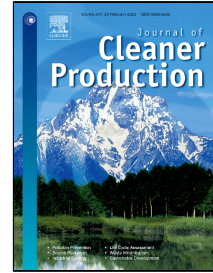


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Consumers' response to environmentally-friendly food packaging - a systematic review



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Consumers' response to environmentally-friendly food packaging  
– a systematic review

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## Consumers' response to environmentally-friendly food packaging – a systematic review

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### **Abstract:**

Consumers play an important role in the market penetration of environmentally-friendly food packaging because it is they who decide whether or not to buy a particular product. The objective of this paper is to analyse the state of the art regarding consumers' response to environmentally-friendly food packaging in order to identify existing barriers to purchase and potential measures to overcome these barriers. The paper is based on a systematic synthesis of 46 scientific journal articles on consumer studies related to environmentally-friendly packaging. The literature review applies a conceptual framework regarding the ways consumers respond to product stimuli and the psychological processes involved. Three important barriers to purchasing environmentally-friendly packaging are identified. First, consumers need guidance in recognizing environmentally-friendly packaging; for while consumers primarily consider the packaging material itself and any eco-labels, they also consider other packaging design elements such as colours and pictures of 'nature' that can be misleading. Second, it became obvious that consumers lack knowledge, in particular about new packaging materials like bio-based packaging. Third, many of the studies reviewed provide evidence that other product attributes such as price and product quality are more important to consumers than environmentally-friendly packaging. Nevertheless, some studies recorded a significantly higher willingness on the part of consumers to buy and pay for environmentally-friendly packaging and products with reduced packaging compared to products with standard packaging, signalling an overall positive attitude. The literature review revealed many research gaps. For example, it became obvious that consumers' response to environmentally-friendly food packaging is not yet well understood, in particular with regards to purchasing behaviour (in the real world as opposed to in a survey setting) and measures for overcoming existing barriers.

### **Keywords:**

Packaging, consumer, food, sustainable, environmentally-friendly, green

## **1. Introduction**

Human activities are causing irreversible environmental effects, such as climate change and loss of biodiversity (Rockström et al. 2009). A large part of each individual's ecological footprint stems from their consumption of products. The production and consumption of more environmentally-friendly products is an important step towards achieving more sustainable lifestyles. At present, however, environmentally-friendly or 'green' products are still a niche market. Gleim et al. (2013) estimate the global market share for green products at less than 4%. According to FTSE Russell (2018), the green economy accounts for 6% of the market capitalization of globally listed companies.

A serious side effect of product consumption is the generation of packaging waste. The global packaging market was estimated at 4,300 billion packaging units in 2015, of which 73% were for food and drinks (ALL4PACK 2016). In the European Union, 1,130 billion packages were used for food and drinks in 2018 (Fuhr et al. 2019). Since 2010, waste production has grown at an annual rate of 4.2% and is expected to continue at the same rate to 2024. Rigid and flexible plastic is the packaging material with the largest market share, at 47% in 2015 (ALL4PACK 2016).

One way to tackle the waste problem is to introduce environmentally-friendly food packaging (Geueke et al. 2018). The market share of environmentally-friendly packaging is difficult to estimate, however, as there is no common definition (PWC 2010) and there are many synonyms such as 'eco-

friendly', 'sustainable' and 'green packaging' (Prakash and Pathak 2017). Steenis et al. (2017, p. 278) define sustainable packaging as "packaging that has a comparatively low environmental impact as measured by life-cycle assessment models". Magnier et al. (2016) take a slightly different approach by focusing on the product's environmental impact: they define sustainable packaging as "the endeavour to reduce the product's footprint through altering the product's packaging, for example, by using more environmentally-friendly materials" (Magnier et al. 2016, p. 132). The definition of sustainable or green packaging developed by Han et al. (2018) is more detailed and covers three levels: raw materials, production processes, and waste management. Regarding raw materials, the authors advocate the use of recycled materials and renewable resources to reduce the use and environmental impact of oil. Environmentally-friendly packaging should be produced in an energy-efficient way and the package should be as light and thin as possible. At the end of its life-cycle, packaging should be biodegradable, reused or recycled (Han et al. 2018).

The implementation of environmentally-friendly packaging requires more serious efforts. Firstly, packaging fulfils important functions that need to be considered when developing environmentally-friendly packaging. The main functions of packaging are protection, storage, loading and transport, sale, promotion, service and guarantee (Lindh et al. 2016b). It should be emphasized that packaging prevents food waste, which is a very important function given that food waste has a higher environmental impact than packaging itself (Molina-Besch et al. 2018; Dilkes-Hoffman et al. 2018). The functions of sale, promotion and service should also not be overlooked. Ultimately it is consumers who determine the market success of packaging through their buying decisions. Indeed, a buying decision is a trade-off between many product attributes. Packaging design is important in communicating the attributes of a product to consumers (Mueller Loose and Szolnoki 2012). For instance, the colour of packaging can influence consumers' perceived taste of a product (Becker et al. 2011). This makes consumers' opinions very important in the entire process of packaging design (Grönman et al. 2013), including the design of environmentally-friendly packaging (Boesen et al. 2019).

Consumer awareness and perceptions are only the beginning of a buying decision process. A positive perception of a product does not automatically mean that a person will purchase it, however, since a buying decision is typically influenced by many different factors (Grunert 2011). The so-called 'attitude-behaviour gap' or 'intention-behaviour gap' is a well-known phenomenon in the field of sustainable consumer behaviour whereby many consumers' positive attitude and noble intentions to act in a sustainable way are not translated into actual consumer behaviour. Many studies have investigated potential factors explaining the occurrence of the attitude/intention-behaviour gap in the area of environmentally-friendly behaviour (e.g. Grunert 2011; Moser 2016; Sheeran and Webb 2016; Vermeir and Verbeke 2006; Kollmuss and Agyeman 2002). Amongst the barriers to purchasing sustainable products commonly mentioned in the literature across different types of sustainable products are higher prices, lack of availability, and perceived lower quality (Stern 2000; Hughner et al. 2007; De Jonge and van Trijp 2013; Young et al. 2010; Magnier and Crié 2015).

It is challenging to explain why the attitude/intention-behaviour gap occurs because the reasons often differ from consumer to consumer and a factor preventing one consumer from buying sustainable products might not constitute a barrier for another (Stern 2000). Accordingly, several studies on sustainable consumer behaviour have applied the consumer segmentation method to identify consumer groups with similar characteristics and distinguish them from groups with different characteristics (Müller and Hamm 2014). However, each study uses a slightly different set of segmentation criteria, making direct comparisons across studies somewhat difficult. A general finding of previous studies on sustainable product purchases has been that the group of consumers truly dedicated to buying sustainable products is rather small, at less than 10%, although a larger share of consumers hold positive attitudes towards sustainable products.

The objectives of the present review paper are to

- 1) analyse the state of the art regarding consumers' response to environmentally-friendly food packaging,
- 2) identify barriers to the purchase of products with sustainable packaging, and
- 3) draw conclusions on how to overcome the most important barriers to purchase.

While other sustainable consumption areas such as organic food purchases have already been theorized in detail, a synthesis of previous research on consumer response to environmentally-friendly packaging has so far been lacking. From the body of existing literature it is somewhat difficult to obtain an overview of results that can be generalised, since previous studies have covered various types of packaging materials with different options for disposal (such as recyclability or biodegradability), and because studies have also differed greatly in their focus on the factors influencing consumer behaviour.

To synthesise existing knowledge and identify research gaps, the present review study is based on a conceptual framework for analysing barriers to purchase (Chapter 2). This framework links purchase behaviour related to environmentally-friendly packaging to the psychological processes of awareness and recognition, knowledge and understanding, liking, preference and attitude, conviction, and other influencing factors. The conceptual framework allows conclusions to be drawn regarding the following research questions:

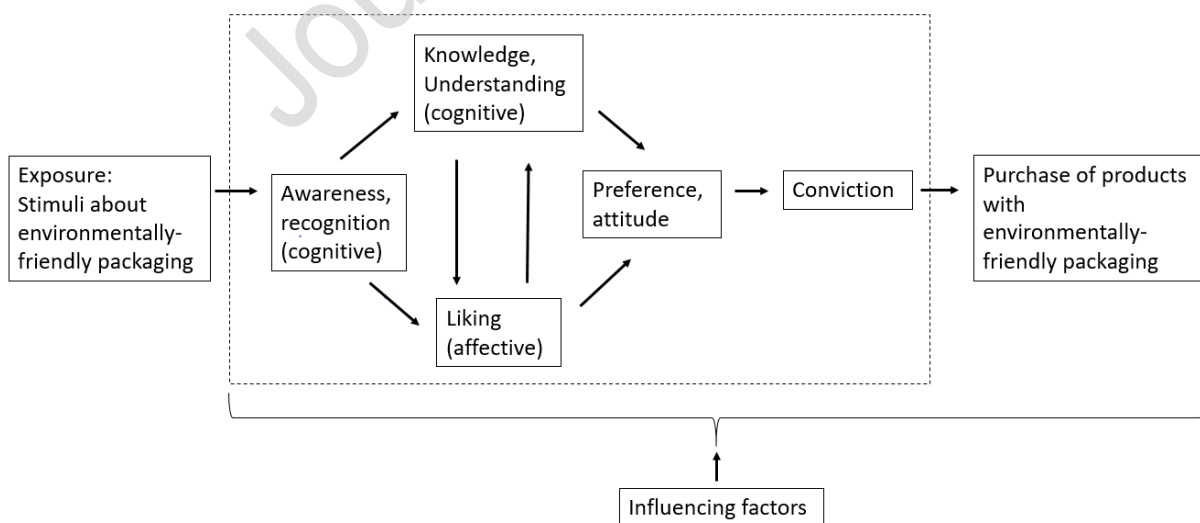
- Are consumers aware of the environmental impact of food packaging? Are they aware of and able to recognise environmentally-friendly packaging solutions?
- What knowledge and perception do consumers have about environmentally-friendly packaging?
- What are consumers' preferences and attitudes with regard to environmentally-friendly packaging?
- How important is environmentally-friendly packaging to consumers in the buying decision process?
- Are consumers willing to buy and pay price premiums for products with environmentally-friendly packaging?
- How can important barriers to purchase be overcome?

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. Section 2 introduces the conceptual framework used to synthesise and present the state of the art of consumer studies about environmentally-friendly packaging. Section 3, 'Methods and material of the literature review', describes the literature search procedure and the studies included in the review. Section 4, 'Results and discussion', presents the synthesis of results, and the final section presents conclusions drawn from the synthesis of results and outlines existing research gaps and recommendations for future research.

## 2. Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework was adapted from Grunert (2011) and Grunert and Wills (2007). Grunert (2011) analysed consumer response to sustainability labels on food and identified barriers to purchase, while Grunert and Wills (2007) applied the framework to explain consumer response to nutrition information on food labels. Both frameworks were inspired by the 'Hierarchy of Effects Theory' developed by Lavidge and Steiner (1961) to measure the effectiveness of advertising. The original 'Hierarchy of Effects' model postulates that "consumers normally do not go from disinterested individuals to convinced purchasers in one instantaneous step" (Lavidge and Steiner 1961, p. 59) but rather undergo several stages between initial exposure to advertising and final product purchase. This original model has been contested on account of its simplified assumption that consumers undergo these stages of awareness, knowledge, liking, preference, conviction and purchase in a stepwise or chronological order.

