

Marissa 00:00

Hi, Phil. My name is Marissa, and I will lead our interview session today. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. Your contributions are valuable and will help guide our design decisions. Moving forward, the session is expected to take 20 to 25 minutes. Is that okay with you?

Phil 00:14

Yes.

Marissa 00:15

I will ask you a few questions related to sustainability. I want to make it clear that there are no right or wrong answers. We are here to listen to you and understand your knowledge on the topic. Please feel free to be candid and share as much as you feel comfortable with. Everything discussed here will be kept confidential and will only be viewed by the research or design team.

Finally, feel free to let me know if you need a break or want to stop at any time during our session. Are there any questions before we begin?

Phil 00:42

No.

INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

Marissa 00:44

Okay, then, could you tell me a little bit about yourself? What do you do for a living, and what are your hobbies?

Phil 00:53

I'm a CTO for an IT company, and for hobbies, I mostly just play video games and things like that, nothing really too serious or expensive.

Marissa 01:10

Great, that's really cool. I will start by throwing out a few simple questions. For our first question, how frequently do you shop online at retail websites?

Phil 01:15

Did you say online?

Marissa 01:15

Yes.

Phil 01:16

Yeah, pretty much exclusively, I would say, okay, frequency, maybe weekly. By you know, every other week, something like that.

Marissa 01:37

Okay, why do you usually shop online?

Phil 01:40

Convenience? [1]

Marissa 01:44

Okay, another easy question here for you: How is your relationship with the outdoors?

Phil 01:50

I avoid it.

Marissa 01:55

I'm not really an outdoor person either, yeah.

Marissa 02:03

How familiar are you with sustainability? You can answer that on a one-to-10 scale.

Phil 02:09

I'd probably say like a five. [2]

Marissa 02:15

Okay. Why would you say about a five?

Phil 02:19

Probably because I know there are a lot of people who know a lot more and a lot of people who know a lot less. So I think I probably land close to the middle.[3]

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Personal Values & Awareness:

Marissa 02:28

Okay, do you practice sustainability often in your daily life? And if so, how?

Phil 02:37

Yeah, I try to, you know, we always keep our cardboard boxes. We break them down. We run them over to the recycling at the recycling location down the street. We collect aluminum cans.

We crush them, take them over to local schools recycling dumpster so the school gets a little bit of funding, and then we recycle instead of filling up the landfill. [4] I've considered composting, but in the house that we're in right now, we don't really have acceptable, like, distances between, like, a compost pile and other people's houses or our own house, so we haven't really done any of the composting stuff just yet, but those are some of the things that we try to do.[5]

Marissa 03:28

Okay, that's great. So, could you describe what environmental responsibility means to you personally?

Phil 03:38

I think, I think for me, it just means doing your best effort within your means,[6] you know, like you know, if there's, you know, like homeless people, I'm not expecting them to necessarily have much of an impact on this sort of thing, But people with the right means I feel like can do their part in some small way, even if they can't do it 100% of the time.[7]

Marissa 04:11

Yeah, so kind of on that end, what would you think then, of like people with a lot of power, so like big companies and the people that are owning those? What do you think about them?

Phil 04:23

Yeah, I think for the public interest, they need to have some sustainability and some processes in place to be careful on those sorts of things.[8]

Understanding & Perception

Marissa 04:40

Yeah. So, when you hear the term environmentally and socially responsible brand, what comes to your mind?

Phil 04:50

Are you talking like a specific brand, or just what am I thinking of when we talk about that?

Marissa 04:57

Just what are you thinking of for now? Yeah.

Phil 05:01

That would be like, probably green energy type initiatives, for example, you know, basically trying to balance out the carbon footprint and things like that. You know, buying and using recyclable materials in their products, that sort of thing.[9]

Marissa 05:26

Okay, so going off of that, tell me about a company or a brand that you think fits that description.

Phil 05:34

I tend to like to mention the one that most comes to mind would be Ben and Jerry's ice cream. They seem to align with a lot of my own, like beliefs and sort of politics and such[10] . And I know they make sustainability efforts to try to balance out their carbon footprint and things like that. And for that, I'm willing to overlook that the ice cream is a little more expensive,[11] you know, it's, it's, and it's generally good and worth it. So, yeah, that company, I think, is a great model for that sort of sustainability that we're looking for in a company, which, you know, doesn't really harm the bottom line. It actually is a benefit for them. I feel like, even if I don't necessarily know what all of their efforts are, specifically, I've just generally heard a lot of buzz around their sustainability efforts.[12]

Marissa 06:36

Okay, so you were saying that despite the price, you would buy from them because of their sustainability. Do you think you would do the same for other companies? Or do you think it's specifically something about them?

