

# When Addressing Social Problems Involves Multiple Behaviors: The Distinct Predictors of Intentions to Use Reusable Bags and Refuse Disposable Bags

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## Introduction

- The overuse of disposable bags while shopping is an environmental problem that requires changing numerous behaviors, including getting people to use reusable bags and refuse disposable bags.

- Past research has considered correlations between different proenvironmental behaviors (Thøgersen & Ölander, 2006) and the unique predictors of proenvironmental behaviors (Harland, Staats, & Wilke, 1999). However, further research is needed on the correlations between, and predictors of, intimately related proenvironmental behaviors, in order to determine when they should be treated as separate or clustered behaviors.

- Five behaviors were the focus of current research: obtaining reusable bags, bringing reusable bags to the store, using reusable bags, refusing disposable bags, and reusing disposable bags

- Important similarities and differences may exist between bag behaviors such as the need for planning when bringing and using reusable bags, or possible concerns about social awkwardness when refusing disposable bags.

- We set out to evaluate the consistency of bag use behaviors, as well as determine if there are distinct predictors of intentions to engage in behaviors relevant to bag usage.

## Method

- Participants from the University of Minnesota (N=262) completed online surveys, reporting Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1985) constructs for each bag behavior: attitude toward behavior, injunctive norms, perceived behavioral control, and intentions to engage in each behavior in the following week.

- Participants also reported past engagement in each behavior in the last month, beliefs about importance of engaging in each behavior, difficulty of each behavior, descriptive norms, and plans to use reusable bags.

## Behavior Correlations

- Table 1 below shows means and standard deviations of each bag behavior, as well as the correlations between the five bag behaviors.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. Obtain Reusable	1.88	0.33	--				
2. Bring Reusable	1.59	1.36	-.14*	--			
3. Use Reusable	1.87	1.61	-.21**	.73**	--		
4. Refuse Disposable	2.56	1.76	.00	.36**	.28**	--	
5. Reuse Disposable	3.03	2.00	-.11	.18**	.17*	.26**	--

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations of bag behaviors. The response scale ranged from engaging in the behavior 0 "never" to 6 "always" over the next week. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

## Predictors of Bag Behavior Intentions

- Table 2 below shows the predictors of intentions to engage in each of the five bag behaviors.

	Obtain Reusable	Bring Reusable	Use Reusable	Refuse Disposable	Reuse Disposable
Attitude	*	**	**		
Injunctive Norm				**	
PBC					
Past Behavior		**	**	**	**
Importance	**		*		**
Difficulty					
Descriptive Norm					
Plans	**	**	**	*	

Table 2: Predictors of intentions to engage in each of the five bag behaviors. PBC = perceived behavioral control. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

## Results and Conclusion

- Four clusters of behaviors emerged: obtaining bags, bringing and using reusable bags, refusing disposable bags, and reusing disposable bags.

- Attitudes predicted intentions to obtain, bring, and use reusable bags, but not refusing or reusing disposable bags. Injunctive norms only predicted refusing to take disposable bags.

- Past behavior predicted all of the behaviors except obtaining reusable bags. Importance predicted obtaining and using reusable bags, as well as reusing disposable bags. Finally, plans predicted all of the behaviors except reusing disposable bags.

- Given these results, it might be best to treat certain bag behaviors as being clustered, such as bringing and using reusable bags. Furthermore, future interventions should test whether or not tailoring behavior change efforts to the different predictors of these clusters is more effective at changing behavior than using a single approach to change the five behaviors.

## References

Ajzen, I. (1985). From intentions to actions: A theory of planned behavior. In J. Kuhl & J. Beckmann (Eds.), *Action-Control: From cognition to behavior* (pp.11-39). Heidelberg: Springer.

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