The present framework also assumes, much like the original ‘Hierarchy of Effects’ model, that several affective and cognitive processes are involved before consumers react to a stimulus. In contrast to the original model, however, several authors (Grunert and Wills 2007; Grunert 2011; Kroeber-Riel and Weinberg 2003) have argued that these affective and cognitive processes do not occur in a strict stepwise order but may happen simultaneously and influence each other as well. Following this line of thinking, the literature review was based on the framework presented in Figure 1, which displays in a central box several processes that happen in a consumer’s mind after having been exposed to environmentally-friendly packaging and before reacting to this stimulus. These processes are not directly observable, in contrast to ‘exposure’ and ‘purchase’, which are displayed outside of the box. The framework assumes that environmentally-friendly packaging can only lead to a reaction when consumers are aware of and recognise such packaging. Possible effects include cognitive knowledge and understanding, as well as affective liking. Based on these processes, consumers’ preferences and attitudes may develop, which can lead to the formation of ‘conviction’ (as it was called in the original ‘Hierarchy of Effects Theory’) in favour of products with environmentally-friendly packaging. This conviction can be measured by concepts such as willingness to buy or willingness to pay. The present review paper has similar objectives as the studies undertaken by Grunert and Wills (2007) and Grunert (2011), which is why this framework was selected over other prominent theories of consumer behaviour. The barriers to the purchase of eco-labelled food identified by Grunert (2011) demonstrate the importance of consumer awareness and perception for understanding consumer reactions and ascertaining why consumers might not purchase particular products. For the purchase of products with environmentally-friendly packaging, lack of awareness on the part of consumers may already constitute a first barrier, since consumers do not expect such labelling to be there and consequently do not search for it (Mancini et al. 2017). The framework chosen for the present review study covers all stages from awareness to purchase. Other important theories for analysing consumers’ decision-making, including the ‘Theory of Planned Behaviour’ (Ajzen 1991) and the ‘Theory of Reasoned Action’ (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975), focus on other factors influencing consumer behaviour but do not adequately capture whether consumers are actually familiar with the stimulus in question. The same limitation applies to other theories relevant to environmentally significant consumer behaviour, such as the ‘Value-Belief-Norm Theory’ (Stern 2000) or the ‘ABC Theory’ (Guagnano et al. 1995).



**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework adopted from Grunert and Wills (2007) and Grunert (2011)

### 3. Methods and material of the literature review

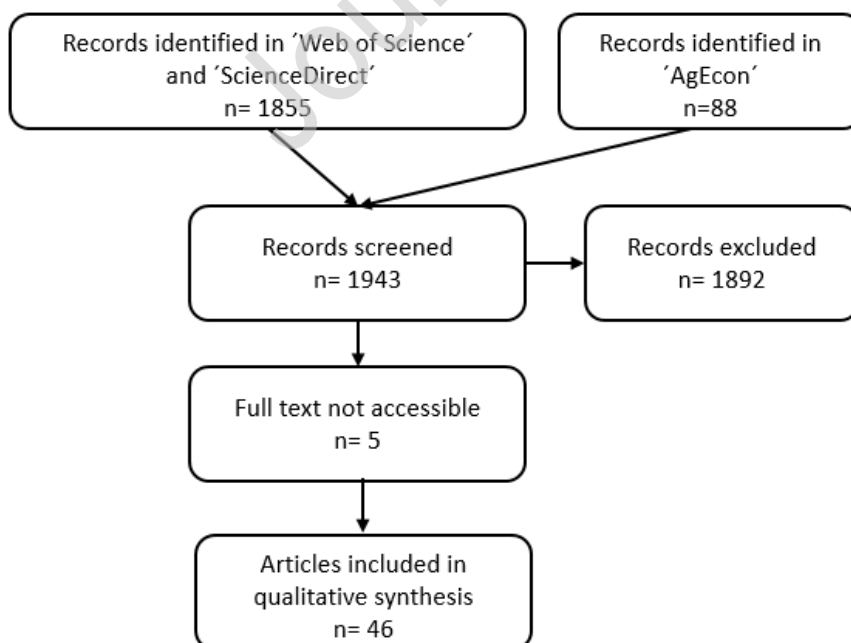
#### 3.1 Literature search

A systematic literature search was conducted to synthesise existing knowledge on consumers' responses to environmentally-friendly food packaging. The review procedure was based on the standards developed for systematic literature reviews by Moher et al. (2009). In addition, previous review papers of similar research areas, such as Janssen et al. (2016), Feldmann and Hamm (2015) and Schäufele and Hamm (2017), provided orientation for the implementation of the review process. The two most renowned databases for scientific peer-reviewed literature, the Web of Science and ScienceDirect, as well as the AgEcon database, were screened for relevant journal articles and conference papers. The following search term was applied to screen title abstracts and keywords: consumer AND pack\* AND (sustainab\* OR organic OR ecological\* OR environment\* OR green OR biologic\*).

The search included consumer studies in English from all countries over a ten-year period from January 1, 2008 to July 31, 2018. Publications that did not focus on food or beverage packaging but analysed other product categories such as the packaging of laundry detergent, electronics, take-away food and shopping bags, were excluded. The criterion 'food or beverage' was not included in the search term, since many studies directly mention a *specific* food or beverage product (i.e. cheese or bottled water) under analysis without mentioning the term 'food' or 'beverage'.

The steps and records of the database searches are presented in Figure 2. The Web of Science database yielded 1,435 records, while ScienceDirect generated 420 and AgEcon yielded 88. In total, 1,943 records were screened. Of these, 1,892 articles were excluded since they did not deal with consumer studies on food packaging. Five more articles were excluded because full texts were not accessible. Finally, 46 articles were evaluated as relevant and included in the qualitative synthesis in this review study. The 46 articles are listed in Table 5 in the Appendix.

The 46 articles were based on data collected in 24 different countries. Most studies were conducted in France (7 articles), followed by the Netherlands, Italy and the USA (5 articles each). The main area of data collection was Europe (39 articles). Interestingly, 33 of the 46 studies were published in the period between 2014 and 2018, while only 13 articles were published between 2008 and 2013.



**Figure 2.** Flow chart of the procedure for selecting the articles to be reviewed

All of the studies included in this review article investigated factors in some way connected to consumers' buying behaviour in relation to environmentally-friendly food packaging. Interestingly, we observed important differences across the studies in terms of the role of environmentally-friendly packaging in the research objectives of the studies. In 21 studies, the research objectives directly addressed the topic of environmentally-friendly packaging. In the other 25 studies, however, environmentally-friendly packaging was only a side issue, either because their structured interview formats included only a few items on this topic or because aspects of environmentally-friendly packaging arose only due to being raised by participants themselves in open-ended research formats. These 25 studies focussed on requirements for packaging, consumer perception of and preferences for packaging in general (18 studies), sustainable or environmental behaviour in general or in relation to food in particular (6 studies), and bio-based products (1 study).

### 3.2 Theoretical foundations of the studies reviewed

This section gives an overview of the main theoretical foundations upon which the 46 studies on consumer response to environmentally-friendly packaging were based. Across the 46 studies, we identified four categories of theoretical foundations. Table 1 shows the distribution of studies across the four categories. Please note that six studies were grouped into two categories, these being studies truly anchored in two theoretical foundations. Studies with a clear focus on one theoretical strand but with selected elements of other theories were only grouped under the main category. Interestingly, some authors did not explicitly outline the theoretical foundations of their studies but referred to previous empirical studies for developing their hypotheses and/or research questions; in these cases we looked at the research questions and methodologies and grouped the studies accordingly.

**Table 1 Theoretical foundations of the studies reviewed**

Theoretical foundations	Number of articles
<i>Theories on attitude-behaviour relationships</i> Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975) and/or Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen 1991)	13
<i>Theories on consumer preferences and willingness to pay</i> Microeconomic foundations, i.e. utility maximisation and/or Random Utility Theory (McFadden 1974)	9
<i>Theories on cue utilization and signalling</i> Information economics, e.g. Cue Utilization Theory (Olson and Jacoby 1972) and Signalling Theory (Spence 1973; Stigler 1961)	11
<i>Other theoretical foundations</i> Focus on (selected) processes in the consumer organism	18

Note. Several articles were assigned to two categories.

*Theories on attitude-behaviour relationships:* Thirteen of the studies analysed relationships between attitudinal constructs and behavioural intention with explicit or implicit reference to the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975) and/or the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen 1991). These studies cover a variety of different attitudinal constructs, including constructs in the tradition of the Theory of Planned Behaviour, such as consumer beliefs about environmentally-friendly food consumption (Tobler et al. 2011; Lea and Worsley 2008), personal/subjective norms (Martinho et al. 2015; Prakash and Pathak 2017), and perceived behavioural control (Martinho et al. 2015), as well as attitudinal constructs related to environmental issues in general, e.g. environmental concern (Trivedi et al. 2018; Prakash and Pathak 2017; Koenig-Lewis et al. 2014) and awareness of environmental problems (van Birgelen et al. 2009).



*Theories on consumer preferences and willingness to pay:* Eleven of the studies analysed consumer preferences, willingness to pay (WTP) or willingness to buy (WTB) with regard to food products with environmentally-friendly packaging, applying the method of choice experiments (Klaiman et al. 2016; Rokka and Uusitalo 2008), conjoint analysis (Arboretti and Bordignon 2016; Koutsimanis et al. 2012), contingent valuation (Ertz et al. 2017; Neill and Williams 2016), or other methods (Van Herpen et al. 2016; Singh and Pandey 2018). These studies include explicit or implicit references to microeconomic foundations such as utility maximisation and/or Random Utility Theory (McFadden 1974).

*Theories on cue utilization and signalling:* Nine of the studies analysed the relationship between product packaging (material, design and/or labelling) and consumers' product perception and evaluation. Studies in this category investigated, for example, how environmentally-friendly packaging affects perceived product quality (Ertz et al. 2017; Magnier et al. 2016) or how package design and labelling elements influence consumer perceptions of the environmental-friendliness of packaging (Ertz et al. 2017; Magnier and Crie 2015). The studies in this category have explicit or implicit foundations in information economics, e.g. Cue Utilization Theory (Olson and Jacoby 1972) or Signalling Theory (Spence 1973; Stigler 1961).

*Other theoretical foundations:* Eighteen of the studies did not fall into one of the fields outlined above. These studies mostly focussed on (selected) processes in the consumer organism and covered a wide variety of constructs, including consumer perception, knowledge, affection/emotions, expectations and attitudes. These studies are mostly either exploratory or descriptive in nature. Eight of the ten qualitative studies in the review were assigned to this category. Some of the studies in this category also collected data on reported behaviour but without analysing statistical relationships to attitudinal constructs (e.g. Scott and Vigar-Ellis 2014), which is why they were not grouped under the attitude-behaviour category described above.

Overall, a wide variety of concepts from consumer behaviour theory were analysed in the 46 studies. Some of these concepts differed in their terminology from the psychological processes included in the conceptual framework of our literature review (see Figure 1). In the synthesis of results, we linked all concepts from the studies reviewed to one of the psychological processes of our conceptual framework. For example, 'perception' was linked to 'knowledge and understanding', 'emotions' to 'liking', and 'willingness to pay' to 'conviction'.

### 3.3 Research methodologies of the studies reviewed

The great majority of articles reviewed presented results from quantitative research approaches (39 articles). Eight of the articles were based on qualitative research approaches, while only 2 articles presented results from mixed method approaches (Table 2). It is striking that there was little variety regarding the method of data collection applied in the quantitative studies: 34 articles were based on surveys, while experiments and other methods were only applied in relatively few studies.

To our surprise, most articles were based on convenience samples (20 studies), while another 17 articles did not clearly specify the sampling method used (Table 3). Only 4 studies applied elements of probability sampling methods.

**Table 2** Number of articles per method of data collection

Method of data collection	Number of articles <sup>1</sup>	Number of participants (min–max)
Quantitative (n=41)		
Survey	34	60–2,001
Experiment	4	100–302
Eye-Tracking	1	89
Implicit Association Test	1	89
Free choice profiling method	1	249
Qualitative (n=10)		
Focus group	5	12–89
Interview	4	8–195
Projective technique	1	25

<sup>1</sup> Several articles used more than one method of data collection.

**Table 3** Number of articles per sampling method

Sampling method	Number of articles <sup>1</sup>
No information	17
Convenience sampling	20
<i>Snowball</i>	10
<i>Students</i>	6
<i>Other</i>	4
Quota sampling	7
Elements of probability sampling methods	4

<sup>1</sup> Several articles used more than one sampling method.

## 4. Synthesis of study results

This chapter is organised according to the conceptual framework presented in Figure 1, beginning with the exposure stage and proceeding to consumers' awareness and recognition, knowledge and understanding, liking of environmentally-friendly packaging, preference for and attitude towards, conviction for, and purchase of environmentally-friendly packaging.

