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Drivers of Purchase Intentions of Generation Z on Eco-Products

Alina Filip [1], Alin Stancu [1], Lucian-Florin Onișor [1], Oana Cristina Mogoș [1,*], Ștefan-Alexandru Catană [2,*] and Dumitru Goldbach [3]

[1] Faculty of Marketing, Department of Marketing, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, 010374 Bucharest, Romania; alina.filip@mk.ase.ro (A.F.); alinstancu@mk.ase.ro (A.S.)
[2] Faculty of Business and Administration, Department of Business Administration, University of Bucharest, 030167 Bucharest, Romania
[3] Department of Science and Engineering, Valahia University of Targoviste, 130004 Târgoviște, Romania; dumitru.goldbach@valahia.ro
* Correspondence: oana.mogos@mk.ase.ro (O.C.M.); stefan.catana@faa.unibuc.ro (Ș.-A.C.)

Abstract: Concerns about environmental protection and sustainable consumption increased among Generation Z, as a consequence of more perceived risks emerging in the context of climate change and depletion of natural resources. The aim of the present research was to identify the main factors that influence the intention to purchase eco-products among the young generation. Quantitative marketing research was carried out on a sample of 269 Gen Z. The research results proved that purchasing intention for eco-products is strongly influenced by the perceived quality of environmentally friendly products, consumer consciousness about eco-products, perceived value of green products, and consumer trust in ecological products. Lower influences were recorded in terms of perceived price and perceived availability of eco-products, with improved total effects when considering the mediating role of eco-trust. Consequently, the provision of eco-products could lead to image benefits for organizations.

Keywords: eco-products; eco-purchase intention; eco-consciousness; eco-perceived price; eco-perceived quality; eco-perceived value; eco-perceived trust; eco-perceived availability; sustainable consumption; environmental protection

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1. Introduction

Climate change, pollution, and degradation of natural resources are increasingly of interest to people, in general, and to researchers, in particular. The growing public awareness of the consequences of human activity on the environment has led to a significant change in consumer behavior, promoting the adoption of more environmentally friendly and sustainable products [1,2]. As a result, an increasing number of consumers are adopting responsible purchasing practices to minimize their negative impact on the environment [3] or participating in circular economy practices [4]. In 2021, in a study conducted by the IBM Institute for Business Value [5], it was reported that more than 90% of the global respondents indicated that the pandemic had shaped their perspectives on sustainability, and more than two-thirds of the global respondents indicated that environmental issues are very important to them on a personal level. In addition, there are other studies that emphasize that 57% of consumers want to change their purchasing habits to help the environment [6], and 55% of customers are willing to spend more on sustainable goods [7].

In Romania, similar to other emerging markets, the interest in eco-products has been increasing [8], particularly among educated young people [9], who form a consumer group that will influence future trends. A study [10] carried out among students from Romania,

Bulgaria, and Moldova reveals that education is an essential predictor of sustainable consumption and healthy eating. Furthermore, Lakatos et al. [11] highlighted that the satisfaction offered by a green brand can be seen as a pleasant level of fulfillment for young consumers. The main barriers to purchasing sustainable products for Romania are the high price of the products, lack of trust in the authenticity of the ecolabel, the reduced availability of alternative alternatives in stores, the company's sustainability claims, and the habit of buying certain brands [12].

From a marketing point of view, before making a purchase, consumers must first become aware of the existence of eco-products, as access to information about eco-friendly products significantly influences their purchasing decisions [13]. In this line, awareness of eco-products (or green products) could be generated through labeling, packaging, and advertising [14]. Furthermore, awareness of green products can be defined as the level of understanding and recognition that consumers have of products designed to reduce environmental impact [15]. This awareness involves not only familiarity with the term 'green products', but also knowledge of their environmental benefits and the issues they aim to address [16]. In sustainable consumption, awareness is generally considered the first and crucial step in cultivating positive attitudes toward purchasing green products. Recent research indicates that consumers who are well informed about the environmental benefits of green products are more likely to choose these options over conventional ones [17,18]. Other studies reveal that environmental awareness not only influences the intention to purchase eco-friendly products but also plays a moderating role in linking pro-environmental attitudes to actual purchasing behavior [19]. However, intention refers to the likelihood or willingness of consumers to prioritize and buy green products instead of traditional alternatives [20]. This intention is influenced by various factors, such as environmental concerns [21], perceived value [22], and the level of trust consumers place in claims about green products [23]. In studies of sustainable consumption, the intention to purchase green is frequently used as an indicator of actual purchasing behavior, reflecting the commitment to sustainable practices [24]. In a study on Insta-shopping as a social commerce model, it was found that hedonic motivation, social influence, and perceived page quality contribute to institution-based trust, which, in turn, influences consumers' purchase intentions [25]. These findings suggest that elements that enhance emotional satisfaction and a pleasant experience may also play a significant role in eco-product purchase decisions.

