). Higher involvement has been associated with increased intentions to purchase green products (Vermeir and Verbeke 2006), though this can depend heavily on the product category (Rahman 2018). We expect higher purchase intentions for green products among those who indicate higher involvement for those products. However, we believe there is a difference in how processing a choice for green products is influenced by product involvement.

For less involving products, consumers often resort to simple non-compensatory choice strategies, such as “I'll choose the cheapest option” (Cacioppo and Petty 1984; Petty et al. 1983). In such cases, the most salient attribute may be used in decision-making. Promotion of a green attribute can lead to the use of that attribute in decision-making (Atkinson and Rosenthal 2014). A consumer with some interest in the environment would then choose an alternative with a green attribute, if price does

not over-ride. When considering a less involving product, a green-focused consumer may give high importance to a single attribute, e.g., the use of green materials used to make a product. Based on the above arguments, we hypothesize as follows:

*H<sub>2</sub>: The importance of the materials used attribute for products will be positively associated with purchase intentions for low involvement products when the green attribute is preferred.*

For more involving products, consumers often resort to more compensatory processing, whereby they evaluate more attributes related to a product when making a choice (Cacioppo and Petty 1984; Petty et al. 1983). Given their reliance on and evaluation of more attributes, any single attribute should be less important in relation to other attributes for a more involving relative to less involving product. This leads us to our third hypothesis:

*H<sub>3</sub>: The importance of the materials used attribute for products, will not be associated with purchase intentions for high involvement products even if the green attribute is preferred.*

We will now turn our attention to the methods we employed to test the above hypotheses, including the use of conjoint analysis to infer consumers' unconscious preferences. This will be followed by a discussion of the results and implications for theory and management.

## 13.3 Methods

A pre-test was conducted to identify products that varied on involvement for use as stimuli in a main study. The main study used an online survey design that included a choice-based conjoint analysis task to measure consumers' preferences for both products.

### 13.3.1 Pretest

To choose focal products for the main study, we conducted a pre-test ( $n = 44$ ) in which we asked respondents to rate several products on product involvement. We wanted product categories that would be typical for recycled material and vary on involvement, but still be relevant and affordable for most consumers. Backpacks and socks were chosen from this pre-test, as they were typical recycled products, varied on involvement, were affordable to most consumers, were relevant (as backpacks and socks are commonly purchased by most consumers at some point), and allowed for the stimulus used in the main study to be applicable for both women and men.

## 13.4 Main Study

We conducted a conjoint-based online survey among 193 Norwegian respondents. They were aged 18+, and 57% of the respondents were women. First, choice-based conjoint analysis was used to elicit preferences for two product categories that varied on involvement. Some conjoint analysis studies have examined consumers' intentions to purchase sustainable products, with a general finding being that although consumers are interested in sustainable products, price is often more important (Mansuy et al. 2020; Wang et al. 2022). Therefore, we control for price sensitivity, as measured by price importance in the conjoint task. The other attributes used in the conjoint task were design, brand, and the amount of recycled material used in the product (0% vs. 50% vs. 90% recycled). The output of the conjoint task is a measure of the importance of each attribute to a consumer's overall intention to purchase each product. The sum of the importances for each attribute for a respondent totals to 100%. For example, a respondent might place 35% importance on price, 10% on Brand, 30% on material, and 25% on design. Following the conjoint task, respondents were asked to indicate their concern for the environment, level of involvement with the two product categories, and some limited demographic information (e.g., age and gender). These variables were measured as shown below.

### 13.4.1 Variables

*Environmental concern* was measured by a 4-item, 7-point Likert scale (Nhu et al. 2019) where respondents were asked to rate how much they agreed with the statements: "I am worried about the worsening quality of the environment", "the environment is my major concern", "I am emotionally involved in environmental protection issues" and "I often think about how the environmental quality can be improved" (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.883$ ,  $n = 193$ ).

*Product Involvement* was measured on a 4-item, 7-point Likert scale (adapted from McQuarrie and Munson 1992). For each product used in the study, respondents were asked to rate the importance, their interest for, how much they mean, and relevance of [product] to them (Cronbach's  $\alpha_{\text{low involvement}} = 0.888$ ,  $n = 193$  and Cronbach's  $\alpha_{\text{high involvement}} = 0.893$ ,  $n = 193$ ).