### 4.1 Exposure

In the context of this literature synthesis, 'exposure' refers to the question of how the participants of the different studies were exposed to the topic of environmentally-friendly packaging. This section gives an overview of the use of terms applied for environmentally-friendly packaging in the original questionnaires or interviews, and the stimuli used in the studies.

With regard to how the participants of the studies were exposed to the topic of environmentally-friendly packaging, we distinguished between stimuli *format* and stimuli *content*. In terms of stimuli

*format*, 27 studies used stimuli only in text format, including written and spoken questions, instructions and information about environmentally-friendly packaging. In addition to text stimuli, 19 of the 46 studies presented participants with real products, empty packages or pictures of products or logos (Table 4).

Interestingly, only 25 articles provided information about the original wording of the stimuli used in the study. Fourteen of the other articles outlined the stimuli presented to the participants without directly replicating the original wording in the article. The remaining seven studies used pictures of products or real packaging without labels or written information referring to environmental friendliness. Of the 19 studies that used a picture or real product stimuli, only 9 presented pictures of the stimulus in the article.

In terms of the thematic *content* of the stimuli, we identified 5 categories of thematic stimuli across the 46 studies (Table 4). The theme most often investigated was that of 'environmentally-friendly packaging in general' (15 studies). In terms of specific packaging solutions, recycling was addressed most often (13 studies), followed by unpackaged food/less packaging (8 studies), and bio-degradable and bio-based packaging (7 studies). Eight studies focused on packaging in general.

Table 4 also provides information about the combination of stimuli content and format, as well as stimuli content and methods of data collection. From this table it is apparent that the 'text stimulus only' format was most common in studies of environmentally-friendly packaging in general, while specific packaging solutions were investigated relatively more often with more specific stimulus formats such as real products and packages or pictures of these.

In addition to a wide range of different types of environmentally-friendly packaging, the studies reviewed many different products. In total, 24 of the 46 articles focused on specific products: beverages (11 studies), dairy products (8 studies), sweets (6 studies), vegetables (5 studies), fruits (3 studies), ready-to-eat meals (2 studies), canned food, fresh produce in general, and nuts (1 study each).

1 **Table 4** Stimuli content, stimuli format and method of data collection of the reviewed studies

2

		Stimuli content					Number of studies <sup>1</sup>	
		Environmentally-friendly packaging in general	Recycling of packaging	Packaging in general	Unpackaged food/less packaging	Bio-based packaging and Bio-degradable packaging		Others (Reuse of packaging, Returnable packaging, Low energy packaging, FSC logo, no content)
Stimuli format	Text stimuli only	13	5	8	4	4	2	27
	Pictures of products or logos	4	7	1	3	2	0	15
	Real products or empty packaging	0	0	4	1	0	0	4
Method of data collection	Questionnaire	14	7	7	6	5	2	34
	Experiment	2	1	1	2	0	0	4
	Focus group	0	2	2	0	1	0	5
	Interview	1	1	2	0	0	1	4
	Other methods (IAT, Eye-tracking, Free choice profiling method, Projective technique)	1	2	0	0	1	0	4
Number of studies <sup>1</sup>		15	13	8	8	7	3	

3

4 <sup>1</sup> Several articles used more than one method of data collection or stimuli content and therefore the column/line 'number of studies' does not equal the sum of  
 5 all columns/lines.

6

7

## 8 4.2 Awareness and recognition

9 Only seven of the 46 studies reviewed provided results related to consumers' awareness of  
10 environmentally-friendly packaging and how consumers recognize such packaging. The results of  
11 three studies provide evidence that consumers are generally aware of the environmental impact of  
12 food packaging (Venter et al. 2011; Steenis et al. 2017; Banterle et al. 2012). When university  
13 students in the Netherlands tested various types of food packaging in terms of how they differed,  
14 sustainability cues on food packaging proved highly salient for most students; the only attribute  
15 mentioned more often than sustainability was that of convenience (Steenis et al. 2017). In focus  
16 group discussions conducted in Italy, the participants mentioned that there was no information in  
17 supermarkets about the sustainability, recyclability and reusability of packaging, noting that they  
18 would be interested in having such additional information (Banterle et al. 2012).

19 Four studies investigated how consumers identify environmentally-friendly packaging of food  
20 products. The results of these studies showed that labels, logos and packaging material were the  
21 most important features for consumers in identifying environmentally-friendly packaging. In  
22 addition, consumers used a wide range of other features. In a study conducted in South Africa by  
23 Scott and Vigar-Ellis (2014), 45% of the participants stated they looked for labels, while 30% looked  
24 for images or logos such as the recycling logo. The packaging material itself was used by 18% of the  
25 participants to judge if packaging was sustainable. Furthermore, consumers paid attention to other  
26 signs on packaging such as the colour. For these consumers, 'earth' colours such as cream, brown or  
27 green were indicators of greater sustainability. In addition, plain packaging with only a little colour or  
28 ink was felt to be environmentally-friendly. In this study, only 12% of the participants admitted not  
29 knowing the difference between sustainable and other packaging. In contrast to the results of Scott  
30 and Vigar-Ellis (2014), a study in Sweden by Lindh et al. (2016a) revealed that 27% of the participants  
31 considered packaging material in general when purchasing food, while 20% of the participants  
32 considered the quantity of packaging and 18% looked for recyclable material. A qualitative research  
33 study conducted in France by Magnier and Crié (2015) revealed a broad spectrum of cues for  
34 ecological packaging. In their interviews the participants mentioned the following aspects: the  
35 reduction of over-packaging, the size and shape of packaging, the use of larger instead of smaller  
36 containers, non-diluted products (concentrates), unpackaged and non-pre-packaged products,  
37 refilled products, recycled, recyclable and biodegradable packaging, material made from renewable  
38 resources, material weight, and reusable packaging. The participants also mentioned eco-labels (e.g.  
39 carbon footprint), licensing agreements (e.g. with environmental organisations), pedagogical  
40 attributes (e.g. ecological quizzes and information about waste sorting), environmental claims (e.g.  
41 ecological, biological, pure, honest) and scientific and environmental attributes (e.g. BPA-free). In  
42 contrast to findings suggesting that many consumers know what to look for in order to identify  
43 environmentally-friendly packaging, however, a study in Italy by Mancini et al. (2017) found low  
44 awareness of the 'Forest Stewardship Council' (FSC) logo among focus group participants with a low  
45 to medium level of education, who had difficulties understanding the meaning of the logo.

46

## 47 4.2 Knowledge and understanding

### 48 4.2.1 *Understanding and definition of environmentally-friendly packaging*

49 Five of the studies reviewed gave evidence of how consumers defined environmentally-friendly  
50 packaging and how familiar they were with terms related to such packaging. In a study of Polish and  
51 French university students undertaken by Jerzyk (2016), only 30% of the Polish students had already  
52 heard the term 'sustainable packaging', as compared to 71% of the French students. What the  
53 students in this study found most important about sustainable packaging was that it should be  
54 recyclable, while other major considerations included whether such packaging is safe for human  
55 health and whether it is made from recycled material. In a consumer study in South Africa, 49% of

56 participants defined the term 'environmentally-friendly packaging' as packaging that is non-harmful  
57 to humans and the environment. Further features noted by participants included degradability (41%)  
58 and recyclability (37%) (Scott and Vigar-Ellis 2014). These aspects were also important to consumers  
59 in a study in India, who further declared their willingness to pay a price premium for  
60 environmentally-friendly packaging (Singh and Pandey 2018).

61 A study by Herbes et al. (2018) revealed interesting differences between consumers' responses in  
62 France, Germany and the USA. The survey contained the following open-ended question: "For you,  
63 what makes packaging material green? (i.e. environmentally-friendly) Please list as many answers as  
64 necessary." In summary, the survey found that consumers from Germany were more focused on  
65 attributes at the beginning of the packaging life cycle (e.g. features of the raw materials used) than  
66 the participants from France and the USA, who were more focused on factors at the end of this cycle  
67 (e.g. reusability, recyclability and degradability). In all three countries, the survey participants rarely  
68 mentioned reduced quantity of packaging as a strategy and feature of environmentally-friendly  
69 packaging. The packaging materials mentioned most frequently as being 'green' were paper and  
70 cardboard, followed by glass.

71 Two of the studies reviewed provided insights into the extent to which consumers are familiar with  
72 bio-based packaging (Sijtsema et al. 2016; Koutsimanis et al. 2012). Sijtsema et al. (2016)  
73 implemented focus group discussions in five European countries (the Czech Republic, Denmark,  
74 Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands) and explored consumers' reactions to seven bio-based food  
75 and non-food products already on the market. There was a high level of uncertainty among  
76 participants about the term 'bio-based' and the environmental impact of bio-based packaging,  
77 including doubts as to whether the term 'bio-based' describes a product or a production technique,  
78 whether it means the packaging is biodegradable or refers to energy produced in a bio-based way,  
79 and whether such packaging is aimed at waste reduction. Only a few people were aware that bio-  
80 based materials are produced using renewable resources as opposed to fossil fuels. When asked to  
81 link the term 'bio-based' to keywords on a list, the participants most often associated 'bio-based'  
82 with the development of technologies. Other keywords commonly linked to the term included 'bio  
83 fuel', 'biodegradable', 'environmentally-friendly', 'organic', and 'biotechnology'. (Unfortunately, the  
84 study did not present results differentiated by country of data collection.) In a study of US consumers  
85 conducted by Koutsimanis et al. (2012), only 55% of the participants answered correctly to the  
86 question: "Which raw materials are used to produce containers of bio-based plastic?"

87

#### 88 4.2.2 *Perceived environmental impact of different food packaging materials*

89 Twelve of the studies reviewed gave evidence of how consumers perceived the environmental  
90 impact of different food packaging materials. These studies analyzed a variety of different materials,  
91 including glass, metal, cardboard, plastic, recyclable packaging, reusable packaging, bio-based  
92 packaging and biodegradable packaging, as well as over-packaging.

93 The majority of consumers participating in these studies identified the environmental impact of  
94 packaging as being primarily dependent on the materials used for packaging (Steenis et al. 2017;  
95 Lindh et al. 2016a). Steenis et al. (2017) found that students from the Netherlands judged glass and  
96 bioplastics to be most sustainable, followed by cardboard, while plastic and metal were judged least  
97 sustainable. (The stimuli used in the study were tomato soup products.) A focus group discussion  
98 with elderly participants (aged over 60) conducted in New Zealand by Duizer et al. (2009) confirmed  
99 that glass packaging was regarded by consumers as being more environmentally-friendly than other  
100 materials. In contrast to this result, 79% of Swedish consumers rated paper-based packaging as the  
101 most sustainable packaging, while only 9% rated glass as most sustainable. Similar to the findings of  
102 the study by Steenis et al. (2017), plastic and metal were perceived as the least sustainable packaging  
103 materials (Lindh et al. 2016a). In line with these findings, the participants of focus group discussions

104 in Sweden conducted by Fernqvist et al. (2015) preferred paper to plastic packaging and engaged in  
105 extensive discussion of the negative environmental impact of plastic packaging .  
106 Two studies, one undertaken in Turkey by Aday and Yener (2014), and the other in South Africa by  
107 Venter et al. (2011), provided information about which aspects of packaging materials consumers  
108 perceived as negative for the environment. The consumers in these studies perceived plastic and  
109 glass as being difficult to recycle (Aday and Yener 2014) and plastic as not being biodegradable  
110 (Venter et al. 2011). Nevertheless, only 24% of consumers in Turkey thought there was a problem  
111 with environmental pollution as a result of plastic packaging, although 70% of the participants agreed  
112 that glass supports 'healthy nature' (Aday and Yener 2014). In the study by Venter et al. (2011),  
113 cardboard was also seen as problematic and perceived as a contributor to pollution because product  
114 packaging with cardboard often entails additional packaging material. In a study conducted in the  
115 Netherlands by Steenis et al. (2017), consumers were also asked about their perception of the  
116 environmental friendliness of packaging material, revealing that these consumers' perceptions are  
117 not in line with life cycle assessments. For example, consumers incorrectly rated the packaging  
118 options judged most sustainable by the life-cycle assessment (i.e. dry cardboard sachets and mixed  
119 material pouches) as least sustainable. Likewise, the packaging materials judged as most sustainable  
120 by the participants (glass and bioplastic) are rated the least sustainable according to the life-cycle  
121 assessment. It must also be mentioned that there was little consensus among the participants as to  
122 the sustainability of the 14 different packaging options (in terms of materials and appearance). In  
123 their study on organic food packaging, Lindh et al. (2016a) found that 56% of the participants did not  
124 know whether such packaging was sustainable or not.  
125 Finally, Herbes et al. (2018) asked consumers in France, Germany and the United States how they  
126 perceived the environmental friendliness of different packaging materials. The participants in France  
127 and the US rated the packaging option made from recyclable material as the most environmentally-  
128 friendly, whereas in Germany the reusable packaging option was rated as best. Participants in  
129 Germany rated recyclable material second in terms of environmental friendliness, while in France  
130 and the US the participants rated biodegradable plastic from renewable resources (other than bio-  
131 methane) as second. In all three countries, plastic packaging made from bio-methane was rated as  
132 least environmentally friendly, followed by non-biodegradable plastic from renewable resources  
133 (other than bio methane).