The main research question guiding this study is as follows: *Which are the key drivers of purchase intentions of Generation Z on eco-products?* This question is particularly relevant as it contributes to the existing literature on green purchasing behavior among Generation Z, a generation with some specific attributes, such as digital natives [26] with high ethical consumption patterns [27] and a growing purchasing power [28]. The distinct consumption patterns of Generation Z have increasingly captured the attention of researchers [29,30]. Prior studies suggest that their purchasing decisions are significantly influenced by ethical considerations, social responsibility, and technological advancements, making them a key demographic for understanding shifts in modern consumer behavior [31,32]. These factors underscore the importance of examining Generation Z's consumption habits to provide insights into future market trends and sustainable business practices.

The concept of green products is presented in the literature in association with various terms such as reduced pollution [33], responsible consumption [34], sustainability [35], organic [36], environmentally responsible products [37], and ecological products [38]. For our study, we used the eco-product approach, as this is more prevalent in the Romanian market.

This paper has the following structure. First, the authors conducted a literature review on eco-products, eco-consciousness, eco-perceived value, and eco-perceived quality. To

identify the correlations between these concepts and the intention to buy, the authors conducted quantitative research on Generation Z. The research methodology and main findings are presented in the next part of the article. The paper ends with a discussion of these concepts and draws implications for practitioners and researchers.

2. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

The authors have designed and empirically tested a conceptual framework to explain the influence of the seven key drivers (environmental consciousness, eco-product perceived value, eco-product perceived quality, eco-product purchase intention, eco-product trust, eco-perceived price, and eco-product perceived availability) of purchase intentions of Generation Z on eco-products (Figure 1).

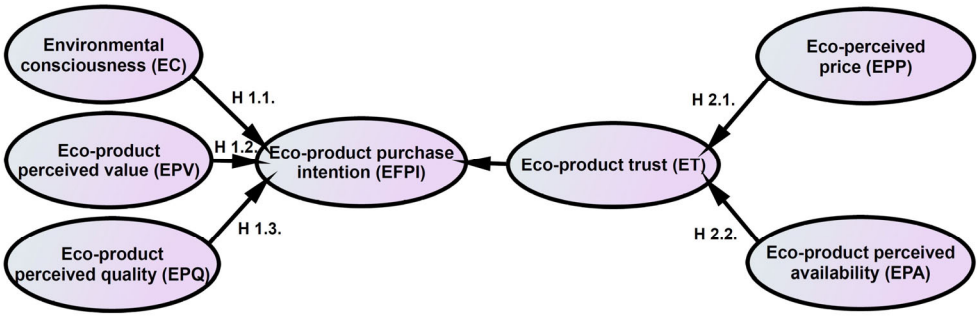


Figure 1. Conceptual research model with working hypotheses.

This framework gains importance in the context of increasing consumer awareness about the environmental impact of their purchasing decisions, driven by intensified discussions around the sustainability agenda. This has led to a growing intention to buy eco-friendly products. Eco-friendly purchase intention (EFPI) can be defined as the desire, preference, or probability of customers to choose products recognized as ecological or durable [39]. As follows, EFPI is a very significant indicator for the evaluation of present and future ecological buying decisions by consumers, allowing the estimation of consumer demand for sustainable products [23].

