
Predicting Consumers' Purchasing Intentions of a Product; A Critical Analysis of Willingness-To-Pay as the Antecedent

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, consumers have become environmentally conscious through their consumption activities and are more willing to buy green products and services. This is attributed to the progressive increase in environmental consciousness globally. Nevertheless, the massive consumption of plastics continues to persist. This concern has led to the formulation of a variety of initiatives with the ultimate aim of reducing plastic bags usage. Moreover, eco-friendly bags have been adopted as viable replacements. However, these bags are priced higher than the ubiquitous plastic shopping bags due to the higher costs of production incurred by the manufacturers in the process. Hence, this study was undertaken among 400 respondents in Bangalore and Chennai to explore how their willingness to pay may influence their purchasing intentions toward eco-friendly bags with price and quality attributes being the mediating factors. The formulated research hypotheses were tested using linear regressions and Pearson's correlation analysis. The data collected using survey questionnaires with the convenience sampling technique were statistically analysed with SPSS. The results confirm that price and quality attributes have positive mediating impacts. Finally, willingness to pay is a predictor and major antecedent of consumers' intentions toward purchasing eco-friendly bags. It is proposed that in order to gain consumers' intention, it is fundamental to arouse their willingness to pay through better pricing and product quality. Accordingly, as much as this is done, the product will receive an overwhelming response from the consumers.

Keywords: *Consumers' Purchasing Intentions, Willingness-To-Pay, Eco-Friendly Bags, Plastic Bags, Price and Quality Attributes.*

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Environmental Degradation

There has been a progressive increase in environmental consciousness globally. The concerns about environmental problems faced daily such as pollution and climate change and their resulting dreadful environmental impacts for humans have gained the attention of many businesses, environmentalists and governments worldwide. In recent years, consumers have also become environmentally conscious through their consumption activities and are more willing to buy green products and services. It was hinted by **Agyeman (2014)** that, firms today are faced with consumers who are environmentally conscious when making a purchase.

The relentless educational programmes and the robust environmental protection policies have played important roles in promoting favourable consumers' attitudes and intentions toward purchasing eco-friendly products. Manufacturers, on the other hand, are demonstrating their environmentalism through the products they offer to the marketplace. Accordingly, the Indian market for green products is growing tremendously in the face of the continuous demand for green products and services. Several companies now provide green products to consumers nationwide but the prices come with a premium. A better understanding of consumers' buying behaviour will allow businesses to acquire more market-applicable approach to sustain in the competitive market (**Agyeman, 2014**).

1.2 Plastic and Eco-Friendly Bags

The massive consumption of plastic and its related products has been identified as a cause of environmental degradation in the country. This is due to the fact that the wastes generated take so many years to biodegrade. The single-use non-biodegradable plastic shopping bags are omnipresent and also consumed in greater amounts. Despite the conveniences they provide to consumers, they also come with inconveniences such as creating unsightly waste, blocked drains causing major flooding, posing threats to aquatic and wildlife. The problems with plastic bags are numerous.

This concern has led to many countries, including India, formulating a variety of initiatives or policies with the ultimate aim of reducing plastic bags usage. The initiatives or policies include; the total ban across the country by the government, taxes imposed on the thicker plastic bags, and in some cases, fines imposed on retailers and consumers.

In combating environmental problems created by plastic bags, eco-friendly bags have been deemed as the best alternative. According to **Agyeman and Devaraj (2017)**, with the support of research and technology, the eco-friendly bags such as jute bags, cloth bags, paper bags and many other varieties have been introduced as the alternatives to plastic bags. These bags are reusable, recyclable and more durable than plastic bags.

1.3 Green Purchasing Intentions and Willingness-To-Pay

Green purchase intention is defined by **Nik (2009)** as the probability and willingness of a person to give preference to products having eco-friendly features over other traditional ones in their

purchase considerations. It is a significant predictor of green purchase behaviour which means that the purchase intention is positively affecting the probability of a customer's decision as to whether he will buy green products (**Beckford et al, 2010**). A consumer's intention to purchase is influenced by many factors such as brand, availability, price and quality. These factors impede them as they translate their intentions into actual purchase behaviour. **Teng and Laroche (2007)** suggest that having the intention to purchase a particular product requires an evaluation of other products in the market. Due to the available substitutes in the market, they select a particular product for themselves after performing some evaluations in the purchasing decision-making process. This is one of the reasons why often, environmentally conscious consumers face the dilemma of purchasing a plastic bag or an eco-friendly bag. Therefore, consumers do not always behave accordingly with their intentions to purchase. It is evident from the above submissions that there is a link between purchasing intentions and willingness to pay. Willingness to pay influenced by some factors, predicts purchasing intentions and purchasing intentions lead to the actual purchase action.