*Purchase intentions* were measured by a single item, 7-point Likert scale in line with Bergkvist and Rossiter (2007) who endorse the use of a single item when measuring a specific singular and concrete attribute. For each product used in the study, respondents were asked "How likely is it that you would purchase [product] made from recycled fishing nets?".

## 13.5 Results

Before conducting our tests, we checked that our two products varied on involvement. Backpacks were seen as higher involvement ( $M_{\text{backpacks}} = 4.9$ ,  $n = 193$ ) than socks ( $M_{\text{socks}} = 3.7$ ,  $n = 193$ ). Hence, we can consider backpacks as high involvement and sock as low involvement for our tests.

We also needed to check that our products were affordable. For the low involvement product, Design was the most important attribute ( $M_{\text{design}} = 36.8\%$ ), followed by Price ( $M_{\text{price}} = 28.5\%$ ) and Material ( $M_{\text{material}} = 28.2\%$ ), and finally Brand ( $M_{\text{brand}} = 6.5\%$ ). For the high involvement product, Design was the most important attribute ( $M_{\text{design}} = 36.0\%$ ), followed by Price ( $M_{\text{price}} = 33.3\%$ ), Material ( $M_{\text{material}} = 21.0\%$ ), and finally Brand ( $M_{\text{brand}} = 9.7\%$ ). This suggests that both products were affordable, as price was not the most important attribute.

### 13.5.1 Age

To test  $H_1$ , that younger consumers are more likely to purchase green products, we conducted a correlation analysis. For both products, younger consumers showed higher purchase intentions than older consumers ( $r_{\text{low involvement product}} = -0.15$ ,  $n = 225$ ,  $p < 0.05$  and  $r_{\text{high involvement product}} = -0.18$ ,  $n = 225$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), providing support for  $H_1$ . Age was not correlated with environmental concern ( $r_{\text{age}} = 0.00$ ,  $n = 225$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ).

### 13.5.2 Involvement

To test our hypothesis that a general intention to purchase sustainable products would lead to purchase intentions for specific products, but influenced by involvement, we conducted a regression analysis for each product category. In each regression, we also controlled for price sensitivity, as this has been shown to have a stronger influence on purchase intentions than environmental concerns (Mansuy et al. 2020; Wang et al. 2022). We also control for product involvement within each product.

The model explained 21% of variance in purchase intentions for the high involvement product ( $PI_{\text{high involvement}}: F(7, 185) = 8.23$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Age, environmental concern, and involvement were found to be predictors of purchase intentions for the high involvement product (see Table 13.1). That is, younger consumers, those more concerned about the environment and those more involved, had a higher intention to purchase the higher involving green product. This provides support for  $H_3$ .

The model explained 30% of variance in purchase intentions for the low involvement product ( $PI_{\text{low involvement}}: F(7, 185) = 12.77$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Environmental concern,

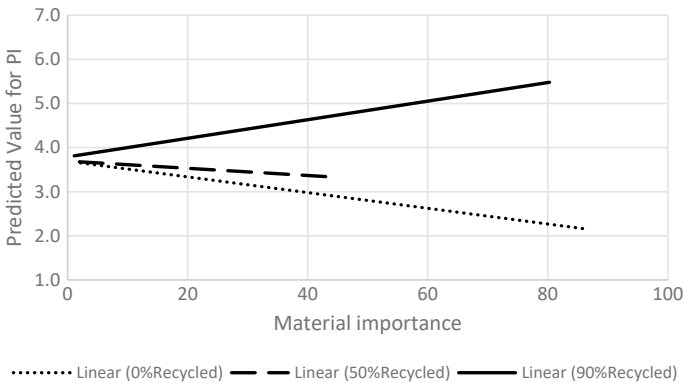
**Table 13.1** Regression predicting purchase intentions

	High involvement		Low involvement	
	Beta	Sig	Beta	Sig
Age	<b>-0.24</b>	< <b>0.001</b>	-0.09	0.176
Environmental concern	<b>0.33</b>	< <b>0.001</b>	<b>0.29</b>	< <b>0.001</b>
Product involvement	<b>0.14</b>	<b>0.040</b>	<b>0.15</b>	<b>0.017</b>
Price importance	-0.05	0.457	-0.03	0.639
Material importance	0.13	0.847	<b>-0.52</b>	< <b>0.001</b>
Material rank	-0.02	0.866	-0.02	0.837
Material rank X importance	-0.05	0.940	<b>0.40</b>	<b>0.006</b>

Bold indicate that the result is statistically significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level

involvement, material importance, and the interaction of material rank and importance were found to be predictors of purchase intentions (see Table 13.1). Hence, we found support for H2 which states that the importance of the materials used attribute for products will be positively associated with purchase intentions for low involvement products when the green attribute is preferred.