Building on the concept of EFPI, it is essential to explore the role of environmental consciousness (EC), since it refers to 'the psychological factors that determine consumers' propensity for environmental behavior' [40], and represents an individual's willingness to be aware of environmental issues, support efforts to solve environmental problems, as well as participate and act accordingly. Previous studies [41,42] stated that there is a positive relationship between eco-consciousness and consumer eco-purchase intention. Also, environmentally conscious consumers generally have a higher probability of developing ecological purchase intention [43]. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1.1. *Eco-friendly purchase intention is largely influenced by environmental consciousness.*

Although EFPI highlights the motivation behind sustainable consumer behavior, understanding eco-perceived value (EPV) sheds light on how consumers assess the benefits of environmentally friendly products in their decision-making process. EPV is related to the general appreciation of consumers for what they expect and what they receive from a product or service, based on their desires for the environment, durability, and ecological needs [23]. More clearly, EPV refers to how consumers imagine or predict the potential benefits gained by using an ecological product. This perceived value can significantly improve the purchase intentions of the respective products [13]. In this regard, some studies [41] also demonstrated that there is a positive relationship between the

value of green products and the intention to purchase green products. Hence, we suggest the following:

Hypothesis 1.2. *Eco-friendly purchase intention is largely influenced by eco-perceived value.*

EFPI and EPV are closely intertwined with perceived quality, as consumers' willingness to choose sustainable products often depends on their evaluation of the environmental benefits along with their overall quality. Therefore, perceived quality is defined as the overall judgment of the differences or dominance of a company and is a distinct characteristic that often affects the green consumer evaluations of that offering of consumers [44]. In addition, eco-perceived quality (EPQ) has been referred to as consumers' decision about the overall green excellence of the brand. Most of the customers believed that organic products had reliable quality, standards, and great value for money. Perceived quality has a positive effect on intentional behavior [45]. Furthermore, EPQ determines a positive influence on EFPI, which not only stimulates positive customer responses but also increases purchase intentions [44,46]. Furthermore, a study [23] conducted on the Chinese market revealed that perceived green quality had a positive effect on the intention to buy green products. Based on these ideas, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1.3. *Eco-friendly purchase intention is largely influenced by eco-perceived quality.*

Trust is considered a very important component in the influence of consumer attitudes, intentions, and actual behavior, and it is a decisive factor in buying decisions [39]. Eco-trust (ET) can be seen as the willingness to rely on the attributes of ecological products [43]. Some studies [45] revealed that price is the most important factor that influences consumers' purchasing decisions for products or services, and the prices of green products are generally higher than the regular ones, making them a barrier to purchasing green products [43]. This would imply having a positive relation between eco-price perception (EPP) and EFPI. Other studies [47] stated that ET is one of the factors that can transform the price from an obstacle to a stimulus for the intention of eco-friendly purchase. Even if a customer has a high income and is willing to spend extra money on eco-products, the lack of trust in these types of products can be a barrier to buying them [41]. Thus, we formulate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2.1. *Eco-trust mediates the relationship between eco-price perception and eco-friendly purchase intention.*

The availability of eco-friendly products is a motivating factor for consumers, as they feel the need to buy and therefore contribute to protecting the environment [13]. The inaccessibility of a product reduces the intention of buying, even if the product is environmentally friendly [48]. In the same vein, the absence of eco-friendly products' availability (EPA) can be an obstacle to environmental protection and demonstrate a strong correlation between eco-product availability and purchase intention [49]. Therefore, we suggest that there is a positive relationship between EPA and EFPI. Kim and Lee [40] suggested that there may be a relationship between ease of purchase, which is related to eco-product availability, and eco-trust, meaning that even if there is motivation and trust for eco-products, the lack of availability can be an obstacle for them to obtain the products. In the same vein, the physical distribution attributes of a green product can be a decisive factor in improving trust in eco-products [50]. From this point of view, there is a positive relationship between EPA and ET. Therefore, we state the following:

Hypothesis 2.2. *Eco-trust mediates the relationship between eco-friendly products' availability and eco-friendly purchase intention.*

All hypotheses can be visualized in Figure 1 and applied to the summary of the conceptual model proposed for the analysis.