Nik (2009) defines willingness as the probability and willingness of a person to give preference to products having eco-friendly features over other traditional ones in their purchase considerations. Aside from quality attributes, consumers encounter myriad prices for products in the marketplace and these can influence the consumer's willingness to pay for the identified product he intends to purchase. The purchase intentions, therefore, stand to shift at any time in the purchase decision-making process of the consumer. In strategizing an optimal pricing strategy for consumers who are likely to pay more for eco-friendly bags, consumers' reactions to prices should be a key decision by both manufacturers and retailers.

Hence, in trying to understand consumers' purchasing intentions towards eco-friendly bags or green products in general, it is worthwhile to equally acknowledge the ways in which willingness to pay may influence it in their purchase decision-making process. In conclusion, this study was undertaken among 400 respondents in Bangalore and Chennai to explore how consumers' willingness to pay influence their purchasing intentions toward eco-friendly bags with price and quality attributes being the mediating factors. The formulated research hypotheses were tested using linear regressions and Pearson's correlation.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

It is evident that consumers have become environmentally conscious and are behaving in more sustainable ways. Their demands for environmentally friendly products are increasing. This indicates that the continuous educational campaigns on the environment by the government, businesses and other environmental advocacy groups aimed at generating positive consumers' attitudes and concerns toward the environment and eco-friendly products have been fruitful. Nevertheless, this is debatable in some cases since many countries are still struggling to achieve their desired environmental goals.

The rampant usage of plastics and the resulting environmental degradation created has resulted in the institution of a ban on plastics nationwide. This has paved the way for the adoption of eco-

friendly bags as viable replacements to preserve the environment. It is an undisputable fact that the implementation and the enforcement of the ban have been ineffective in both Bangalore and Chennai. Despite the difficulties being faced, consumers concern and their awareness have increased over the years. A larger portion of consumers in both cities have embraced the green movement through the use of reusable shopping bags for a variety of purposes. However, these eco-friendly bags are more expensive than the plastic shopping bags due to the higher costs of production incurred by the manufacturers in the process. Consumers, on the other hand, are most sensitive to price in trying to maximise their utility of a product. Sometimes, they are not only concerned by the price but by the quality attributes as well. Due to price and quality variations, their willingness to pay affects their purchasing intentions toward a product. This renders a strong incentive or reason to investigate this topic.

1.5 Rationale of the Study

The rationale underlying this study is to identify the roles price and quality attributes play in influencing consumers' willingness to pay and how these affects their purchasing intentions toward purchasing eco-friendly bags. Since consumers' willingness to pay is obscured by myriad prices and quality variations across both eco-friendly and plastic bags, these may affect their decision-making processes and thereby, their ultimate purchasing intentions. This renders a strong incentive or reason to investigate this topic.

Accordingly, the phenomenon would be explained by the proceeding investigations. Finally, this study could have a significant impact on manufacturers and retailers of eco-friendly bags as the roles price and quality attributes play in influencing consumers' willingness to pay are brought to light. As a result, their marketing strategies could be adjusted to satisfy consumers' needs in with regards to eco-friendly bags.

1.6 Research Gap

The discipline of green marketing has been increasingly attracting the attention of researchers. A huge number of studies in the field of green marketing have explored the factors influencing consumer behaviour, purchasing intentions and willingness to pay but none has looked into the mediating roles of price and quality attributes pertaining to consumers' willingness to pay influencing purchasing intentions toward eco-friendly bags. Gaps, therefore, exist in the literature based on this premise. This paper, therefore, focuses mainly on determining how consumers' willingness to pay may lead to their purchasing intentions of eco-friendly bags with price and quality being the mediating factors.

In other words, this study will attempt to fill this gap by using price and quality attributes being two of the most important components which play influential roles in the determination of willingness to pay for a product to test how their impacts could influence consumers' purchasing intentions. Specifically, if the quality attributes of eco-friendly bags influence their willingness to pay, what price levels are they ready to pay for?