Phil 06:49

It depends, it depends on the price. Still, you know, so like we're talking a little pint of ice cream, so it's a few dollars. Once we get into the hundreds of dollars, it's much, much harder to balance that decision at that price point.[13] So you know, talking about a sustainable product is, you know, triple the cost of a non-sustainable it becomes a lot harder to stomach if we're talking \$300 to \$100. That's a much harder hill to overcome for just financially, really, now someone of more means than I might be capable of going that route, and for them that that's great, but, that would be a little little more difficult for me[14] , so that's where I kind of mentioned we do, we do what we can within our means.

Marissa 07:51

Okay. Do you think that there is anything that these other brands, that may be really expensive, those brands that are also engaging with sustainability? Do you think that there's anything that they could do that would make you even consider purchasing from them, despite their product being maybe three times more expensive?

Phil 08:14

Well, we'd probably have to get into specifics to really break something down like that,

yeah, I'm Hmm,

no, for me, I mean, for me, it still comes down to a financial thing. So, you know, sadly, if they made things slightly less sustainable, but still had efforts at sustainability and still kept the price closer to, like, a reasonable cost that I'd be more inclined to buy from them[15] , you know, because, yeah, like, like, you know, for example. I mean, if we take the Ben and Jerry's thing, for example, you know, like, a pint of ice cream, like the store brand might be, you know, two or \$3 and Ben and Jerry's could be eight or nine, and you know, at that point, you know, we're already talking like three or four times. But now, if you know a pint of ice cream was \$20, I definitely second-guess that purchase at that point. So there, there's definitely going to be, I don't even know that. It's just a multiplication factor, more so than I just know it when I see it, where it's like, that's a bit too much. And I'm not necessarily buying Ben and Jerry's because of sustainability. It's good ice cream, plus the sustainability. So if it's, I guess my answer would be, if it's a good product, and it's just shown to be a better product than the competitors, plus the sustainability on top of that, that would influence my decision more is that it's good value, good price. Product sustainability is a bonus.[16] Then, I would probably make that decision.

Motivations & Decision Making:

Marissa 10:06

Okay, good. So, for our next question, what makes a brand feel genuine or trustworthy to you in the area of sustainability?

Phil 10:16

I would say just consistency in the messaging, you know, there's, I know, especially in some, you see, a lot of hypocrisy, right? So if there's any point, if there's ever a point where they're not following their own ideals, and, you know, it's like, you can use sustainable materials. [17] But then, you know, if you go and have a made in a sweatshop and paying slave wages in China, it's like, well, that's not really lining up with the ideals overall, even though that may not be necessarily a sustainability factor, it just doesn't really align well with that kind of ideal of improving the world overall and making things better,[18] but that sort of thing like just or, you know, making sustainable materials, but then finding out the CEO has a private jet that he flies all over the place, you know? And it's like, well, yeah, you know, are they really lining up with their ideals, like that sort of stuff would disappoint me in certain companies, so, so I'd say it's just a consistency factor in their messaging and their actions, yeah.[19]

Marissa 11:45

Alright, so this is kind of similar to what you've already said. But do you find yourself choosing one brand over another because of its environmental or social commitments? And if so, why?

Phil 11:56

Yeah, this does sound similar. I would say not, not all the time. So it's a factor, but it's definitely not like a number one, number two factor, you know, for me, it's value. It's, you know, the durability of the product, or the reliability of the product. And I guess that, you know, the durability of the product also goes towards sustainability. If I buy a product that's cheaper, but it breaks, and I have to buy another one, and we're just tossing it into a landfill and filling up that, you know, so having a product that's durable and lasts a long time, I guess, does meet the sustainability goal. [20] So you can almost tie that into the secondary factor. But for me and financially, where we're at in 2025 number one is still going to be price point it is definitely a high factor at this time; we're definitely willing to go with higher prices on products to get that better durability, but I'm usually doing the math on it, you know. So if it's if it's going to last three times as long, but it's three times as expensive, I would still buy it in a heartbeat, you know, like, 10 times more expensive and it only lasts three times as long, that's a much harder sell on my part, so I may still then get the product that isn't going to last as long, even, and even if it doesn't have sustainability. That's just the unfortunate financial situation I find myself in. So yeah,

Authenticity

Marissa 13:39

Okay, so how do you tell if a company is authentic about its sustainability efforts versus just using it as marketing?