3. Methodology

The quantitative research necessary to validate the conceptual model created to test the hypotheses raised was designed in Romanian Gen Z consumers, individuals that were born between 1997 and 2012 [47]. The study was conducted between 18 October and 6 November 2024 among undergraduate and master's students from two public universities in the capital of Romania, Bucharest, aged between 18 and 26 years old. A convenience sampling scheme was used, taking into account the selection of students from each level and year of study. The online questionnaire was distributed by email. Respondents were informed at the beginning of the questionnaire about the purpose of the research, the fact that participation in the research is voluntary, and that their responses would be anonymous. After centralization and numerical and logical verification, filtering out incomplete or erroneous data, the responses of 269 people remained for analysis, out of the 284 responses received.

The questionnaire used included questions on a five-point Likert scale. For each factor of the model, five indicators were measured with responses ranging from 5 points of total agreement to 1 point of total disagreement. The questions associated with each indicator can be seen in Table 1. The questionnaire was designed in Romanian, and tested before administration on a small group of 12 students.

The first analysis performed was a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The software used was IBM™ SPSS™ AMOS™ version 28. After running the model loaded with the five indicators for each factor, the model was optimized, retaining for analysis only those indicators that loaded the model adequately, according to common practices above 0.5 [51]. In this way, six factors of the model were measured by two indicators and only one factor by three indicators, as can be seen in Table 1 (the factors kept in the model are in bold).

The conceptual model was transposed into a statistical model based on structural equations that included seven first-order factors; see Figure 2. The model was run using the maximum likelihood estimation technique in an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to clarify and test the hypotheses formulated.

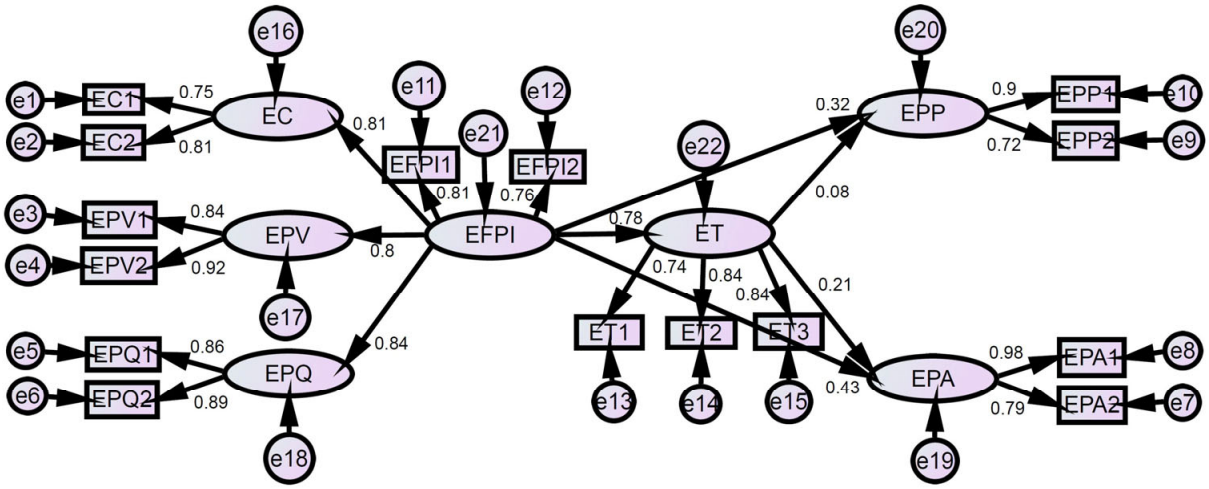


Figure 2. Research model with standardized parameter estimates.

Table 1. Initial variables measured and retained variables in the model.

Variable	Items	Source
Environmental consciousness	I have heard about eco-products	[23]
	I have a detailed knowledge and understanding of eco-products (EC1)	
	I am aware of the difference between eco-products and conventional products	
	I buy eco-products instead of common/conventional goods (EC2)	
	I am aware that buying eco-products contributes to a sustainable future	
Eco-perceived price	I am more eager to pay more for eco-products	[48]
	I like eco-products but they are expensive	
	Price is a major concern for me to go for eco-products (EPP1)	
	Although I like to buy eco-products, I cannot afford them (EPP2)	
	I will switch to eco-products if it is available at the same price compared to my favorite brands	
Eco-product perceived availability	Eco-products are seen very often in my community	[13]
	Eco-products can be easily found in my community (EPA1)	
	I have no difficulty finding eco-products in my community (EPA2)	
	I cannot find eco-products in the places where I do shopping	
	I may purchase eco-products only if they are simply available	
Eco-product perceived value	Eco-products give me extra value	[52]
	Eco-products have high value	
	Eco-products give me more benefits than other products (EPV1)	
	The environmental functions provide good value for me (EPV2)	
	Eco-products have more environmental concerns than conventional products	
Eco-product perceived quality	The quality is superior to conventional ones	[13]
	The quality is reliable compared to conventional ones	
	The quality is effective and stable compared to conventional ones	
	The quality is extraordinary compared to that of conventional ones (EPQ1)	
	The quality is much better than the conventional ones (EPQ2)	