1.7 Research Objectives

The following are the objectives of the study;

1. To identify the mediating role of price on consumer willingness to pay and their intentions toward purchasing eco-friendly bags.
2. To find out the mediating role of quality attributes on consumer willingness to pay and their intentions toward purchasing eco-friendly bags.
3. To explore the relationship between consumers' willingness to pay and purchasing intentions toward eco-friendly bags.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

It was revealed in a study by **Chen (2008)** that when a consumer selects a particular product, his final decision relies entirely on his intention. This encompasses and it is affected by the willingness to pay. Purchase intention is an individual's conscious plan to make an effort to purchase (**Spears and Singh, 2004**). In the prediction of consumers' purchase intention, it is important to understand their willingness to pay. Eco-friendly bags and green products, in general, are expensive in comparison with plastic shopping bags due to the higher costs of production incurred by the manufacturers in the process. This increases the final price for the product. However, **D'Souza et al (2005)** recommend that since the price is the antecedent of green purchases, businesses that are pursuing green products should avoid practising premium pricing strategy. There are two schools of thought on the subject of consumers' willingness to pay for environmentally friendly products. According to one, consumers are willing to pay more and in other cases, they are unwilling to pay higher prices.

Nisel (2001) suggests that the main determinant for consumers' purchase decision is low price. This is also supported by **Magnusson et al (2001)** and **D'Souza et al (2005)** who argued that many individuals consider the price to be an important determinant of consumers' product selection process. Moreover, **Verhoef (2005)** examined the effect of price and quality on green buying behaviour. It was discovered that price significantly influences customers' choice and the frequency of green buying, whereas quality only influences choice. Besides price, quality as a product attribute has been seen to play an important role in the consumers' purchasing decision process (**Gan et al, 2008**).

Consumers are price and quality sensitive. When purchasing a green product, consumers make their choices based on price and quality and they will never compromise on them. Quality attributes of the product can drive their purchasing decision but if the price is not as expected, the willingness to pay will be discouraged and vice versa. They have a major influence on consumers' willingness to pay.

2.1 Hypotheses

The research hypotheses constructed for the study are the following;

H1: Price has a positive mediating impact on consumers' willingness to pay and their intentions toward purchasing eco-friendly bags.

H2: Quality attributes have a positive mediating impact on consumers' willingness to pay and their intentions toward purchasing eco-friendly bags.

H3: There is a significant relationship between consumers' willingness to pay and purchasing intentions toward eco-friendly bags.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed the quantitative research methodology and the exploratory research design due to the nature of the objectives of the study. A survey was undertaken to explore consumers' willingness to pay and their reasoning for their purchasing intentions in Bangalore and Chennai. The study was conducted in selected places of the two cities because they are they are Tier-1 cities and both happen to be the capital cities of their respective States. They also have higher populations and this suits the demographic profiles adopted for this study. This is because the recruitment strategy was to encompass varied consumers from 18 years of age and above, of different gender, engaged in employment or education and with diverse marital statuses. Finally, environmentally friendly programmes are more popular due to the institution of a ban on plastics in these cities.

A total of 400 self-administered questionnaires were distributed to 200 respondents selected from each city using the non-probability convenience sampling method. All the self-administered questionnaires were successfully collected from the respondents. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure the items for the variables of the study. Scores on the scale items ranged from 1 to 5 corresponding to responses from strongly agree to strongly disagree and with agree, neither agree/disagree, and disagree as the interval points. This was used to measure respondents' extent of agreement or disagreements with the statements on the scale. The nature of statements in the questionnaire was close-ended questions.

The questionnaire was divided into three sections; (I, II and III). In the opening Section I of the questionnaire, it consisted of questions on the demographic profile of the respondents, which are; gender, age, education level, occupation, income level and marital status. Part II also consisted of questions related to the dependent and independent variables. These are; consumers' willingness to pay more and their purchasing intentions toward purchasing eco-friendly bags. These questions were posed to identify the relationships between them. The last Section III consisted of questions relating to the mediating impact of price and quality attributes on consumers' willingness to pay and their intentions toward purchasing eco-friendly bags.

The study obtained data from both the primary and secondary data sources as per the purpose of this study. The self-administered questionnaires handed to the respondents were the source of primary data. Secondary data were also collected from relevant books, articles, journals and reports by government agencies on the environment and eco-friendly bags. Lastly, using SPSS version 17.0, the statistical tools employed for the analyses of data were the percentage analysis (was used to analyse the respondents' demographic profile), Cronbach's alpha (was used to examine the reliability coefficient for all items), Pearson's correlation analysis (was used to determine the strength of linear relationships) and simple linear regressions (was used to

examine the nature of relationships between the dependent and independent variables.