134

### 135 4.3 Liking

136 Only two of the reviewed articles included in this study provided evidence on consumers' affective  
137 liking of environmentally-friendly packaging. The study undertaken in Norway by Koenig-Lewis et al.  
138 (2014) found evidence of emotional effect arising from the perceived ecological benefits of a partly  
139 plant-based water bottle. Not surprisingly, the positive emotions evoked by packaging were  
140 significantly influenced by the perceived benefits of the packaging, while negative emotions arose  
141 when participants were uncertain about the ecological benefits of the packaging. Koenig-Lewis et al.  
142 (2014) also found that the positive and negative emotions evoked by partly plant-based packaging  
143 had a strong impact on purchase intention. More specifically, the effect of positive emotions on  
144 purchase intention was found to be greater than that of negative emotions. In contrast, the cognitive  
145 benefits associated with the packaging did not directly influence purchase intention.  
146 In a qualitative study conducted in five European countries, Sijtsema et al. (2016) revealed that  
147 consumers had positive, negative and mixed feelings towards bio-based products. Positive feelings  
148 were connected to aspects such as the packaging being good for the environment, natural, healthy,  
149 or innovative. Negative feelings were aroused when people were not familiar with the concept of  
150 bio-based packaging or perceived it as a marketing trick.

151

## 4.4 Attitudes and preferences

### 4.4.1 *Attitudes towards environmentally-friendly packaging*

Fourteen studies revealed which advantages and disadvantages consumers ascribed to environmentally-friendly packaging and how consumers evaluated specific packaging materials. Regarding environmentally-friendly packaging in general, 64% of the participants in a study undertaken in South Africa by Scott and Vigar-Ellis (2014) stated that buying environmentally-friendly packaging added to their quality of life. When asked how it added to quality of life in an open-ended question, the participants referred to six themes, including the following: 22% stated that environmentally-friendly packaging would improve sustainability and save the planet; 13% stated that it gave them a good feeling; 13% thought it reduced waste; and 11% said they felt such packaging was good for health and prevented serious illnesses. In line with these results, a study of French consumers by Magnier and Crié (2015) found that protection of the environment and the well-being of others were perceived benefits of sustainable packaging, while private benefits included health-related benefits, social value, emotional value, convenience (decrease of packaging volume and ease of disposal) and decrease in price due to reduction in the amount of packaging material. Furthermore, 51% of the participants in a study conducted by Scott and Vigar-Ellis (2014) in South Africa believed that environmentally-friendly packaging would save money. In contrast to this result, the consumers in the study conducted by Magnier and Crié (2015) expected such packaging to entail an increase in price and a decrease in convenience leading to reduced pleasure during consumption. Other perceived costs of environmentally-friendly packaging included a decline in aesthetics, quality, hygiene, product protection, and efficiency (Magnier and Crié 2015).

Other studies investigated the influence of environmentally-friendly packaging on perceived product quality, naturalness, environmental friendliness, convenience, cost, and company credibility. Magnier et al. (2016, France) revealed in two approaches that when packaging looked more sustainable the participants perceived the products (chocolate, raisins, coffee) to be of better quality than the same products without sustainable packaging. In the case of coffee, sustainable packaging led consumers to perceive the product as more 'natural'. The authors found that the participants even perceived unhealthy products as more natural and therefore healthier, tastier, and ultimately of better quality because of sustainable packaging. However, in contrast to the results for conventional coffee, there was no effect of sustainable-looking packaging on the perceived quality and naturalness of organic coffee. In a study in France by Monnot et al. (2015) the researchers found that the elimination of over-packaging had a significant positive effect on consumers' perception of environmental friendliness, convenience and cost, though there was no significant effect on the perceived quality of the product. The results of a study in Canada by Ertz et al. (2017) showed that, in the case of cereal bar packaging, an increased amount of self-declared environmental claims ("less cardboard is used") did not influence consumers' perception of product quality or of the companies' credibility with respect to its environmental activities. However, when an elaborate, self-declared environmental claim was combined with a third-party label, the perceived product quality and credibility of the company were significantly higher.

Five studies documented negative consumer attitudes towards over-packaging: Venter et al. 2011; Clonan et al. 2010; Hanssen et al. 2017; Tobler et al. 2011; and Lea and Worsley 2008. In two of these studies, the majority of consumers stated there was too much packaging on products (Clonan et al. 2010, UK; Hanssen et al. 2017, Norway). Two other studies found that consumers perceived reduction of packaging as important for saving the environment (Tobler et al. 2011, Switzerland; Lea and Worsley 2008, Australia). In the study conducted by Lea and Worsley (2008), 50% of the participants strongly agreed that it helps the environment when food manufacturers use less packaging.



200 Regarding bio-based packaging, two studies found that consumers were sceptical and uncertain as to  
201 the benefits of such material (Sijtsema et al. 2016; Herbes et al. 2018). In focus group discussions  
202 held in five European countries, consumers showed both positive perceptions of bio-based packaging  
203 (good for the environment or natural, healthy, energy-related, and innovative) and negative  
204 perceptions. Participants who were not familiar with the term 'bio-based' or who perceived it as a  
205 marketing gimmick questioned whether bio-based packaging was truly innovative, environmentally-  
206 friendly and healthy (Sijtsema et al. 2016). The study by Herbes et al. (2018) revealed that consumers  
207 in France, Germany and the USA felt uncomfortable about using packaging made from biomethane,  
208 both for environmental reasons in general as well as specifically for its lack of biodegradability. Only  
209 the German participants in the study showed some concern regarding ethical factors and the  
210 disposal of such packaging.

211 With regard to reusable packaging and recyclable materials, several studies recorded positive  
212 consumer perceptions, including a study in Finland and the Netherlands by Heiniö et al. (2017) and in  
213 South Africa by (Venter et al. 2011). One study in Belgium by Songa et al. (2018) focused on the  
214 research question of how implicit and explicit attitudes and emotional reactions are triggered by  
215 recyclability logos. The results of the tests revealed a positive implicit attitude (measured with an  
216 implicit attitude test) and explicit attitude (measured with a questionnaire) towards recyclability. In  
217 line with these results, the participants' emotional reaction (measured with eye-tracking) to yoghurt  
218 products with a recyclability logo was also positive. Not surprisingly, the participants evaluated the  
219 products with a recyclability logo more positively than the products with the logo stating that the  
220 packaging was not recyclable.

221

#### 222 4.4.2 *Preferences for environmentally-friendly packaging*

223 Fourteen studies reviewed for this article provided findings on the importance of environmentally-  
224 friendly packaging to consumers. In a study of consumers in Italy, Mancini et al. (2017) found that  
225 focus group participants with medium to low levels of education evinced little interest in sustainable  
226 packaging material. Amongst students in Poland, Jerzyk (2016) found sustainable packaging was of  
227 little importance in the buying decision process, though most respondents stated that they expected  
228 the importance of sustainable packaging for consumers to increase in the future. In a questionnaire  
229 conducted in Australia by Lea and Worsley (2008), only 20% of the participants stated that they  
230 frequently avoided buying products with non-environmentally-friendly packaging, while 45% said  
231 they sometimes avoided such packaging, 26% rarely, and 9% never. Students in a study conducted in  
232 Spain by Rodríguez-Barreiro et al. (2013) said they would rather not consider types of packaging  
233 when buying a product.

234 Several studies have found that environmentally-friendly packaging is less important to consumers  
235 than other product attributes. Martinho et al. (2015) found that sustainable packaging was less  
236 important to the participants of their study in Portugal than product quality and price, although more  
237 important than packaging design. The results of a study in Denmark by Nørgaard Olesen and  
238 Giacalone (2018) were similar, showing that environmentally-friendly packaging of carrots was  
239 important to only 15% of the participants, while the following aspects were important to a larger  
240 share: transparent packaging, organic quality, Danish origin, and the 'nice and clean' appearance of  
241 the carrots. The only aspect rated less important than environmental packaging was familiarity with  
242 the brand. Baruk and Iwanicka (2015, 2016) found in their study in Poland that the eco-friendliness of  
243 the packaging of dairy products was of medium importance to participants during the buying  
244 process, while attributes considered more important than eco-friendly packaging included the expiry  
245 date, the brand, the regional origin of the product, the unit size of the packaging, and the ease with  
246 which packaging could be used. The inclusion of information about the company's webpage, a  
247 helpline and the quality management system were deemed least important. Furthermore, a study in  
248 New Zealand by Duizer et al. (2009) revealed that elderly consumers ranked the recyclability of

249 packaging fourth in importance when choosing food products. The price of the product, the safety  
250 and the size of the packaging were all considered more important than the recyclability of the  
251 packaging. The results of a study by Jerzyk (2016) showed that student participants in France and  
252 Poland would not accept any modification of packaging to protect the environment that might also  
253 decrease the quality of the product. Surprisingly, van Birgelen et al. (2009) found that only price and  
254 taste were more important than environmentally-friendly packaging for consumers in Germany when  
255 buying a product. Product brand and design were attributes that the participants in this study were  
256 specifically willing to trade-off for more eco-friendly packaging.

257 A study of consumers in the UK by Clonan et al. (2010) revealed that the highest priority for  
258 participants in terms of sustainable food was how the food had been produced, followed by  
259 packaging and seasonality. The findings of Hanss and Böhm's (2012) study in Norway indicated that  
260 consumers rated recyclable packaging and low-energy packaging as important product attributes for  
261 sustainable products, while product attributes related to natural wholesomeness, animal protection,  
262 and economic attributes were perceived as less relevant.

263 Regarding the importance of environmentally-friendly packaging in relation to other packaging  
264 attributes, a study in Turkey by Aday and Yener (2014) observed that the recyclability of packaging  
265 and its non-harmfulness to nature (12%) were ranked third in order of importance by the  
266 participants. The most important attributes for these consumers were that packaging provided food-  
267 related information (47%) and that it was easy to use and store (36%). Only one aspect was ranked as  
268 less important than the environmental-friendliness of packaging and this was the packaging's ease of  
269 transport (5%). Interestingly, Arboretti and Bordignon (2016) found from their study of consumers in  
270 Italy that the aspect of disposal (i.e. whether the packaging is recyclable, non-recyclable or  
271 biodegradable) was most important compared to other packaging attributes. The participants  
272 regarded biodegradable packaging as having many advantages over recyclable and non-recyclable  
273 packaging.

274

## 275 4.5 Conviction

### 276 4.5.1 *Willingness to buy environmentally-friendly packaging*

277 Seven of the studies reviewed provide substantial evidence of consumers' willingness to buy  
278 environmentally-friendly packaging. Magnier and Schormans (2015, Netherlands) found that the  
279 ecological appearance of packaging positively influenced Dutch consumers' purchasing decisions  
280 when buying nuts. In addition, 66% of the students in a study conducted by Jerzyk (2016) in France  
281 and Poland stated they would buy a different product if it had sustainable packaging, while only 6%  
282 said that they would definitely not do so.