Table 1. *Cont.*

Variable	Items	Source
Eco-product purchase intention	I will probably buy eco-products in the next month	[23]
	I plan to transition to an eco-friendly version of the product	
	I am willing to purchase eco-products for personal use	
	I will make an effort to purchase eco-products for my own use (EFPI1)	
	I plan to purchase eco-products as they do not pollute the environment (EFPI2)	
Eco-product trust	I trust that products with eco-certification genuinely comply with environmental standards	[23]
	I believe that marketing claims about the ecological impact of products are truthful (ET1)	
	I think companies honor their commitment to reducing environmental impact (ET2)	
	I believe that eco-products have been manufactured in a way that protects the environment throughout their entire life cycle (ET3)	

4. Results

The data were then examined for normal distribution. Table 2 shows the asymmetry and kurtosis for each variable maintained in the model. The values indicate a distribution close to normal, slightly skewed to the left, and slightly flattened, so the verification of the validity of the measurement scale and the interpretation of the results of the model was the next step. The multivariate kurtosis value of 52.53 is below the mean limit of 78.70 recommended by experts [53].

Table 2. Assessment of normality.

Variable	Min	Max	Skew	c.r.	Kurtosis	c.r.
ET1	1.000	5.000	−0.438	−2.930	−0.162	−0.541
ET2	1.000	5.000	−0.306	−2.047	−0.607	−2.032
ET3	1.000	5.000	−0.505	−3.383	−0.310	−1.039
EFPI1	1.000	5.000	−0.499	−3.342	−0.573	−1.917
EFPI2	1.000	5.000	−0.555	−3.715	−0.344	−1.152
EPQ1	1.000	5.000	−0.213	−1.428	−0.537	−1.798
EPQ2	1.000	5.000	−0.320	−2.146	−0.147	−0.491
EPV1	1.000	5.000	−0.397	−2.658	−0.394	−1.319
EPV2	1.000	5.000	−0.372	−2.492	−0.314	−1.052
EPA1	1.000	5.000	−0.283	−1.894	−0.590	−1.974
EPA2	1.000	5.000	−0.390	−2.609	−0.263	−0.882
EPP1	1.000	5.000	−0.586	−3.923	−0.182	−0.610
EPP2	1.000	5.000	−0.086	−0.579	−0.900	−3.015
EC1	1.000	5.000	−0.150	−1.004	−0.297	−0.994
EC2	1.000	5.000	−0.028	−0.189	−0.481	−1.612
		Multivariate			52.532	19.076

4.1. Scale Validation

To verify that all latent factors and indicators measured are adequate, score validity tests were performed. The results of the convergent validity and discriminant validity tests are presented in Tables 3 and 4. Convergent validity shows that each indicator in the group of variables associated with the factors measures the same construct, since their intercorrelations are appreciable in magnitude (Table 3). All estimated values of the indicators exceeded the recommended level of 0.5, suggesting good convergent validity [54], and Cronbach's alpha values were higher than 0.7, suggesting a high level of reliability for all the factors in the model.

Table 3. Convergent validity and reliability tests.