4.0 RESULTS AND ANALYSES

4.1 Demographics Profile of Respondents

Table 4.1: Demographics Profile of Respondents

Source: Field Data

Demographic Factors	Descriptions	Total (n=400)	Percentage Total (100%)
1. Gender	a. Male	185	46.3
	b. Female	215	53.8
2. Age	a. 18-25 years	102	25.5
	b. 26-33 years	90	22.5
	c. 34-41 years	95	23.8
	d. 42-49 years	47	11.8
	e. 50-57 years	34	8.5
	f. 58 years and above	32	8.0
3. Education Level	a. None	1	0.3
	b. Diploma	62	15.5
	c. Graduate	209	52.3
	d. Postgraduate	128	32.0
4. Occupation	a. Student	37	9.3
	b. Private Sector Employee	191	47.8
	c. Government Employee	111	27.8
	d. Professional	61	15.3
5. Marital Status	a. Single	238	59.5
	b. Married	152	38.0
	c. Separated/Divorced	6	1.5
	d. Widowed	4	1.0
6. Family Size	a. 1-3	248	62.0
	b. 4-7	151	37.8
	c. 8 and above	1	0.3
7. Income Level	a. Below Rs. 10,000	23	5.8
	b. Rs. 10,000-19,000	33	8.3
	c. Rs. 20,000-29,000	35	8.8
	d. Rs. 30,000-39,000	35	8.8
	e. Rs. 40,000-49,000	83	20.8
	f. Rs. 50,000-59,000	99	24.8
	g. Rs. 60,000 and above	92	23.0

The demographic profile of the 400 respondents is represented on the table above. The table reveals that majority are females with 53.8%. Most of the respondents are found between the age categories of 18-25 years (25.5%). The education category shows that the highest numbers of

respondents are graduates (52.3%) and employed in the private sector (47.8%). With respect to their marital statuses, most of them are singles (59.5%). The dominant family size amongst the categories is 1-3, this consists of 62.0%. Finally, the majority of them earn a monthly income of between Rs. 50,000 – 59,000.

4.2 Reliability Statistics

Table 4.2: Cronbach’s Alpha

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.960	.970	15

Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficient was tested to determine the reliability coefficient for all items included in the data collection instrument. The value of Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficient is 0.960. This value is very high and it meets the minimum acceptable level of 0.7. Moreover, it confirms that the data is satisfactory and it can be used for analytical purposes.

4.3 H1: Price has a positive mediating impact on consumers’ willingness to pay and their intentions toward purchasing eco-friendly bags

Table 4.3:

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.744 ^a	.553	.552	.83500
2	.814 ^b	.662	.660	.72707

a. Predictors: (Constant), Consumers' Willingness-To-Pay

b. Predictors: (Constant), Consumers' Willingness-To-Pay, Price

1. When the mediating variable (price) was not introduced at the first stage, Regression Coefficient ‘R’ = .744 or 74.4%. Thus, it means that the correlation between the dependent variable and the independent variable is positive. Next, the Coefficient of Determination ‘R²’ = .553. This also implies that 55.3% of the variation in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variable.
2. At the second stage, when the mediating variable (price) was later introduced, the Regression Coefficient and the Coefficient of Determination were both increased. The Regression Coefficient ‘R’ = .814 or 81.4%. This implies that the correlation between the dependent variable and the independent variable is positive. Next, the Coefficient of

Determination 'R2' = .662. This also implies that 66.2% of the variation in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variable.

Table 4.4:

ANOVA^c

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	343.685	1	343.685	492.937	.000 ^a
	Residual	277.493	398	.697		
	Total	621.178	399			
2	Regression	411.313	2	205.656	389.039	.000 ^b
	Residual	209.865	397	.529		
	Total	621.178	399			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Consumers' Willingness-To-Pay

b. Predictors: (Constant), Consumers' Willingness-To-Pay, Price

c. Dependent Variable: Consumers' Purchasing Intentions

1. At the first stage, when the mediating variable (price) was not yet introduced, the F-test value of 492.937 is significant. This is due to the fact that the significance level is = .000 and it is also less than 0.05. It also implies that the correlation between the dependent variable and the independent variable is statistically significant. Therefore, the regression model is valid.
2. At the second stage, when the mediating variable (price) was finally introduced, the F-test value has now been decreased to 389.039. However, it is still significant because the significance level is = .000 and it is also less than 0.05. It also implies that the correlation between the dependent variable and the independent variable is statistically significant. Therefore, the regression model is valid.