283 A study in South Korea by Seo et al. (2016) compared the influence of eco-friendly packaging and  
284 eco-friendly ingredients on consumers' willingness to buy (WTB). Interestingly, the authors found  
285 different results for different types of products, recording a significantly higher WTB for jellybeans  
286 and energy drinks with eco-friendly packaging than for products with eco-friendly ingredients and  
287 conventional packaging. For yogurt drinks, however, the opposite was true: eco-friendly ingredients  
288 evoked a higher WTB than eco-friendly packaging. For protein bars there were no significant  
289 differences in WTB between eco-friendly packaging and eco-friendly ingredients.

290 Three studies focused on reduced packaging. Clonan et al. (2010) found that 90% of the UK study  
291 participants preferred unpackaged fruits and vegetables for environmental reasons. Similarly, Seo et  
292 al. (2016) revealed that their study participants in South Korea were significantly more willing to buy  
293 organic cookies with appropriate packaging than organic cookies with excessive packaging.  
294 Moreover, the results of a study of consumers in the Netherlands by van Herpen et al. (2016) showed  
295 that the participants bought organic food (fruits and vegetables) more often when it was

296 unpackaged. In contrast, a study carried out in China (Wang et al. 2014) found that consumers stated  
297 they would not purchase products with less packaging.

298 Regarding packaging made of bio-based materials, Koutsimanis et al. (2012) found that the  
299 participants in a study in the USA significantly preferred bio-based materials to petroleum-based  
300 packaging, although overall this aspect did not have a strong influence on consumers' product  
301 evaluation. In a conjoint analysis, product evaluations were found to be mostly influenced by price  
302 (25%), followed by shelf life (19%) and container size (17%). A study on consumers' perceptions of  
303 recyclable packaging in Finland (Rokka and Usitalo 2008) concluded that the attributes of 'price' and  
304 'recyclable carton packaging' had similar relative importance values based on conjoint analysis (35%  
305 and 34%), while the 're-sealability of the packaging' and the 'brand' had relatively low values (17%  
306 and 15%).

307

#### 308 *4.5.2 Willingness to pay for environmentally-friendly packaging*

309 Several studies analysed consumers' willingness to pay (WTP) or intention to pay a price premium for  
310 environmentally-friendly packaging. These studies applied discrete choice analysis, contingent  
311 valuation and other methods. It is problematic to compare the absolute WTP values across these  
312 studies since the WTP was measured under very different conditions and the results of conjoint  
313 analysis and choice experiments need to be interpreted within the context of each experimental  
314 setting. Therefore, we do not report concrete WTP values in this section.

315 Most studies found that the majority of consumers were willing to pay a price premium for  
316 environmentally-friendly packaging, including 86% of participants in a study conducted in Sweden  
317 (Lindh et al. 2016a), 81% of participants in a study conducted in the USA (Neill and Williams 2016),  
318 and 67% of participants in a study in Germany (van Birgelen et al. 2009). In their study of US  
319 consumers, Klaiman et al. (2016) investigated the WTP for the recyclability of different packaging  
320 materials for fruit juice and found a significantly higher WTP for the recyclability of plastic than for  
321 the recyclability of glass and the recyclability of cartons. In addition, consumers in a study in France  
322 by Orset et al. (2017) stated the highest WTP for bottles made from r-PET (recycled material, 100%  
323 recyclable), and for the PLA bottles (biodegradable), followed by PEF (renewable material, 100%  
324 recyclable, not biodegradable), while the lowest WTP was recorded for PET bottles (petroleum, 100%  
325 recyclable, not biodegradable). In contrast to studies that recorded a positive WTP, consumers in a  
326 study from Canada were not willing to pay more for a reduction in the material used in cardboard  
327 packaging (Ertz et al. 2017), while Barber (2010) found that only 28% of the participants in a US study  
328 were willing to pay more for green packaging for wine.

329

#### 330 **4.6 Purchase of products with environmentally-friendly packaging**

331 None of the studies analysed consumer behaviour in the real marketplace, e.g. through test markets  
332 or consumer purchase panels, and we accordingly conclude that none of the reviewed studies  
333 provided evidence on consumers' real purchase behaviour concerning products with  
334 environmentally-friendly packaging.

335 Instead, 19 of the 46 reviewed studies investigated consumers' intention to buy, willingness to buy or  
336 willingness to pay for environmentally-friendly packaging, while 20 other studies discussed their  
337 results with respect to purchase behaviour. However, drawing conclusions regarding purchase  
338 behaviour based on self-reported attitudes or intended/stated behaviour is problematic due to the  
339 well-known phenomenon of attitude/intention-behaviour gap (Janssen 2018; Moser 2016; Sheeran  
340 and Webb 2016). Only six of the reviewed studies discussed their results in light of the attitude-  
341 behaviour gap (i.e. Trivedi 2018, India; Scott and Vigar-Ellis 2014, South Africa; Wang et al. 2014,  
342 China; Fernqvist et al. 2015, Sweden; Ertz et al. 2017, Canada; Songa et al. 2018, Belgium). The  
343 authors of 17 other studies in the review acknowledged that consumer surveys do not provide data

344 on real purchase behaviour. Also, the authors of four experiment-based studies raised the issue that  
345 their results could not be interpreted as real purchase behaviour due to the experimental  
346 environment of the research (Koutsimanis 2012, USA; Magnier and Schormans 2015, Netherlands;  
347 Steenis et al. 2017, Netherlands; Songa et al. 2018, Belgium).

348 Another important issue surrounding consumer research on pro-environmental behaviour is that of  
349 social desirability bias. Surprisingly, only 7 studies mentioned the problem of social desirability and  
350 its consequences for their research (i.e. Rokka and Uusitalo 2008, Finland; van Birgelen et al. 2009,  
351 Germany; Tobler et al. 2011, Switzerland; Wang et al. 2014, China; Fernqvist et al. 2015, Sweden;  
352 Klaiman et al. 2016, USA; Nørsgaard Olesen and Giacalone 2018, Denmark).

353 Overall, it can be stated that there is a lack of evidence based on real purchase behaviour; all we  
354 know about consumer response to environmentally-friendly packaging is derived from self-reported  
355 (intended) behaviour and attitudes. An essential task, therefore, is to ascertain the extent of the  
356 attitude/intention-behaviour gap; however, the 46 reviewed studies provided no relevant evidence  
357 with which to assess this gap. Previous studies on organic food consumption have suggested that  
358 attitudes could explain around 50% of observed variation in pro-environmental behaviour (Hauser et  
359 al. 2013; Honkanen et al. 2006; Janssen 2018; Pino et al. 2012; Tarkiainen and Sundqvist 2009; Zhou  
360 et al. 2013). With regard to other types of pro-environmental behaviour, however, previous studies  
361 have reported only a weak influence of attitudes on behaviour (Gupta 2009; Kollmuss and Agyeman  
362 2002; Peattie 2010).

363

## 364 4.7 Influencing factors

365 Sixteen studies investigated the influence of demographic and psychographic characteristics of  
366 consumers on their response to environmentally-friendly packaging. The most frequently measured  
367 factors were related to environmental concern (16 studies), age/generation (6 studies), gender (6  
368 studies), and preference for organic food (5 studies). This chapter considers only those influencing  
369 factors that were researched by more than one study.

370

### 371 4.7.1 *Environmental concern and environmental beliefs*

372 In a study of consumers in India, Trivedi et al. (2018) found in general that consumers' environmental  
373 concern had an impact on their attitude towards environmentally-friendly packaging. A study in  
374 Poland by Jeżewska-Zychowicz and Jeznach (2015) found that people with a positive attitude towards  
375 the environment more frequently claimed not to buy food in disposable plastic or paper packaging  
376 compared to people with a negative attitude towards the environment. Conversely, people with  
377 negative attitudes towards the environment more frequently stated that they did not do anything to  
378 minimize the amount of packaging waste. In addition, Martinho et al. (2015) found that participants  
379 in a study in Portugal who stated that the sustainability of packaging was important to them also  
380 showed more environmental awareness. Similar results were found in Germany by van Birgelen et al.  
381 (2009), who found that consumers who were aware of current environmental problems and  
382 consumers with a positive attitude towards protecting the environment through the purchase of  
383 environmentally-friendly packaging were more likely to buy ecologically-friendly beverage packaging.  
384 Lea and Worsley (2008) found that consumers in their study in Australia who scored highest on the  
385 Food-Environment Belief Score were significantly more likely to state that they frequently avoided  
386 purchasing products with environmentally-unfriendly packaging. For milk packaging, Neill and  
387 Williams (2016) found that US consumers' preference for returnable glass milk bottles over  
388 paperboard gable-top packaging and plastic jugs was positively influenced by the perception that  
389 returnable bottles are helpful for the environment, as well as by the frequency with which  
390 consumers used canvas or reusable bags for food shopping.

391 The results of the study undertaken in Norway by Koenig-Lewis et al. (2014) showed that a higher  
392 level of concern for the environment leads to a more positive cognitive assessment of the benefits of  
393 a partly plant-based water bottle. In addition, the study found that positive emotions with respect to  
394 the packaging were significantly influenced by the environmental concerns of the participants,  
395 whereas there was no effect of environmental concern on negative emotions. The environmental  
396 concerns of the participants were found to have a significant positive influence on purchase  
397 intention. Additionally, Prakash and Pathak (2017) revealed that the purchase intention of young  
398 consumers in India for environmentally-friendly packaging was significantly influenced by attitudes  
399 towards eco-friendly packaging and environmental concern. Personal norms related to saving the  
400 environment and using eco-friendly packaging had the highest impact on purchase intention.  
401 Interestingly, in their study in the Netherlands of consumers' attitudes to conventional-looking  
402 packaging of nuts, Magnier and Schormans (2015) found that consumers with low environmental  
403 concern registered an even higher intention to purchase packaging without a sustainability claim  
404 than packaging that included such a sustainability claim. However, whether the sustainable-looking  
405 packaging presented a sustainability claim or not did not significantly affect the purchase intention of  
406 consumers with low environmental concern. Regarding consumers with high environmental concern,  
407 the same factors were investigated but no significant effect was found.  
408 With respect to the willingness to pay for environmentally-friendly packaging, Barber (2010, USA)  
409 found that participants in a US study who evinced high environmental concerns, those with a positive  
410 attitude towards the importance of being environmentally-friendly, and those who evinced an  
411 attitude that it is not inconvenient to behave in an environmentally-friendly way, all declared  
412 themselves willing to pay more for green wine packaging. In line with this finding, consumers who  
413 stated that they considered environmental issues when purchasing food were also willing to pay  
414 more for green wine packaging compared to other consumers. Similarly, Orset et al. (2017, France)  
415 showed that the WTP for environmentally-friendly bottles was affected both by consumers' belief  
416 that the manufacturer cares about the environment as well as the importance consumers attach to  
417 environmental protection in general. Klaiman et al. (2016, USA) found a higher WTP for recyclable  
418 plastic packaging of fruit juice among participants who reported that recycling improves water  
419 quality and saves energy, as well as among participants who stated that they felt good when they  
420 participated in environmentally-friendly activities.

421

#### 422 4.7.2 *Preference for organic food*

423 Lindh et al. (2016a) reported that organic food consumers in Sweden took into account  
424 considerations of packaging material (e.g. amount of packaging material, recyclable material)  
425 significantly more than non-organic consumers and were also willing to pay more for  
426 environmentally-sustainable packaging. Neill and Williams (2016, USA) found that a preference for  
427 eco-labelled products positively influenced the preference of participants for returnable glass milk  
428 bottles. In two studies with a focus on unpackaged fruits and vegetables, van Herpen et al. (2016,  
429 Netherlands) found a positive relationship between attitudes towards organic food and self-reported  
430 preferences for unpackaged products. Nevertheless, this effect was not observed in the experiment  
431 that formed part of the study, in which consumers with a positive attitude towards organic food  
432 chose more organic food independently of whether it was packaged or unpackaged; they did not  
433 choose more non-packaged products than did consumers with a less positive attitude towards  
434 organic food.