The interaction of material rank and importance suggests that as the rank is lower (i.e., prefer non-recycled), the consumer chooses based on non-recycled being the preferred material, whereas those who prefer the 90% recycled material choose based on this preference (see Fig. 13.1) and provides support for H3. Price importance was not found to be a driver of purchase intentions for either product.



**Fig. 13.1** Interaction of material rank X importance predicting PI for low involvement product



## 13.6 Discussion

Our findings make important contributions to the literature and debate regarding purchase intentions for green products and age. Our study provides increased understanding and insight on the role of material importance in the purchase of green products. In addition, our study shed light on the role of age in the consumer decision-making process in relation to the purchase of green products. The result of our study suggests that younger consumers are more likely to purchase affordable green products, as suggested by Diamantopoulos et al. (2003). We also saw an influence of environmental concern and product involvement on purchase intentions that are in accordance with results from prior research (Newton et al. 2015; Vermeir and Verbeke 2006). More environmentally concerned and more involved consumers had higher intentions to purchase green products. We also found an interaction between the importance the consumer place on the materials used in the product and the positive or negative desirability of the green attribute for the low involvement product. This interaction was not seen for the high involvement product. We will now discuss the theoretical and managerial implications, followed by identification of some limitations.

### 13.6.1 Theoretical Implications

Age was negatively correlated with intentions to purchase affordable green products. This adds support to previous studies showing younger consumers are more interested in purchasing green products than older consumers, when price is not a barrier (Diamantopoulos et al. 2003), suggesting that a disconnect between green attitudes and green purchasing intentions has to do with younger consumers not having the ability to purchase more expensive green products. Our findings support this line of reasoning.

We also find support for arguments that consumers are less influenced by the green attribute for more involving products relative to less involving, as suggested by Atkinson and Rosenthal (2014). It appears that consumers of low involving products seek out simple cues from which to make a choice. A green product attribute can provide such a cue, hence increasing the importance of that attribute in a choice. For more involving products, the green attribute is one of the potentially several core attributes that a product is evaluated on. If the consumer is interested in green products, the product still must be good enough on other attributes weighed in the consumer's evaluation.

### **13.6.2 Managerial Implications**

Focusing on green attributes can be a primary focus for low involvement products among younger consumers, as they may use a simple heuristic choice strategy to choose the green product, when making a decision among competing affordable alternatives. However, for more involving products, the sustainability attribute will be considered among other attributes in a compensatory process. This suggests the overall utility of higher involving products will be considered when a consumer is making a choice and more careful thought should be given to developing the products accordingly.

Younger consumers may be a better target group for green products when the price level is not a barrier for them. Our research showed that there was a general tendency for younger consumers to be more interested in purchasing affordable green products than older. Hence, marketing communication activities may be more effective when targeted at younger consumers when the price is considered reasonable, given their more limited budgets.

## **13.7 Limitations, Further Research, and Conclusion**

We only tested our hypotheses with two products meant to represent a lower and higher involving product. Also, the difference in mean involvement for these two products was greater in the pre-test relative to the main study. This makes it difficult to generalize our findings. Prior research also suggests that involvement is highly dependent on product category (Rahman 2018). We suggest further research using more products and services to see whether these results hold in other categories and to test for boundary conditions. In conclusion, our analysis shows that younger consumers are more likely to purchase green products if they are reasonably priced. Being green can directly lead to higher purchase intentions especially for low involving, affordable, products. Firms have a great deal of potential to differentiate themselves from their competitors, through creating value from waste and offering environmentally friendly, and green products that target the relevant customer segments. Thus, we believe is a win–win business solution to the marine plastics pollution problem.

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