From the above analyses, it can be concluded that price fully mediates and has a positive mediating impact on the relationship between consumers' willingness to pay and their intentions toward purchasing eco-friendly bags. The hypothesis is therefore accepted.

4.4 H2: Quality attributes have a positive mediating impact on consumer' willingness to pay and their intentions toward purchasing eco-friendly bags.

Table 4.5:

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.744 ^a	.553	.552	.83500
2	.778 ^b	.606	.604	.78511

a. Predictors: (Constant), Consumers' Willingness-To-Pay

b. Predictors: (Constant), Consumers' Willingness-To-Pay, Quality attributes

1. When the mediating variable (quality attributes) was not introduced at the first stage, Regression Coefficient 'R' = .744 or 74.4%. Thus, it means that the correlation between the dependent variable and the independent variable is positive. Next, the Coefficient of Determination 'R²' = .553. This also implies that 55.3% of the variation in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variable.
2. At the second stage, when the mediating variable (quality attributes) was later introduced, the Regression Coefficient and the Coefficient of Determination were both increased. The Regression Coefficient 'R' = .778 or 77.8%. This implies that the correlation between the dependent variable and the independent variable is positive. Next, the Coefficient of Determination 'R²' = .606. This also implies that 60.6% of the variation in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variable.

Table 4.6:

ANOVA^c

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	343.685	1	343.685	492.937	.000 ^a
	Residual	277.493	398	.697		
	Total	621.178	399			
2	Regression	376.470	2	188.235	305.383	.000 ^b
	Residual	244.707	397	.616		
	Total	621.178	399			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Consumers' Willingness-To-Pay

b. Predictors: (Constant), Consumers' Willingness-To-Pay, Quality attributes

c. Dependent Variable: Consumers' Purchasing Intentions

1. At the first stage, when the mediating variable (quality attributes) was not yet introduced, the F-test value of 492.937 is significant. This is due to the fact that the significance level is = .000 and it is also less than 0.05. It also implies that the correlation between the dependent variable and the independent variable is statistically significant. Therefore, the regression model is valid.

2. At the second stage, when the mediating variable (quality attributes) was finally introduced, the F-test value has now been decreased to 305.383. However, it is still significant because the significance level is = .000 and it is also less than 0.05. It also implies that the correlation between the dependent variable and the independent variable is statistically significant. Therefore, the regression model is valid.

From the above analyses, it can be summarised that quality attributes fully mediates and has a positive mediating impact on the relationship between consumers’ willingness to pay and their intentions toward purchasing eco-friendly bags. The hypothesis is therefore accepted.

4.5 H3: There is a significant relationship between consumers’ willingness to pay and purchasing intentions toward eco-friendly bags

Table 4.7:
Correlations

	Consumers' Willingness-To-Pay	Consumers' Purchasing Intentions
Consumers' Willingness-To-Pay	1	.744**
Pearson Correlation		.000
Sig. (2-tailed)		
N	400	400
Consumers' Purchasing Intentions	.744**	1
Pearson Correlation	.000	
Sig. (2-tailed)		
N	400	400