435

#### 436 4.7.3 *Age*

437 In a study by Jeżewska-Zychowicz and Jeznach in Poland (2015), older participants were more likely  
438 to agree with a statement that they thought about how long packaging materials stayed in the

439 environment. Another study in Poland by Baruk and Iwanicka (2016) also found that the importance  
440 of the ecological features of dairy product packaging to participants increased with the respondent's  
441 age. Barber (2010) provided evidence that age (in this study referred to as 'generation') had an  
442 influence on US consumers' intention to pay more for green wine packaging, with 80% of 'baby  
443 boomers' stating their intention to pay more, while only 6% of the millennial generation did so. In a  
444 study by Koutsimanis et al. (2012, USA), the two older consumer segments preferred bio-based to  
445 petroleum-based plastics, in contrast to the younger segment. Indeed, compared to the older cluster  
446 (62 years), participants from the younger cluster (33 years) were better informed in answering the  
447 question: "What raw materials are used to produce containers of bio-based plastic?" Finally, Klaiman  
448 et al. (2016) also identified age as an influencing factor on WTP for the recyclability of fruit juice  
449 packaging, with younger and elder consumers showing the highest WTP. In contrast to these results,  
450 Neill and Williams (2016, USA) found no significant impact of age on the preference for returnable  
451 glass milk bottles. In addition, Scott and Vigar-Ellis (2014, South Africa) found that age had no  
452 influence on how consumers identified environmentally-friendly packaging.

453

#### 454 4.7.4 Gender

455 Jeżewska-Zychowicz and Jeznach (2015) recorded that women were more likely than men to think  
456 about the time required for packaging to decompose in the environment and more likely to buy  
457 products in large packages in order to minimize packaging waste. The results yielded by Orset et al.  
458 (2017, France) showed a higher WTP among women compared to men for all types of  
459 environmentally-friendly bottles included in the study. In contrast to these results, Muratore and  
460 Zarba (2011, Italy) found that environmental aspects of packaging are more important to men than  
461 to women. In line with this finding, Barber (2010, USA) found that gender significantly influenced  
462 participants' willingness to pay more for green wine packaging, with 68% of males and only 32% of  
463 females declaring their intention to pay more. In contrast to these results, Koutsimanis et al. (2012,  
464 USA) did not find a gender influence on the importance attached by consumers to different  
465 packaging characteristics or on their preference for any particular disposal methods (recycling,  
466 composting, regular trash bin). Neill and Williams (2016, USA) likewise found no significant impact of  
467 gender on consumers' preference for returnable glass milk bottles. Furthermore, Scott and Vigar-Ellis  
468 (2014, South Africa) found no gender influence on how consumers identify environmentally-friendly  
469 packaging.

470

#### 471 4.7.5 Education

472 Whereas high school and college graduates in a study conducted in the USA by Koutsimanis et al.  
473 (2012) declared a greater preference for bio-based materials to petroleum-based packaging than  
474 other consumers, Neill and Williams (2016, USA) found no significant impact of education on the  
475 preference for returnable glass milk bottles. In addition, Barber (2010) found that levels of education  
476 did not influence the intention to pay more for green wine packaging.

477

## 478 5. Discussion and conclusions

479 In this section we discuss the theoretical contribution of the literature review in terms of barriers to  
480 purchase and measures for overcoming these barriers. The paper closes with an outline of research  
481 gaps and recommendations for future research.

### 482 5.1 Theoretical contribution

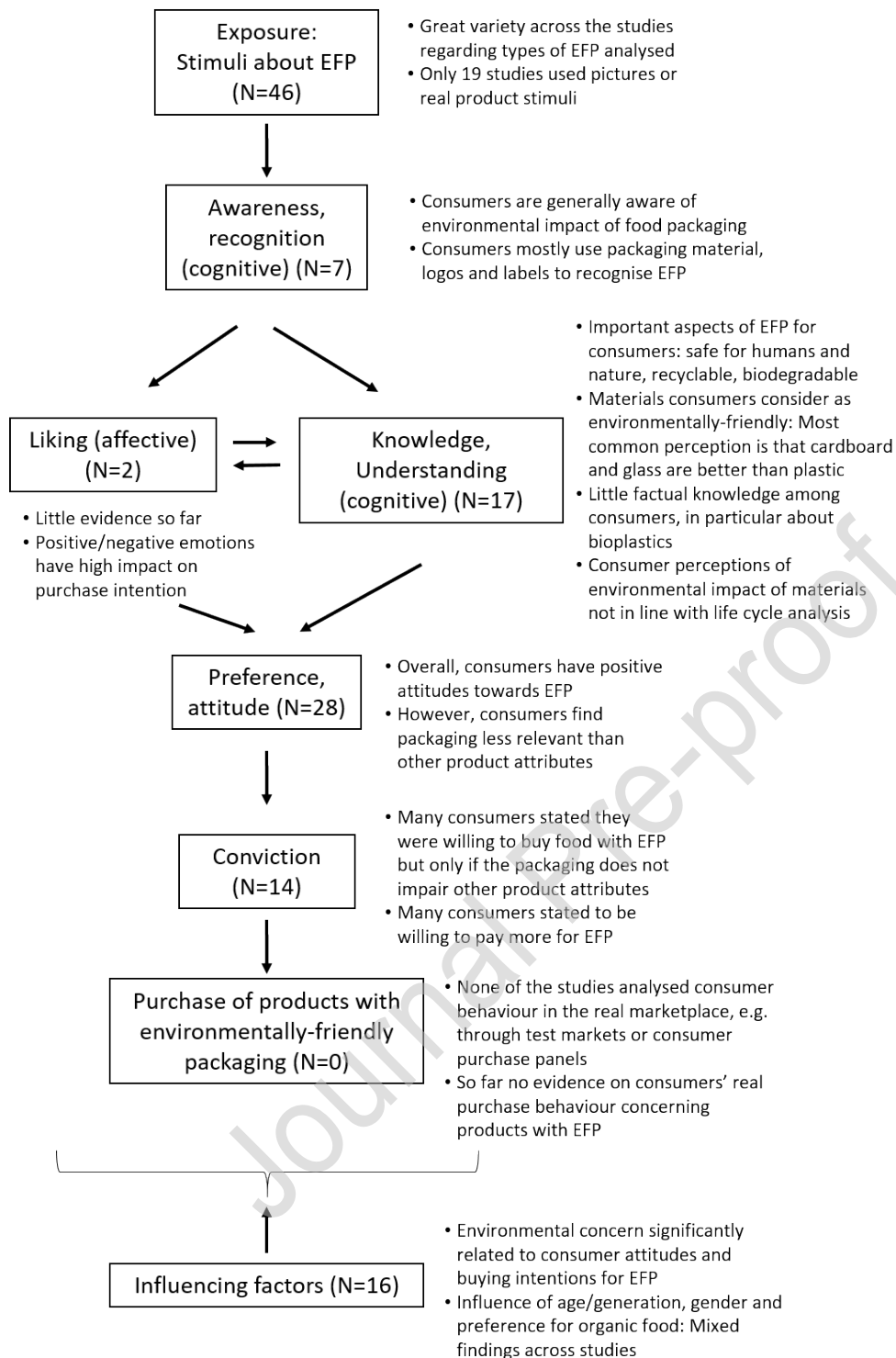
483 Through a systematic literature search we identified 46 studies published between 2008 and 2018  
484 that provided evidence on consumers' responses to environmentally-friendly food packaging. Figure  
485 3 summarises the key findings of the review study, structured according to the conceptual  
486 framework of the review. The 46 studies dealt with a variety of different packaging solutions for

487 different products and were based on different methods of data collection in various countries. The  
488 fact that 33 of the 46 studies were published in the years 2014–2018 and only 11 in the years 2008–  
489 2013 shows that research on consumers' response to environmentally-friendly packaging is a young  
490 research field attracting growing interest. In view of the relatively low number of records in total, and  
491 the fact that the data were collected in 24 countries for 38 different products in combination with  
492 different packaging solutions, it can be concluded that existing knowledge is rather fragmented. Only  
493 21 of the 46 studies in the review focussed primarily on environmentally-friendly packaging. Overall,  
494 it became obvious in the course of the review that the topic of consumers' response to  
495 environmentally-friendly packaging has not yet been extensively researched.

496 Our systematic literature review revealed that the existing body of empirical research does  
497 constitute a good basis for identifying barriers to increased purchases of food with environmentally-  
498 friendly packaging, despite the fact that only a small number of the studies were explicitly designed  
499 for this aim. By consolidating existing fragmented knowledge on barriers to purchase (see section  
500 5.1.1), this literature review represents an important contribution to theorizing consumer behaviour  
501 with regard to consumers' response to environmentally-friendly packaging. To our surprise, very few  
502 previous studies dealt with measures for overcoming these barriers to purchase (see section 5.1.2),  
503 thus revealing an important research gap (see section 5.2).

504

Journal Pre-proof



505  
506 **Figure 3.** Consumer response to environmentally-friendly packaging (EFP): Synthesis of key findings (N=46  
507 articles)

508  
509 **5.1.1 Barriers to purchase**

510 The results of this literature review have shown that most consumers are aware of the  
511 environmental problems caused by food packaging. Regarding awareness and recognition of  
512 environmentally-friendly packaging solutions, a somewhat mixed picture emerged. Interestingly,  
513 studies showed that many people stated they knew how to identify environmentally-friendly  
514 packaging. It became clear that consumers consider packaging material itself as a strong indication of  
515 its environmental impact. In this respect, the studies showed a consistent picture: consumers



516 perceived paper/cardboard and glass as more environmentally-friendly than metal and plastic.  
517 Consumers also referred to claims and logos in recognizing environmentally-friendly packaging. At  
518 the same time, consumers also stated that their perception of the environmental friendliness of  
519 packaging was influenced by packaging design elements such as colour and pictures of nature, which  
520 is somewhat worrying in that it suggests consumers can easily be misled by packaging design. Steenis  
521 et al. (2017) found that consumers' perception of the environmental friendliness of different  
522 packaging materials was not in line with the results of life cycle analyses. Other studies have also  
523 found that consumers have little knowledge regarding environmentally-friendly packaging solutions.  
524 For example, many consumers were not familiar with the terms 'sustainable packaging' and 'bio-  
525 based', nor with the 'Forest Stewardship Council' (FSC) logo. Moreover, consumers were sceptical  
526 about the benefits of some environmentally-friendly packaging materials, especially with respect to  
527 bio-based packaging. Overall, we conclude that lack of recognition of environmentally-friendly  
528 packaging solutions other than paper/cardboard and glass constitutes an important barrier to  
529 increased purchases.

530 Several studies provided evidence that environmentally-friendly packaging was of little importance  
531 to consumers as a purchase criterion. Above all, many studies confirmed that other product  
532 attributes such as price and product quality were more important than environmentally-friendly  
533 packaging. Some consumers even associated environmentally-friendly packaging with detrimental  
534 effects, foremost in terms of increased product prices and lower levels of convenience. At the same  
535 time, several studies indicated that environmentally-friendly packaging could also have a positive  
536 effect on the perceived quality of a product. Overall, we conclude that consumer perceptions and  
537 attitudes towards environmentally-friendly packaging are very heterogeneous, ranging from positive  
538 to negative overall product evaluations.

539 Despite consistent findings that the environmental impact of packaging is not an important purchase  
540 criterion, several other studies recorded a significantly higher willingness to buy and to pay for  
541 environmentally-friendly packaging and products with reduced packaging. In order to understand  
542 this somewhat contradictory picture, we think it is important to highlight that the WTB and WTP  
543 studies were based mostly on contingent valuation analyses (CVA). CVA is a data-collection method  
544 for monetarizing the value of a single product attribute – in this case, environmentally-friendly  
545 packaging; however, the method does not capture how important this attribute is rated in relation to  
546 other attributes (e.g. convenience, taste, price). Moreover, the method is prone to social desirability  
547 bias.

548 From the literature review we conclude that consumers have positive attitudes towards food  
549 products with environmentally-friendly packaging and are also willing to pay a small price premium;  
550 however, when it comes to purchase decisions, other product attributes are more important to  
551 consumers than environmentally-friendly packaging, and most consumers would probably not make  
552 compromises on other product attributes.