Construct	Items	Factor Loadings > 0.5	AVE > 0.5	CR > 0.7	Cronbach Alpha > 0.7
ET	ET1 ET2 ET3	0.74 0.84 0.84	0.652	0.848	0.906 0.905 0.905
EFPI	EFPI1 EFPI2	0.81 0.76	0.615	0.762	0.903 0.905
EPQ	EPQ1 EPQ2	0.86 0.89	0.759	0.863	0.904 0.903
EPV	EPV1 EPV2	0.84 0.92	0.783	0.878	0.905 0.903
EPA	EPA1 EPA2	0.98 0.79	0.783	0.877	0.906 0.910
EPP	EPP1 EPP2	0.90 0.72	0.662	0.795	0.914 0.917
EC	EC1 EC2	0.75 0.81	0.610	0.757	0.908 0.906

Note: ET = eco-trust; EFPI = eco-friendly purchase intention; EPQ = eco-perceived quality; EPV = eco-perceived value; EPA = eco-product availability; EPA = eco-product availability; EPP = eco-price perception; EC = eco-consciousness.

Table 4. Correlations and square root of the AVE.

	ET	EFPI	EPQ	EPV	EPA	EPP	EC
ET	**0.426**						
EFPI	0.162	**0.379**					
EPQ	0.246	0.219	**0.577**				
EPV	0.261	0.233	0.354	**0.613**			
EPA	0.261	0.233	0.354	0.376	**0.614**		
EPP	0.187	0.167	0.254	0.269	0.270	**0.439**	
EC	0.159	0.141	0.215	0.228	0.228	0.164	**0.372**

Note: ET = eco-trust; EFPI = eco-friendly purchase intention; EPQ = eco-perceived quality; EPV = eco-perceived value; EPA = eco-product availability; EPP = eco-price perception; EC = eco-consciousness. On the diagonal, the bold values are the square roots of the AVE. The other values are the intercorrelations between factors.

Discriminant validity shows that the intercorrelations between factors that are supposed to measure different constructs exceed the correlations between constructs [54,55], suggesting good discriminant validity (Table 4).

4.2. Model-Fit Tests

The tested model was evaluated using several fit indices, according to common practices in structural equation modeling [51,56]. Both the model fit indices and the residual values registered values above the usual norms (>0.9) in the case of the fit indices and below the usual norms (<0.1) in the case of the residuals. These values are as follows: CMIN/DF: 2.2004; NFI: 0.926; RFI: 0.905; IFI: 0.958; TLI: 0.946; CFI: 0.958; RMSEA: 0.067.

4.3. Model Measurements

The proposed model highlights the relationships between the seven eco-factors considered. Before proceeding to the acceptance or rejection of the hypotheses, it is worth commenting on the importance of each indicator when explaining the associated factor. Thus, the eco-product availability (EPA) is influenced to a very large extent by the fact that eco-products can be easily found in the community (EPA1) 0.98 and to a large extent by the fact that there are no difficulties in finding eco-products in the communities where young people live (EPA2) 0.79. Eco-price perception (EPP) is influenced to a very large extent by the price level (EPP1) 0.90 and to a large extent by the desire to buy eco-products even if young people cannot afford them (EPP2) 0.72. Eco-consciousness (EC) is largely influenced by the degree of knowledge and understanding of eco-products (EC1) 0.75 and by the action of preferring to buy eco-products instead of classic, traditional ones (EC2) to a large extent 0.81. Eco-perceived quality (EPQ) is also largely influenced by the opinion that the quality of eco-products is extraordinary compared to conventional products (EPQ1) 0.86 and the opinion that the quality of eco-products is much better than that of conventional ones (EPQ2) 0.89. Eco-perceived value (EPV) is largely influenced by the fact that eco-products offer more benefits than other products (EPV1) 0.84 and by the fact that the environmental functions of eco-products provide important value (EPV2) 0.92. Eco-trust (ET) is largely influenced by the belief that marketing claims about the ecological impact of products are truthful (ET1) 0.74 and largely by the beliefs that companies keep their commitments to reduce environmental impact (ET2) 0.84 and that green products have been manufactured in a way that protects the environment throughout their entire life cycle (ET3) 0.84. Eco-friendly purchase intention (EFPI) is largely influenced by the effort to purchase green products for personal use (EFPI1) 0.81 and largely by planning to purchase green products because they do not pollute the environment (EFPI2) 0.76.