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 4.1: Scatter Diagram

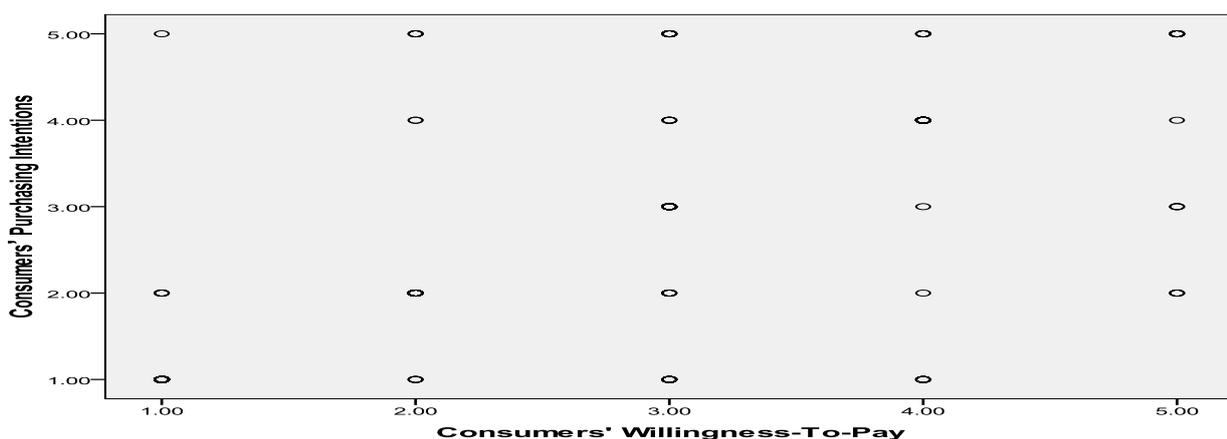


Table 4.3 above represents the correlations between consumers’ willingness to pay and purchasing intentions toward eco-friendly bags. It reveals a positive relationship because; $r(398) = .744, p = .000. p < .01$ (correlation is significant at the 0.01 level). Also, r is positive. Additionally, the scatter diagram indicates a positive trend because the dots are trending from lower left to

upper right. The hypothesis is therefore accepted.

5.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of this study based on the Pearson correlation analysis and regressions analyses indicated that price and quality attributes have positive mediating impacts on consumers' willingness to pay and their intentions. It has provided a detailed framework for understanding predictors of eco-friendly bags' purchase intention. Sensitive consumers place greater emphasis by relying on price and quality attributes in the purchase decision-making process by comparing the different substitutes in the market in order to make a purchase. Simultaneously, willingness to pay is a predictor and major antecedent of consumers' intentions toward purchasing eco-friendly bags. All the three hypotheses formulated for the study were accepted and these support the findings.

This study has provided relevant contributions to literature in filling the research gap by unveiling and establishing the relationship between consumers' intentions and willingness to pay for eco-friendly bags. It has also thrown more insights with respect to understanding consumers' overall green purchasing intentions. Finally, the study's findings have provided valuable insights to manufacturers and retailers of eco-friendly bags in designing marketing strategies. It can also be a guide to the government in its related policy making.

5.1 Managerial Implications

- Price was found in this study as having a positive mediating impact on the relationship between consumers' willingness to pay and their intentions toward purchasing eco-friendly bags. Price is always a cause of concern to consumers because they are sensitive to it. Therefore, it is recommended that the manufacturers of eco-friendly bags should revise their pricing strategies in order to boost the patronage of the product.
- Moreover, quality attributes were also found in this study as having a positive mediating impact on the relationship between consumers' willingness to pay and their intentions toward purchasing eco-friendly bags. Taking a stand from this viewpoint, the manufacturers are to pay much attention to the product's quality. Differentiation strategies could be adopted by adding more attractive features and making them durable.
- There is a significant relationship between consumers' willingness to pay and purchasing intentions toward eco-friendly bags. Thus, in order to gain consumers' intention, it is fundamental to arouse their willingness to pay through better pricing and product quality. Accordingly, as much as this is done, the product will receive an overwhelming response from the consumers.

- Additionally, the government can play a role in terms of cost reduction by decreasing duties on imports, decreasing taxes and allocating subsidies to the manufacturers. This will lower their costs of production. Consequently, this will pave the way for eco-friendly bags to be sold at suitable price levels in the market and increase its competitive strength eventually.

5.2 Limitations and Future Areas of Research

- The study only focuses on respondents from two cities. It was conducted in Bangalore and Chennai, the hub of educational, government institutions and businesses. Future research should include the participants of varied cities or villages across the country to reach more valid and valuable findings and recommendations.
- Furthermore, the results generated in this study may not apply to all types of green products and hence, the findings of this study should be generalised with cautions. To accommodate this limitation, a broader view of other green products could be replicated to give more insightful conclusions.
- Moreover, variables taken in this study and examined are not the only determinants of the intent of the consumers. Many other factors can equally predict consumers' willingness to purchase eco-friendly bags and thereby influencing their intentions. It is suggested that future research should take into account other demographic and psychographic variables as well as pricing strategies.
- Finally, it might be interesting to conduct a comparative study between eco-friendly bags and plastic bags using the price and quality attributes adopted as mediating variables in this study. The comparison could be paramount to assist the manufacturers in obtaining the views of the consumers on these two substitute products. This could better aid in their price settings and product categories they offer to the market.

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