Phil 13:49

It's pretty, pretty hard to tell. I know a lot of the companies are putting out sustainability reports, you know, very detailed kind of assessments of where they're at, what measures they've taken, and I feel like that as a company would be much harder to just kind of fake it. [21] You know, marketing, of course, you see marketing stuff, and they, you know, marketers often can say almost anything. You know, it doesn't always have to align with the truth[22] . But I feel like, you know, investor reports on sustainability and things like that, I feel like have a little bit more weight than just pure marketing hype. So that's kind of what I would consider. But do I actually look at those things? Not, not really. So it's still, word of mouth is still pretty strong in that category, you know? [23] So whenever they get some bad press, maybe being hypocritical. Goal on their sustainability efforts that can that can definitely weigh quite a bit. I can't think of any recent examples, though. So, yeah, yeah, that's, I think that's the bulk of my answer on that one.

Marissa 15:15

Do you think they could make those sustainability reports maybe more visible, so that more people are seeing them, and so then the word of mouth gets out more?

Phil 15:26

Boy. I mean, they're kind of dry reads anyway, so more visibility may not be that big of a benefit, you know? Yeah, I don't know. I feel like the ones that do have them are fairly, I mean, that's usually very public and easy to find, obviously, if they are like investor-only kind of things, see, I just don't think they do it that way, though, because the sustainability reports are strictly for public consumption. Anyway, in most cases, they want to tout their efforts that they've been making. So I generally don't have a hard time finding anything like that. And even if they did, you know, send it out through marketing and social media and things like that. I guess that could be one way is just to talk about it more, make it a larger percent of the marketing pie, just to get that message kind of hammered home consistently and repeated frequently, that would get that across.[24] I'm thinking about emails and things I get, newsletters that I see, I don't, you know, a

lot of times I'll just click on, glance at it, move on. The next thing. But it's like, if you see those often enough and you go, Okay, this company does seem to be often touting their green efforts and sustainability efforts, and I think that gets the message across, just with repetition.[25]

Marissa 16:57

Yeah, so like, consistency is key there.

Phil 17:01

Yeah, yep, see, yeah, that's true.

Marissa 17:06

Okay, so what kinds of actions or communications make you trust or distrust a brand's claims about ethics or sustainability?

Phil 17:15

Yeah, the hypocrisy factor, basically, you know, if there's certain things come out that go against their sustainability efforts, and that's what would be most useful, is to know, like have an idea or an impression that they have a company culture of sustainability because the company's made up of individuals, and some individuals are going to take certain actions that maybe don't align with that sort of thing. So just seeing that everyone in the company is kind of on, on the same page as far as sustainability efforts, would, you know, go a long way to not having these little like, oh, you know, the CEO, he's he's exempt, he flies his jet, you know, that sort of thing.[26]

Culture & Broader Impact:

Marissa 18:01

Yeah, okay, so in your opinion, can companies that focus on sustainability actually make a difference in environmental or social issues? And if so, how?

Phil 18:12

I mean, I think with enough of them over a long enough period of time, it can start to shift, you know, public opinion on some of these things. But, and as far as, like, actual change, I guess that's still to you know, I think the jury's still out on that a bit, whether there's any kind of noticeable benefits, it's easy for individual people to not see the, I guess, not see the forest from the trees sort of thing, like, you know, not seeing the big picture on all these small efforts start to add up. And I think big companies have a much larger impact than individual people. So even though individual people will make their little efforts that they can, you know, it's pretty noticeable that me, recycling is almost negligible compared to what the companies are doing. So I think with enough companies doing enough things to try to work on that, I think we could see a small impact and even a shift in public perception[27] , but that would be, yeah, I don't know what. We'll have to wait and see if that, if that actually ends up happening, because I haven't really, don't really feel like I've seen it so far, you know?

Marissa 19:38

Yeah. Okay, great. So what do you think needs to change for brands to be genuinely impactful in their sustainability or ethics? You can just answer this real quick, since you kind of already answered this question.

Phil 19:57

Genuinely impactful?

Marissa 19:58

Yes, genuinely impactful.

Phil 19:59

Okay, yeah. I mean, I think, I think what I was saying before is I don't know how impactful they can be. You know, in the whole scheme of things, when you look at, like, developing nations, where they're pumping out plenty of pollution and waste and things like that, and I think it's hard to balance all of that out. So in the wide scheme of things, I'm not sure how well that works.

But could you repeat the question again?

Marissa 20:47

Yeah, it was what do you think needs to change for brands to be genuinely impactful in their sustainability or ethics work?