The relationships established between the factors of the model are described below. Between EFPI and EC, a very strong influence of 0.81 is found, leading to the confirmation of *Hypothesis 1.1. as EFPI is largely influenced by EC*. Between EFPI and EPV, a very strong influence of 0.80 is found, which also leads to the confirmation of *Hypothesis 1.2. as EFPI*

is largely influenced by EPV. Similarly, a very strong influence of 0.84 is found, confirming *Hypothesis 1.3. EFPI is largely influenced by EPQ*. In fact, this is the strongest influence relationship, so, in summary, perceived quality influences the purchase intention of green products the most. However, while there is a direct influence of the EPP in a weak measure of 0.32 and of the EPA in a weak to medium measure of 0.43 on the EFPI, if these influences are quantified by introducing into the equation also the confidence of Generation Z attributed to eco-products (ET), the influence increases significantly.

To test the significance of mediation, on the sample size, a bootstrapping mediation test was used. To achieve a more precise result [57], the number of bootstraps performed was set at 5000 samples and the bias-corrected confidence intervals to 95% (Table 5). Thus, *Hypothesis 2.1. ET mediates the relation between EPP and EFPI* is partially confirmed. The direct standardized (unmediated) effect of EPP on EFPI is 0.322. The indirect (mediated) effect of EPP on EFPI is 0.061. In this case, the total effect of EPP on EFPI is 0.383, all values being statistically significant at a level of 0.001. *Hypothesis 2.2. ET mediates the relation between EPA and EFPI* is also partially confirmed. The standardized (unmediated) effect of EPA on EFPI is 0.432. The indirect (mediated) effect of EPA on EFPI is 0.164. In this case, the total effect of EPA on EFPI is 0.596, all values being statistically significant at a level of 0.001. It can be said that the price and availability of eco-products have a weak or medium influence on the purchase intention of these products. However, if they are also considered from the point of view of trust as a mediator, the total effect increases on the intention to purchase eco-products; see Table 5.

Table 5. Bootstrapping mediation test with a 95% confidence interval.

Hypothesis	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect (Confidence Interval Low–High)
H 2.1. ET partially mediates the relationship between EPP and EFPI	EPP –> EFPI 0.322 **	EPP –> ET –> EFPI 0.061 **	0.383 ** (0.224–0.592)
H 2.2. ET partially mediates the relationship between EPA and EFPI	EPA –> EFPI 0.432 **	EPA –> ET –> EFPI 0.164 **	0.596 ** (0.527–0.838)

** $p < 0.001$. Note: EPP = eco-price perception; EPA = eco-products availability; ET = eco-trust; EFPI = eco-friendly purchase intention. Bootstrap sample = 5.000 with replacement.

5. Discussions and Conclusions

The present research aimed to investigate the drivers of the purchase intentions for eco-products among students, as representative of Generation Z. The intention was mainly defined by young individuals through the specific efforts they were willing to perform in order to purchase eco-products for their own use, as well as by plan actions to purchase eco-products for the reason of not polluting the environment. The perceived quality of environmentally friendly products had the strongest significant positive effect on the intention to purchase eco-friendly products, confirming Hypothesis 1.3 and previous research results that state that eco-products are generally perceived to meet excellence, reliability, and high quality standards, thus increasing purchasing intentions [23,44–46]. Therefore, according to the young generation, the quality of eco-products is much better, or even exceptional, than conventional alternatives, improving consumer technical satisfaction in line with environmental concerns. This translates into monthly (33.5%) or even weekly (23%) buying frequencies of eco-products, which compared to quite modest shopping budgets of students highlight their sustainable behavior pattern.

Furthermore, eco-consciousness was shown to have the second-best influence on intention to buy eco-products, confirming Hypothesis 1.1, as well as previous studies that connect environmental values and willingness to be aware of eco-issues with their propensity to buy eco-products [41–43]. According to the present research results, eco-

consciousness among Generation Z translates into their inclination to buy eco-products instead of conventional ones, and it is largely influenced by how much knowledge and expertise they have on eco-products. The result is likely explained by the fact that the students were highly aware of the characteristics of green products (95.2%) and the meaning of sustainable consumption (92.9%), results that also confirm the role of environmental education and training in individual purchasing and consumption behaviors [13]. However, students seemed not to be aware to a high extent of how buying eco-products might contribute to a sustainable future, probably given the turbulent environment they currently live in, which raises difficulties in estimating future realities.

