When Green Attitudes Don’t Pay: The Role of Sustainability in Repair Attitude vs. Willingness to Pay for Repairs

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When Green Attitudes Don’t Pay: The Role of Sustainability in Repair Attitude vs. Willingness to Pay for Repairs

Repairing products instead of replacing them is a key step toward promoting sustainable consumption. Despite efforts like the EU’s Right to Repair legislation, repair rates remain low due to persistent barriers. This study surveyed n = 760 participants from five European countries and used multiple regression analysis to investigate repair attitudes and payment for repairs across three product categories. Results show that while CSR and sustainability attitudes positively influence repair attitudes, they do not lead to higher financial commitment, underscoring the attitude-behavior gap. Cost sensitivity and a preference for new products strongly deter repair behaviors, while a preference to preserve drives willingness to pay, reflecting emotional attachment to owned items.
The findings highlight the importance of strategies such as repair guarantees, financial incentives, and integrating repairability into CSR initiatives to reduce barriers.

*Keywords**:** Repairs, Attitude-Behavior Gap, Sustainable Consumption*

Track: Social Responsibility & Ethics

1. Introduction

When a single broken product is repaired instead of replaced, the immediate impact may seem small, but cumulatively, such actions challenge the unsustainable "take-make-dispose" model and align with circular economy principles by extending product lifespans, improving resource efficiency, and reducing emissions (Bisenebit & Chankov, 2023; European Environment Agency, 2024). Despite these benefits, replacement often remains the default choice. Retailers prioritize promoting new products, frequently designed for a single lifecycle (Psarommatis et al., 2024), while consumers face high repair costs, limited repair options, and "style obsolescence," where functional items are deemed outdated (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2019; McCollough, 2009). The European Union's Right to Repair legislation seeks to make repairs more attractive by ensuring spare part availability, extending warranties, and simplifying processes (European Parliament, 2024; Wray & VanderVeer, 2024). Yet repair rates remain low, reflecting a disconnect between consumers' sustainability values and their behavior (Nadro et al., 2024). This "green gap" is driven by practical and psychological barriers, despite strong consumer support for sustainability and CSR (Carrington et al., 2010; ElHaffar et al., 2020). Retailers contribute to the gap by prioritizing new product sales, often sacrificing quality, and relying on low-cost production (McCollough, 2009). Despite growing research on sustainable consumption, psychological and practical barriers to repair behavior remain underexplored (Bansah, 2024). Most studies focus on non-European households or small appliances, offering limited insights (Bovea et al., 2020; McCollough, 2009). In contrast, the European market stands out due to strengthened consumer rights aimed at reducing the "fight for repair" and promoting easier access to repair services (European Parliament, 2024; Kugler, 2023). Additionally, pioneering research on the Right to Repair often measures future repair intent rather than actual willingness to pay, limiting economic realism and overlooking the attitude-behavior gap (Marikyan & Papagiannidis, 2024; Boulstridge & Carrigan, 2000).

This study addresses these gaps by investigating repair behavior across five European countries—Austria, Switzerland, Germany, France, and Hungary—using three product categories: sofas, sneakers, and coffee machines. It examines both repair attitudes and payment in local currencies, providing concrete insights into the attitude-behavior gap. The findings offer valuable guidance for policymakers, retailers, and sustainability advocates aiming to promote repairability.

2. Theoretical Foundation

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) shapes consumer attitudes, particularly in areas concerning ethical consumption and sustainability, as it reflects a company's commitment to social and environmental responsibility (Khan et al. 2024; Palihawadana et al., 2016; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). Research highlights repairability as a key aspect of the circular economy (CE), suggesting that individuals who prioritize CSR should also exhibit a positive attitude toward repairability (Faludi et al., 2024). However, a significant behavior-attitude gap often prevents positive CSR attitudes from translating into consistent behaviors (Boulstridge & Carrigan, 2000). Consequently, CSR attitudes may not significantly influence Repair Payment. In summary,

H1a: CSR Attitude positively influences Attitude Toward Repair.

H1b: CSR Attitude does not significantly influence Repair Payment.

Sustainability attitudes reflect a consumer's commitment to environmentally conscious behaviors and values. Drawing on the Cognitive-Affective-Behavior model, sustainability-oriented individuals should derive emotional satisfaction from eco-friendly practices (affective), hold strong beliefs about the environmental benefits of reparability (cognitive), and engage in behaviors aligned with sustainable living (behavioral) (Lisboa et al., 2022). Research has shown that individuals with strong environmental values are more inclined to support practices aligned with sustainable outcomes (Magnier & Schoormans, 2015), which should translate into a more positive attitude toward repairs. However, a behavior-attitude gap may exist in repair-related behaviors (Boulstridge & Carrigan, 2000). This is highlighted by Marikyan & Papagiannidis (2024) who found that while sustainability-driven consumers in general express strong intentions to act responsibly, these attitudes had no significant impact on repair intent.

H2a: Sustainability Attitude positively influences Attitude Toward Repair.