553

#### 554 *5.1.2 Measures for overcoming barriers to purchase*

555 In the planning stage of this literature review we aimed to generate new insights on barriers to the  
556 purchase of food with environmentally-friendly packaging as well as measures for overcoming these  
557 barriers. However, we soon realised that empirical knowledge on measures for overcoming these  
558 barriers was scarce. Based on the barriers outlined above and the few studies on contextual factors  
559 with a positive influence on the purchase of food with environmentally-friendly packaging, the  
560 following recommendations can be made for food companies and retailers.

561 Given the variety of aspects that consumers consider when identifying environmentally-friendly  
562 packaging, we conclude it is important for food companies to bear in mind that the environmental  
563 impact of a products' package is not automatically visible to consumers upon purchase. It is also

564 important to bear in mind that consumers might have mistaken perceptions that are not in line with  
565 the results of life cycle analysis (Steenis et al. 2017), which is a common method for determining the  
566 environmental impact of a product (Grönman et al. 2013). Overall, this literature synthesis suggests  
567 that consumers need guidance to identify environmentally-friendly packaging. Therefore, we  
568 recommend that food companies that engage in environmentally-friendly packaging should  
569 prominently label their product packages and provide clear information on any environmental  
570 benefits. With good communication, environmentally-friendly packaging could pay off for both the  
571 environment and for companies in the food and packaging industries.

572 Marketing communication for environmentally-friendly packaging is not easy. On the one hand, this  
573 literature review has shown that consumers have knowledge gaps regarding environmentally-  
574 friendly packaging. We conclude that communication about environmentally-friendly packaging is  
575 necessary for consumers' acceptance of such packaging, particularly for packaging solutions that  
576 consumers are not familiar with, such as bio-based packaging. On the other hand, it has been shown  
577 that consumers also consider packaging material and colour when attempting to identify  
578 environmentally-friendly packaging and hence there is a risk that food producers could mislead  
579 consumers with respect to the environmental friendliness of packaging. Environmentally-friendly  
580 packaging needs to stand out with information about the ways in which the packaging is  
581 environmentally-friendly and by using labels certifying environmental friendliness. To be trustworthy  
582 in consumers' eyes, a third-party label on environmentally-friendly packaging could be used, as the  
583 study by Ertz et al. (2017) has shown.

584 Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that environmentally-friendly packaging is not a top priority  
585 for consumers. Most consumers do not actively search for products with environmentally-friendly  
586 packaging. From other food consumption areas (e.g. organic food) it is known that consumers can be  
587 'nudged' to buy environmentally-friendly products by supportive measures in the so-called choice  
588 architecture or purchase environment (Reisch et al. 2013). When it comes to environmentally-  
589 friendly food purchases, retailers could play a pivotal role as choice architects, e.g. through signs on  
590 supermarket shelves highlighting products with environmentally-friendly packaging.

591

### 592 *5.1.3 Generalizability to other types of environmentally-friendly behaviour*

593 Different types of environmentally-friendly behaviour vary greatly in the degree to which they are  
594 influenced by attitudinal factors, personal capabilities, contextual factors and habit and routine,  
595 which is why Stern (2000) proposes that each target behaviour should be theorized separately.  
596 Nevertheless, we believe the insights of this literature review on barriers to increased purchases of  
597 food with environmentally-friendly packaging can be transferred to similar types of purchase  
598 decisions and product attributes, e.g. food which leads to reduced greenhouse gas emissions or  
599 other environmentally-friendly fast-moving consumer goods.

600

## 601 **5.2 Research gaps and recommendations for future research**

602 Existing knowledge on consumer response to environmentally-friendly packaging is fragmented. In  
603 this final section we outline research gaps and offer recommendations for future research in terms of  
604 'research questions and topics', 'methods of data collection' and 'sampling'.

605

### 606 *5.2.1 Research questions and topics*

607 In light of the fragmented nature of existing knowledge, we recommend that future research focus  
608 on consumers' response to *specific* packaging solutions (rather than environmentally-friendly  
609 packaging in general) so as to contribute to a deeper understanding of potential barriers to consumer  
610 acceptance of specific solutions.

611 Regarding the psychological processes influencing consumers' purchase behaviour, we identified  
612 several research gaps. Surprisingly, only a few studies analysed consumer awareness and recognition  
613 of environmentally-friendly packaging (7 studies), and only two studies investigated the aspect of  
614 emotions (affective liking). A common feature of the studies included in this review is that they  
615 focused on selected psychological processes of consumer behaviour theory. Only few studies  
616 investigated effects between *several* psychological processes of the conceptual framework of  
617 consumer behaviour (e.g. Koenig-Lewis et al. 2014 Norway; Prakash and Pathak 2017, India). By  
618 investigating the relationships between – for example – consumer awareness of, attitudes towards,  
619 and purchasing behaviour regarding specific packaging solutions, future research could help explain  
620 why consumers do or do not buy food with environmentally-friendly packaging and offer solutions  
621 for overcoming existing barriers.

622 Based on our review we can also identify potential research topics with high relevance for food  
623 companies engaging in environmentally-friendly packaging. As previous studies have revealed the  
624 crucial role played by package design for consumers in recognising environmentally-friendly  
625 packaging, investigation should be undertaken into how environmentally-friendly packaging should  
626 be designed in order to be most accepted by consumers. Another interesting question is how the  
627 environmental friendliness of a packaging can be communicated to consumers in a transparent and  
628 trustworthy way. Previous related studies include, for instance, Ertz et al. (2017, Canada) and Orset  
629 et al. (2017, France). For companies it is important to know how to address their target population,  
630 and consumer segmentation analyses based on consumers' reactions to different design and  
631 communication elements of environmentally-friendly packaging could thus provide valuable insights.  
632 Such segmentation analyses could also draw on previous studies that have analysed the importance  
633 of personal factors such as environmental concern, preference for organic food, and socio-  
634 demographic variables (see section 4.7 'Influencing factors').

635

#### 636 5.2.2 *Methods of data collection*

637 Surprisingly, only 25 studies reported the original survey/interview question posed to the  
638 participants in their publication, making evaluation and comparison of results somewhat difficult.  
639 Only 15 studies stated that they used real products (2 studies) or pictures of products (13 studies) as  
640 stimuli. For future research, we generally recommend designing a more realistic shopping situation,  
641 for instance by using real product stimuli, as did Fernqvist et al. (2015, Sweden) and Seo et al. (2016,  
642 South Korea). To measure willingness to buy and the willingness to pay, more experiments should be  
643 used for data collection instead of contingent valuation. Experiments were conducted in only four of  
644 the studies reviewed. Interestingly, none of the reviewed studies analyzed consumers' purchase  
645 behaviour in the real marketplace, e.g. through test markets or consumer purchase panels.

646

#### 647 5.2.3 *Sampling*

648 Other weaknesses of previous studies pertain to the quality of sampling. Participants were selected  
649 via snowball sampling in 10 studies and another 6 studies used student samples, while 17 studies did  
650 not clearly specify the sampling method applied. Generally we recommend increasing the quality of  
651 sampling by using methods other than convenience sampling or snowball sampling. Instead,  
652 participants should be selected using elements of probability sampling methods, as applied by van  
653 Birgelen et al. (2009, Germany) and Barber (2010, USA). Another option would be quota sampling, as  
654 applied by Baruk and Iwanicka (2016, Poland) and Herbes et al. (2018, Germany, France, USA).

655

#### 656 **Author declaration**

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658 PhD programme of the University of Kassel and the Fulda University of Applied Sciences. The authors  
659 are very grateful for the financial support of the Federal Hessian Ministry of Science and Art.

## Appendix

**Table 5** List of reviewed articles

Author(s)	Title	Year	Country	Type of research approach	Theoretical foundations (see code legend below the table) <sup>1</sup>	Product	Packaging	Method of data collection	Sampling of participants	Sample size
Aday, Yener	Understanding the buying behaviour of young consumers regarding packaging attributes and labels	2014	Turkey	quantitative	4	food in general	food packaging in general	self-administered questionnaire	sampling method not specified in the publication	324
Arboretti, Bordignon	Consumer preferences in food packaging: CUB models and conjoint analysis	2016	Italy	quantitative	3	food in general	recyclable, non-recyclable, biodegradable	conjoint analysis combined with questionnaire	sampling method not specified in the publication	205
Banterle, Cavaliere, Ricci	Food labelled information: An empirical analysis of consumer preferences	2012	Italy	qualitative (followed by a quantitative study that did not address the topic of packaging)	4	food in general	food packaging in general	focus group	quota sampling	36
Barber	“Green” wine packaging: targeting environmental consumers	2010	USA	quantitative	1	wine	environmentally-friendly wine packaging in general	online questionnaire	randomly selected from a consumer database by a national data warehouse company	313
Baruk, Iwanicka	The effect of age, gender and level of education on the consumer’s expectations towards dairy product packaging	2016	Poland	quantitative	4	dairy products	dairy product packaging in general	face-to-face survey	quota sampling	550
Baruk, Iwanicka	Polish final purchasers’ expectations towards the features of dairy product packaging in the context of buying decisions	2015	Poland	quantitative	4	dairy products	dairy product packaging in general	face-to-face survey	quota sampling	550
Van Birgelen, Semeijn, Keicher	Packaging and proenvironmental consumption behaviour: Investigating Purchase and Disposal Decisions for Beverages	2009	Germany	quantitative	1	beverages	pro-environmental beverage packaging in general	online questionnaire	randomly selected from an online research panel and snowball sampling	176
Clonan, Holdsworth,	UK consumers’ priorities for sustainable food purchases	2010	UK	quantitative	4	sustainable food in	food packaging in general	postal questionnaire	randomly selected from	842

Author(s)	Title	Year	Country	Type of research approach	Theoretical foundations (see code legend below the table) <sup>1</sup>	Product	Packaging	Method of data collection	Sampling of participants	Sample size
Swift, Wilson						general			five electoral registers that encompass both urban and rural areas	
Duizer, Robertson, Han	Requirements for packaging from an ageing consumer's perspective	2009	New Zealand	Quantitative and qualitative	4	Study 1: food in general  Study 2: coffee, cereal, juice, milk, canned food, biscuits, cheese	Study 1: glass bottles and jars, bags with sliding resealable closures, tin cans, foil packages, plastic packaging, cardboard boxes, Tetra Pak, aluminium cans, plastic bottles, cellophane  Study 2: food packaging in general	Study 1: face-to-face survey  Study 2: focus group	Study 1: convenience sampling from shopping centres, the Royal New Zealand Returned and Services' Association, churches and retirement villages  Study 2: upon completion of the survey, participants were invited to participate in a focus group	Study 1: 100  Study 2: 13
Ertz, François, Durif	How consumers react to environmental information: An experimental study	2017	Canada	quantitative	2 and 3	cereal bars	paper packaging with and without environmental message (less cardboard)	online experiment	randomly recruited by a survey company (e-mail)	321
Fernqvist, Olsson, Spendrup	What's in it for me? Food packaging and consumer responses: a focus group study	2015	Sweden	qualitative	4	potatoes	standing paper bag with plastic window on back, transparent	focus group	convenience sample	12

Author(s)	Title	Year	Country	Type of research approach	Theoretical foundations (see code legend below the table) <sup>1</sup>	Product	Packaging	Method of data collection	Sampling of participants	Sample size
							plastic bag, bulk potatoes			
Hanss, Böhm	Sustainability seen from the perspective of consumers	2012	Norway	qualitative and quantitative	4	food in general	sustainable groceries packaging in general	face-to-face survey	shopping areas and waiting areas (convenience sample)	123
Hanssen, Vold, Schakenda, Tufte, Möller, Olsen, Skaret	Environmental profile, packaging intensity and food waste generation for three types of dinner meals	2017	Norway	quantitative	4	ready to eat meals	readymade meal packaging in general	online questionnaire	web panel of 'Norstat'	1008
Herbes, Beuthner, Ramme	Consumer attitudes towards biobased packaging – A cross-cultural comparative study	2018	France, Germany and USA	quantitative	4	food in general	from recyclable material, from reusable material, plastics from non-renewable resources, biodegradable and not biodegradable, plastics from bio-methane, plastics from renewable resources other than biomethane	face-to-face and online survey	quota sampling	2001
Heiniö, Arvola, Rusko, Maaskant, Kremer	Ready-made meal packaging: A survey of needs and wants among Finnish and Dutch 'current' and 'future' seniors	2017	Finland, Netherlands	quantitative	4	ready-made meals	ready-made meal packaging in general	online questionnaire	consumer panel of Taloustutkimus Ltd research agency, 'SenTo' ('Seniors of the Future')	1221