Phil 20:54

What needs to change? Yeah. I mean, I think what needs to change is to get, get a little bit more of a global push for this sort of change. I know it's happening in a lot of first-world developed nations, but some of the developing nations are struggling to get by, and so they're not you know, they're, they're kind of hindering the efforts globally. So I think to make actual change happen, I think we need it to be more widespread in developing nations, and then hopefully developing nations can assist. Sorry, developed nations can help developing nations to make their efforts happen, within you know, it's all about again. It goes back to the means thing. It's like people who are starving aren't really worrying about recycling their cans and their trash and such like that they're making sure they can get the next meal.[28] And that's the same thing with developing nations. So it's really hard to say, you know, are we going to see actual change? It's, I think it needs to be a lot of companies, a lot of nations, making a concerted global effort for actual change to be noticeable and impactful.[29]

Marissa 22:24

All right, so do you think your perception of sustainable brands changed over time? And if so, how?

Phil 22:33

Oh yeah. I mean, over the years I've, you know, I think as it became pretty obvious that, you know, climate change is, is real and that the risks to the planet are a real thing. I think that's shifted my opinion over time. I didn't used to care too much about any of those sorts of sustainability things.[30] And at that time, also financially, you know, we were kind of on the come up, and just sort of, you know, it's like, we're just getting by. So I didn't really worry too much about it. And then over time, it's like, okay, well, I should probably do my little part just to be able to say that I tried at least. But yeah, I didn't used to worry much about it at all. So it's definitely changed towards sustainability in the long run.

Behavior & Navigation:

Marissa 23:38

Okay, so next we're gonna move away from sustainability for a little bit, and it's going to be more about your online shopping habits. So, for this first question, what factors influence your decision to buy a product online rather than in-store?

Phil 23:56

What factors? Yes, basically, convenience is one thing for online, but even price is still, I mean, online prices are generally still better as well. [31] Yeah, the only thing online lacks is tactile kind of experiences, you know, being able to get your hands on a product and, you know, trying things on, things like that. [32] So, yeah, that's, that's the main reason to still have box stores. But, you know, when we're talking sustainability, having a storefront also seems like maybe not such a sustainable idea, but I don't know, yeah, I don't know what the I don't know what balance of things would be between shifting the individual people's places or taking it and shipping some things to a building and then picking it up there

Anyway. I think I'm going on a tangent, but

What was the question?

Marissa 24:32

What factors influence your decision to buy a product online rather than in-store?

Phil 24:54

It's all the things I mentioned before. So still, price, durability of the product, and the convenience of getting it online, convenience of having it shipped to the home, all those things factor into online shopping versus in-store shopping.

Marissa 25:37

So what tools are most useful to you when you're navigating an online retail website?

Phil 25:44

The tools that are most useful would be, obviously, like a functional search bar.[33] I also like it anytime, especially when I'm doing tech products or anything with features like individual feature sets, I like it when they have the capability of, like, toggling filtering down to certain features and functions. So like, if I'm searching for a product, maybe I want one that has rechargeable batteries rather than disposable batteries. So I like being able to check a box and say, I want rechargeable batteries and that way I only get filtered those products I like.[34] I like those sorts of features. Also, online reviews are very good, user-based reviews, verified purchase reviews, those are, those are good factors. Obviously, pictures of the product are good, but yeah, any site where you get reviews, and even if the reviewers can add pictures and videos, that's beneficial to just having real end-user feedback on a product. That's very beneficial, because any website can say this product's great, and here's all the reasons it's great, but having actual people who purchase the product saying that this is a good product, and I've had this for years, things like that are beneficial.[35]

Marissa 27:18

Going off of that, tell me about one negative online shopping experience. How was that?

Phil 27:28

Let's see, I can't, I can't think of any specific instance, but, yeah, like a bad online shopping experience would be anything that hinders the ease of navigating and following through on the purchase. [36] You know, some some sites just have terrible shopping carts and checkout processes, and I feel like it's it's useful when they have kind of like a countdown sort of thing, like a timeline for the checkout process, so that, you know, I think often I get on a checkout process and I'm like, you know, where do I put in my shipping information? Is it the first step? Is it the second step? Am I putting that in? You know, it usually comes before the credit card, but not always, it's kind of quirky. Sometimes they all have their different flows, and sometimes I get lost in the like, did I? Did I put the promo code in? Where is the promo code? Like, laying out how that flows is very important, because some bad experiences I've had, I've gone through. I mean, the worst is, like, sometimes I get through and it's like, oh, okay, I did purchase like, I'm done. It's like, I didn't even know that was the last step. [37] And sometimes you have a promo code and you go, Oh, I didn't see any place to actually put that in and those sort of experiences are disappointing.

Marissa 29:07

Yeah, that makes sense. And then could you tell me about one positive experience you have in mind?