H2b: Sustainability Attitude does not significantly influence Repair Payment.

Research shows that repair cost perceptions are a significant barrier influencing both repair decisions and attitudes (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2019; Marikyan & Papagiannidis, 2024). Sykes and Matza's Neutralization Techniques (1957) offer a useful framework for understanding how consumers may justify repair avoidance through rationalizations, such as denying responsibility and attributing inaction to external factors like higher costs (Gruber & Schlegelmilch, 2014).

H3a: Cost Sensitivity negatively influences Attitude Toward Repair.

H3b: Cost Sensitivity negatively influences Repair Payment.

Preference for new products reflects a consumer tendency to associate novelty with superior functionality, modernity, and aesthetic appeal (Hekkert et al., 2003). These beliefs conflict with the value of repairing older items as they may perceived as old-fashioned or obsolete (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2019; Wieser & Tröger, 2018). These preferences impact repair attitudes and payment behavior.

H4a: Preference for New Products negatively influences Attitude Toward Repair.

H4b: Preference for New Products negatively influences Repair Payment.

The preference to preserve reflects a consumer's emotional attachment to their possessions, prioritizing longevity, and maintenance over replacement (Graul & Brough, 2021). Research highlights that individuals with this preference are more likely to engage in repair behaviors, actively resisting a culture of constant renewal (Wieser & Tröger, 2018). Similarly, addressing the throwaway culture, research showed that individuals who believe products are intentionally designed to fail are more inclined to develop favorable intentions toward repairs (Marikyan & Papagiannidis, 2024).

H5a: Preference to Preserve positively influences Attitude Toward Repair.

H5b: Preference to Preserve positively influences Repair Payment.

We present our proposed conceptual framework in Figure 1.

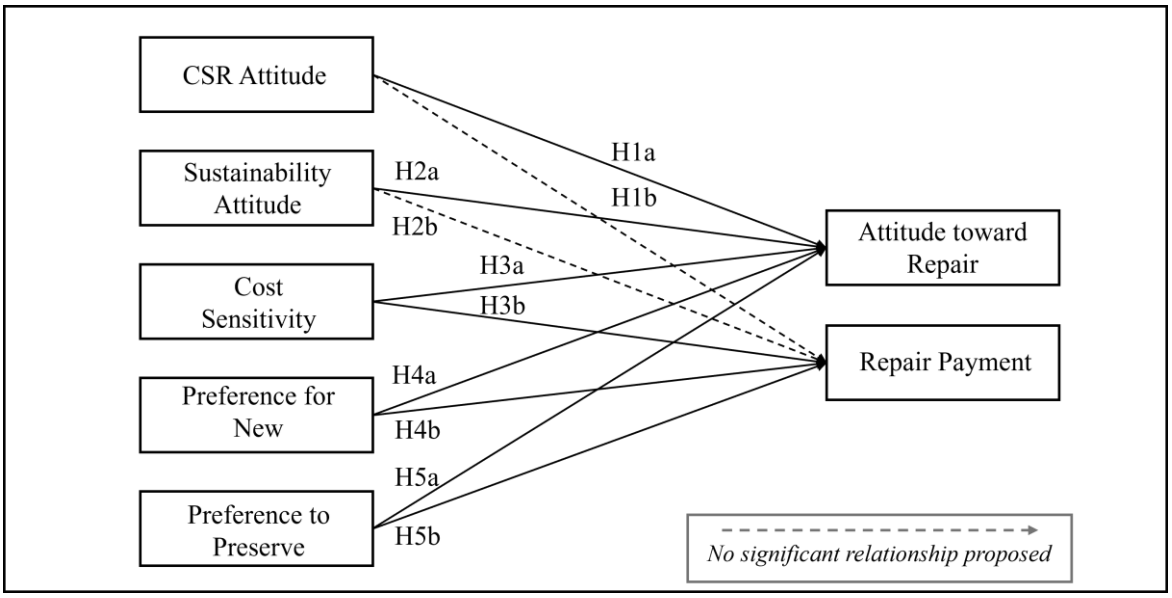

Figure 1: Conceptual framework

3. Methodology

3.1 Survey design and measures

Our study explored consumer attitudes toward product reparability and willingness to pay for repairs using a structured questionnaire across five European countries (n = 760). The first section assessed attitudes toward repairability, sustainability, CSR, cost sensitivity, and preferences for new versus repaired products. In the second section, participants were assigned one of three product scenarios—a sofa, trainers, or a coffee machine—and indicated the percentage of the product's original price they would pay for repairs (in local currency). The reliability of the multi-item scales was confirmed by Cronbach's Alpha (see *Table 1*).