Author(s)	Title	Year	Country	Type of research approach	Theoretical foundations (see code legend below the table) <sup>1</sup>	Product	Packaging	Method of data collection	Sampling of participants	Sample size
Jerzyk	Design and communication of ecological content on sustainable packaging in the young consumers' opinions	2016	Poland, France	quantitative	2 and 4	food in general	sustainable food packaging in general	auditorium questionnaire	students (purposive and random sampling)	161
Jeżewska-Zychowicz, Jeznach	Consumers' behaviours related to packaging and their attitudes towards environment	2015	Poland	quantitative	1	food in general	multi-use packaging	face-to-face survey	sampling method not specified in the publication	548
Koenig-Lewis, Palmer, Dermody, Urbye	Consumers' evaluations of ecological packaging - Rational and emotional approaches	2014	Norway	quantitative	1	bottled water (no company or brand associations were made)	partly plant-based plastic bottle	online questionnaire	Snowball sampling (social network), aged 18-40	312
Klaiman, Ortega, Garnache	Consumer preferences and demand for packaging material and recyclability	2016	USA	quantitative	3	fruit juice drink products,	glass, aluminium, plastic and carton, recyclable or not recyclable	online discrete choice experiments	consumer database maintained by 'Survey Sampling International'	1500
Koutsimanis, Getter, Behe, Harte, Almenar	Influences of packaging attributes on consumer purchase decisions for fresh produce	2012	USA	quantitative	3	fresh produce in general and sweet cherries in particular	petroleum- and bio-based materials, flexible and rigid packaging	online questionnaire	participants recruited using the 'MarketTool Inc.' database	292
Lea, Worsley	Australian consumers' food-related environmental beliefs and behaviours	2008	Australia	quantitative	1	food in general	food packaging in general	postal questionnaire	randomly selected from the population of Victoria via 'Australia on Disc software package'	223
Lindh, Olsson, Williams	Consumer perceptions of food packaging: Contributing to or counteracting environmentally sustainable development?	2016	Sweden	quantitative	1 and 3	food in general	environmentally-sustainable food packaging in general	online questionnaire	e-mail (plausibility sampling)	157

Author(s)	Title	Year	Country	Type of research approach	Theoretical foundations (see code legend below the table) <sup>1</sup>	Product	Packaging	Method of data collection	Sampling of participants	Sample size
Magnier, Crie	Communicating packaging eco-friendliness: An exploration of consumers' perceptions of eco-designed packaging	2015	France	qualitative	2	food in general	eco-designed food packaging in general	Study 1: in-depth interviews Study 2: Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) interviews	1. convenience sample 2. sampling method not specified in the publication	Study 1: 8 Study 2: 10
Magnier, Schormans	Consumer reactions to sustainable packaging: The interplay of visual appearance, verbal claim and environmental concern	2015	The Netherlands	quantitative	2	nuts	recycled paper appearance and red aluminium packaging	online questionnaire	Dutch university-based consumer panel	119
Magnier, Schoormans, Mugge	Judging a product by its cover: Packaging sustainability and perceptions of quality in food products	2016	France	quantitative	2	Study 1: raisins, chocolate bars Study 2: conventional and organic coffee	Study 1: white plastic vs. recycled cardboard Study 2: conventional aluminium vs. recycled look	online questionnaire	snowball sampling	Study 1: 132 Study 2: 127
Mancini, Marchini, Simeone	Which are the sustainable attributes affecting real consumption behaviour? Consumer understanding and choices	2017	Italy	qualitative and quantitative	4	food in general	food packaging in general	Study 1: focus groups Study 2: face-to-face survey	Study 1: quota sampling Study 2: major retail shop (sampling method not specified in the publication)	Study 1: 24 Study 2: 240
Monnot, Parguel, Reniou	Consumer responses to elimination of overpackaging on private label products	2015	France	quantitative	2	yoghurt	overpackaging	face-to-face survey	approached in the street in a major French city (sampling method not further specified in the publication)	217



Author(s)	Title	Year	Country	Type of research approach	Theoretical foundations (see code legend below the table) <sup>1</sup>	Product	Packaging	Method of data collection	Sampling of participants	Sample size
Martinho, Pires, Portela, Fonseca	Factors affecting consumers' choices concerning sustainable packaging during product purchase and recycling	2015	Portugal	quantitative	1	food in general	sustainable food packaging in general	online questionnaire	snowball sampling	215
Muratore, Zarba	Role and function of food packaging: What consumers prefer	2011	Italy	qualitative	4	food in general	hollow glass packaging	face-to-face interview with laddering technique	approached at retail stores in urban areas of Sicily (sampling method not further specified in the publication)	195
Neill, Williams	Consumer preference for alternative milk packaging. The case of an inferred environmental attribute	2016	USA	quantitative	3	milk	returnable glass milk bottle and plastic jug	contingent valuation survey + bound-and-a-half logit model (face-to-face questionnaire)	market street grocery store (sampling method not specified in the publication)	229
Nørgaard Olesen, Giacalone	The influence of packaging on consumers' quality perception of carrots	2018	Denmark	quantitative	2	carrots	plastic bag, plastic box, cardboard box	online conjoint analyses and 'pick any' task	snowball sampling (social network)	251
Orset, Barret, Lemaire	How consumers of plastic water bottles are responding to environmental policies?	2017	France	quantitative	3	bottled water	plastic water bottles with different plastic (PET, r-PET, PLA and PEF)	online questionnaire	quota sampling	148
Prakash, Pathak	Intention to buy eco-friendly packaged products among young consumers of India: A study on developing nation	2017	Indian	Quantitative	1	food in general	food packaging in general	face-to-face survey	shopping malls (sampling method not further specified in the publication)	204
Rodríguez-Barreiro, Fernández-Manzanal, Serra, Carrasquer, Murillo, Morales, Calvo,	Approach to a causal model between attitudes and environmental behaviour: A graduate case study	2013	Spain	quantitative	1	food in general	food packaging in general	questionnaire	students (convenience sample)	60

Author(s)	Title	Year	Country	Type of research approach	Theoretical foundations (see code legend below the table) <sup>1</sup>	Product	Packaging	Method of data collection	Sampling of participants	Sample size
del Valle										
Rokka, Uusitalo	Preference for green packaging in consumer product choices – Do consumers care?	2008	Finland	quantitative	3	functional drink products	small (recyclable) cartons and (non-recyclable) plastic bottles	online questionnaire (choice-based conjoint analysis)	consumer panel	330
Scott, Vigar-Ellis	Consumer understanding, perceptions and behaviours with regard to environmentally friendly packaging in a developing nation	2014	South Africa	quantitative	4	food in general	environmentally friendly food packaging in general	online questionnaire	snowball sampling (Facebook)	323
Seo, Ahn, Jeong, Moon	Consumers' attitude toward sustainable food products: Ingredients vs. packaging	2016	South Korea	quantitative	2 and 3	Study 1: protein bars and jelly beans Study 2: yoghurt and energy drink Study 3: cookies	Studies 1 & 2: with and without green packaging certification (Study 1: paper box and plastic, Study 2: plastic bottle and beverage can) Study 3: exaggerated packaging and appropriate packaging (paper box with plastic insight)	Studies 1 & 2: online experiment Study 3: laboratory experiment	Studies 1 & 2: snowball sampling (social network) Study 3: Students (convenience sample)	Study 1: 240 Study 2: 302 Study 3: 112
Sijtsema, Onwezen, Reinders, Dagevos, Partanen, Meeusen	Consumer perception of bio-based products—An exploratory study in 5 European countries	2016	Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Italy, and Netherlands	qualitative	4	Coca-Cola bottle	bio-based Coca-Cola bottle	focus group discussions	sampling method not specified in the publication	89

Author(s)	Title	Year	Country	Type of research approach	Theoretical foundations (see code legend below the table) <sup>1</sup>	Product	Packaging	Method of data collection	Sampling of participants	Sample size
Singh, Pandey	The determinants of green packaging that influence buyers' willingness to pay a price premium	2018	India	quantitative	3	food in general	glass	questionnaire	individuals with the knowledge of the 'green' concept and who had purchased a product with environmentally-friendly packaging	343
Steenis, van Herpen, van der Lans, Ligthart, van Trijp	Consumer response to packaging design. The role of packaging materials and graphics in sustainability perceptions and product evaluations	2017	Netherlands	qualitative and quantitative	2	14 tomato soup products	varying in packaging design and material. glass jar, bioplastic pot, liquid carton, dry carton sachet, plastic pouch, mixed material pouch (plastic with carton wrapping) and can	free choice profiling method and collecting consumer evaluations for each packaging (lab setting)	students (convenience sample)	249
Songa, Slabbinck, Vermeir, Russo	How do implicit/explicit attitudes and emotional reactions to sustainable logo relate? A neurophysiological study	2018	Belgium	quantitative	4	Yogurt products	packaging with logo recyclable or non-recyclable or without logo	IAT, eye-tracking	students (convenience sample)	89
Tobler, Visschers, Siegrist	Eating green. Consumers' willingness to adopt ecological food consumption behaviors	2011	Switzerland	quantitative	1	food in general	food packaging in general	postal questionnaire	a computer programme randomly selected households in telephone directories in the German- and French-speaking regions	6189

Author(s)	Title	Year	Country	Type of research approach	Theoretical foundations (see code legend below the table) <sup>1</sup>	Product	Packaging	Method of data collection	Sampling of participants	Sample size
Trivedi, Patel, Acharya	Causality analysis of media influence on environmental attitude, intention and behaviors leading to green purchasing	2018	India	quantitative	1	food in general	green food packaging in general	online questionnaire	e-mail addresses on ad-hoc basis (non-probability sampling)	308
Van Herpen, Immink, van den Puttelaar	Organics unpacked: The influence of packaging on the choice for organic fruits and vegetables	2016	Netherlands	quantitative	3	fruits and vegetables	unpacked food and plastic material, with the product clearly visible	experiment (3D virtual supermarket environment)	Part 1: students (convenience sample) Part 2: convenience sample of supermarket customers	Part 1: 100 Part 2: 150
Venter, Merwe, Beer, Kempen, Bosman	Consumers' perceptions of food packaging: an exploratory investigation in Potchefstroom, South Africa	2011	South Africa	qualitative	4	food in general	ambiguous mock packaging (glass bottle, cardboard box and plastic pouch), empty without labels	combination of semi-structured interviews and ambiguous stimuli as a projective technique	snowball sampling	25
Wang, Liu, Qi	Factors influencing sustainable consumption behaviors: A survey of the rural residents in China	2014	China	quantitative	1	food in general	food packaging in general	face-to-face survey	convenience sample	1403

<sup>1</sup> Categories of theoretical foundations (also see section 3.2):

- 1 Theories on attitude-behaviour relationships with explicit or implicit reference to Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975) and/or Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen 1991)
- 2 Theories on consumer preferences and willingness to pay with explicit or implicit reference to microeconomic foundations, i.e. utility maximisation and/or Random Utility Theory (McFadden 1974)
- 3 Theories on cue utilization and signalling with explicit or implicit reference to information economics, e.g. Cue Utilization Theory (Olson and Jacoby 1972) or Signalling Theory (Spence 1973; Stigler 1961)
- 4 Other theoretical foundations with focus on (selected) processes in the consumer organism

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**Declaration of interests**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests:

Journal Pre-proof

Highlights

- Most consumers are aware of the environmental problems caused by food packaging
- Consumers know little about environmentally-friendly packaging (EFP) solutions
- Research gaps exist regarding how to increase consumers' purchases of EFP
- No study on consumers' purchases of EFP in the real marketplace conducted so far

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