According to the confirmatory factor analysis performed, eco-perceived value has the next strongest direct influence on eco-purchase intention, confirming Hypothesis 1.2. and supporting the findings of other relevant studies in this regard [13,41]. Therefore, student buying decisions would be rather rational, since the environmental functions of eco-products are appreciated in terms of providing good value for money, while the benefits of green products are also considered in comparison with other market offerings and chosen based on their superior perceived value.

A similar strong positive effect on eco-purchase intention comes from consumer trust in eco-products. When analyzing respondents' rankings for eco-trust-specific indicators, it was noticed that these recorded the highest values compared to all other items investigated. Therefore, consumers' confidence in green products is mainly determined by the credible content of marketing claims on the ecological impact of products (mean 3.59), based on the belief that eco-products have been manufactured in ways that protect the environment throughout their life cycle (mean 3.51) and trusting that companies will fulfill their promises to reduce environmental impact (mean 3.34). Based on these positive consumer appreciations, we can conclude that organizations offering eco-products seem to benefit from an improved image. However, it is important to emphasize that eco-products represent only a specific segment of sustainable practices, and corporate social responsibility, although it can generate competitive advantages, encompassing a much broader range of initiatives and activities than merely offering eco-products. Moreover, data analysis revealed that eco-trust mediates the relationship between the perceived price of green products and eco-purchasing intention, confirming Hypothesis 2.1 and supporting results from previous studies [41,47], as well as the relationship between the perceived availability of green products and eco-purchasing intention, confirming Hypothesis 2.2, and other similar results [40,50]. Even if these effects may not be considered strong enough, they still improve the total effects of price and availability on consumer propensity to buy ecological products, meaning that trust is one of the best predictors of young people's buying intentions, helping to increase sustainable consumption.

Therefore, the perceived price of green products proved to have the lowest direct influence on eco-purchase intention, but when adding to these the indirect effects resulting from eco-trust mediating influence, the total effects improve. This means that Generation Z representatives might not always be willing to pay higher prices for eco-products, but they are able to understand that the positive differentiation of these products in comparison to other market choices might also increase purchasing expenditure, which in the long term is rather an investment into better consumption habits and environmental protection. Similarly, data analysis proves that the perceived availability of ecological products has only a moderate direct influence on eco-purchase intention, but the total effects increase when considering the indirect effects determined by the mediating role of eco-trust. Thus, when consumers have confidence in green product concepts and these are readily available, the likelihood of the buying act will increase.

6. Conclusions

From a theoretical point of view, the present research contributes to the practice and sustainable consumption theory [58] by identifying specific patterns of intentional buying behavior among Generation Z consumers when considering ecological products. It shows the increased interest of young people in buying green products, considering environmental protection. From a practical perspective, our findings have important managerial implications for businesses. Offering high-quality eco-products can not only enhance corporate image but also foster long-term customer commitment, especially among Generation Z consumers. This generation perceives eco-products as superior to conventional alternatives in terms of quality, reliability, and environmental benefits. The strong positive influence of perceived quality on purchase intentions, as highlighted by our results, underscores the potential for businesses to align their product offerings with the sustainability values of young consumers. Such efforts may translate into regular purchasing patterns, even among students with limited budgets, further reinforcing their commitment to environmentally conscious behavior. However, trust in ecological products is needed to mediate the relationships between the various attributes of green products and the buying intention of ecological products. Consequently, it is recommended to transparently communicate the benefits of eco-products and the way their consumption might protect the environment, so as to help consumers understand how their own buying decisions might impact the well-being of future generations.

The results could be interesting for nongovernmental organizations for environmental protection, in order to understand how to target Generation Z within social marketing campaigns to increase their awareness of sustainable consumption and to convert students into advocates for environmental protection among other age segments.

Last but not least, future research directions might extend the drivers of eco-purchasing intentions to more sources of value creation or to other components of the marketing mix designed for green products. These can be supported by technological advancements on the one hand, and by the psycho-demographic shifts, attitudes and behaviors of various generations on the other. *One of the limitations of the study is given by the size and representativeness of the sample, as it refers only to Romanian Gen Z consumers, not considering other demographic segments*. As a result, future researchers may consider using larger and more representative samples.

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