Variable Name	Questions/Items	C's Alpha	Notes
Repair Attitude	1. The reparability of products is an important purchase criterion for me. 2. When I buy a product, I look specifically at its reparability. 3. I am willing to pay more for a product if it can be repaired.	α = 0.84	Attitudes towards repair-ability
CSR Attitude	1. I think it's good when companies make products that can be repaired. 2. I prefer to buy from companies that make repairable products. 3. I have greater confidence in companies that make repairable products. 4. The certainty that companies will provide spare parts for repairable products in the long term gives me peace of mind.	α = 0.88	Attitudes towards CSR
Sustain-ability Attitude	1. Environmental protection is an important issue for me personally. 2. I specifically focus on a sustainable lifestyle in my everyday life. 3. When buying products, I pay particular attention to their sustainability.	α = 0.87	Attitudes towards sustain-ability

Table 1: Scales and Measurement Items

In addition, the survey included single-item measures to capture the remaining constructs. Cost Sensitivity was measured with: *"I often find the cost of a repair too high; it is not in proportion to the cost of buying a new item."* Preference for New Products used: *"I prefer a brand-new product to a repaired one, as new ones are usually more modern."* Preference to Preserve was assessed with: *"I'd rather keep using the product I already have than buy a new one."* These measures provided insights into perceptions of repair costs, preference for new products, and attachment to existing items.

3.2 Analysis and results

We conducted multiple regression analyses to investigate the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variables, Repair Attitude and Repair Payment. The data met prerequisites, including linearity, homoscedasticity, and the absence of multicollinearity. The latter was of particular interest among the sustainability measures and the variables Preference for New and Preference to Preserve.

For Repair Attitude, our results revealed that CSR Attitude ($\beta = .44$, $p < .001$) and Sustainability Attitude ($\beta = .26$, $p < .001$) were significant positive predictors, supporting H1a and H2a. As suggested and supported by research, individuals with strong sustainability values are more likely to exhibit positive attitudes toward repair (Lisboa et al., 2022). However, in support of H3a, Cost Sensitivity negatively influenced Repair Attitude ($\beta = -.09$, $p = .002$), indicating that participants who perceive repair costs as high are less likely to value reparability. The results did not support H4a and H5a, Preference for New Products and Preference to Preserve showed no significant influence. For Repair Payment, our analysis demonstrated that Cost Sensitivity ($\beta = -.15$, $p < .001$) and Preference for New Products ($\beta = -.16$, $p < .001$) were significant negative predictors, supporting H3b and H4b. Participants who viewed repairs as too expensive or who preferred new products were less willing to allocate a higher percentage of the purchase price to repairs. Conversely, Preference to Preserve ($\beta = .14$, $p < .001$) had a positive effect, supporting H5b and indicating that participants with a strong attachment to their existing possessions were more likely to invest in repairs. As proposed and highlighting the behaviour attitude or "green gap" (Boulstridge & Carrigan, 2000; Carrington et al., 2010; ElHaffar et al., 2020), CSR Attitude and Sustainability Attitude did not significantly predict Repair Payment.

4. General Discussion

The findings highlight the persistence of the attitude-behavior gap in repair contexts. While CSR and sustainability attitudes positively influence repairability attitudes, they do not significantly predict willingness to pay for repairs, suggesting that values alone are insufficient to drive action. Cost sensitivity and preference for new products hinder repair behaviors, as consumers prioritize affordability and modernity over sustainability. In contrast, a preference to preserve strongly predicts repair payment, likely driven by emotional and

practical attachment (Wieser & Troeger, 2018). These results suggest that interventions are needed to translate positive attitudes into actual repair behaviors.

4.1 Managerial implications

Retailers and manufacturers play a key role in bridging the attitude-behavior gap by positioning repair services as sustainable and cost-effective alternatives to replacement. Addressing cost sensitivity, a major barrier identified in this study, requires transparent and competitive pricing as well as accessible repair options. Highlighting the financial and environmental benefits of repairs, as seen in self-service repair programs by Apple and Nokia (Kugler, 2023), can improve consumer perceptions. Strategies such as in-store repair solutions, online tutorials, loyalty programs, and information campaigns can further encourage adoption. Integrating repairability into sustainability strategies also enhances CSR profiles, builds consumer trust, and appeals to environmentally conscious consumers, extending beyond legislative requirements. Policymakers can strengthen the Right to Repair by mandating repairability scores, ensuring spare part availability, regulating repair costs, and requiring manufacturers to include repair information in product packaging (Marikyan & Papagiannidis, 2024). These measures lower perceived repair costs, enhance consumer control over repairs, and boost confidence in the law's efficacy. By addressing these barriers, businesses, policymakers, and retailers can align repairability with consumer priorities, fostering sustainable consumption.

4.2 Limitations and future research

This study offers valuable insights into sustainability attitudes and consumers' willingness to pay for repairs but has limitations. Despite a large sample, self-reported data may involve social desirability bias, leading to overstatement of sustainability attitudes or willingness to repair (Larson, 2019). Hypothetical scenarios may not reflect real-world decisions, which could be studied in a retail context. The focus on European countries may not capture attitudes in other regions. Future research could use experimental designs to observe actual behavior and expand to include cultural differences. Additionally, emotional attachment and convenience factors, such as repair time and accessibility, and their influence on repair behavior warrant further exploration (Güsser-Fachbach et al., 2023).

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