Phil 29:15

I would say most of my purchasing experiences would be generally positive. Try and think of, I don't know if I can think of any specific instance, I guess, I mean some of the, some of the, I guess some of the positive experiences, I would say, is every so often, you know, you'll be in a checkout process and something will be recommended as a similar product or a similar purchase. And sometimes those are useful, and it might get you thinking, Oh, I also should shop for this. And even though that might sideline me into searching for additional products, generally, I'm more satisfied when I check out, and then the site has made an additional sale at the same time. So I'd say those sorts of experiences are beneficial and positive.[38]

Marissa 30:04

Okay, great, that's all I had for you today. I really appreciate all of your answers, and thank you so much for your time.

Phil 30:08

Thank you. Bye.

Hi Marie, my name is Rylee, and I will lead our interview session today. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. Your contributions are valuable and will help guide our design decisions moving forward. This session is expected to take about 15 to 10 minutes, if that's okay with you. I will ask you a few questions related to sustainability. I wanna make it clear that there are no right or wrong answers. We are here to listen to you and understand your knowledge on the topic. Please feel free to be candid and share as much as you feel comfortable with.

Everything discussed here will be kept confidential and will only be viewed by my research team and design team. We would like to request your permission to record both of our conversations.

The recording will be confidential and will only be viewed by the people working on this project.

It will not be shared with anyone else. We use it to take notes and refer to important moments in our conversation. Do you consent to being recorded? Yes. Okay. Finally, feel free to let me know

if you need a break or want to stop at any time during our session. Do you have any questions before we begin? No, I do not. Okay. Cool, so first, can you tell me a little bit about yourself? Like, what do you do for a living or in one of your hobbies? My name's Marie. I'm a student at Miami University, so I don't have a job. And some of my hobbies are hanging out with my friends and cooking. Okay. How frequently would you say you shop online for retail websites? Mm, I'd say sometimes. Sometimes. How was your relationship with the outdoors? I would say that I like being outside, but maybe I'm not outside as much as I would like to be. Okay. How familiar are you with sustainability on a scale from one to 10? About a seven. Okay. What about sustainable products? Mm, I'd say it depends on the product, but maybe around the same range. Maybe it's 7.5. Okay. Do you practice sustainability in your daily life? Um, I try to. Okay, how do you try? I use reusable bags at the grocery store, and I reuse glass jars. Okay. Can you describe what environmental um, environmental responsibility means to you personally? I would say that environmental responsibility is the responsibility that you have to be conscious of how your actions and things you're purchasing and doing are impacting the environment. Good. When you hear the term environmentally and socially responsible brand, what comes to mind? Um, when I think of this it would, I would think of brands that are being conscious of what the materials they're using are that are in, uh, affecting the environment, and like how producing it is affecting the environment, and like making efforts towards changing it. All right, so tell me about a company or brand that you think like genuinely fits your description. So, one that I've heard of is called Misfits Market, and it's a food company that will take foods that weren't good enough to be sold at the grocery store and either turn them into new products or just sell them on their website to people who are willing to purchase the quote unquote subpar products. Okay. So now we're gonna be moving on to motivations and decision-making for why you choose to shop

with a brand. So what makes a brand feel genuine or trustworthy to you in this area of sustainability? I would say that if I've heard of their efforts towards sustainability, or also like what people have told me about it, and maybe things in the news. Okay. Do you find yourself choosing one brand over another because of its environmental or social commitments? I would say sometimes, like I'd say if they are, maybe I'd be more willing to, and then if I've heard bad things, sometimes not, but then also I feel like sometimes cheaper things could come from these brands, so that can also make it sometimes difficult not to buy from those brands. Right. What factors most influence purchase decisions, price, quality, mission, or is it something else? I would say probably price and quality would be the top two. Um, how do you tell if a company is authentic about its sustainability efforts versus just using it as marketing? I would say that if the majority of what they're doing is just on social media and seems like it's very performative, then they want to be very trustworthy, whereas if they actually show their genuine efforts, like on their website and like people actively doing things to help this, then that would be trustworthy. Right. So can you list some actions or communications that make you trust or distrust a brand's claims about sustainability or ethics? I would say distrust would be simply just talking about what they're doing versus actually showing things that they're doing and the impact that it has, and then a positive would just be like the opposite, like actually showing people of their company making these efforts, or like changing materials or things like that. Okay. In your opinion, can companies that focus on sustainability actually make a difference in environmental or social issues? If so, how? I would say yes, because I think the production of things is probably one of the number one things that is impacting the environment. So, say even if 10 companies decide to become more sustainable, especially larger companies, I think it would definitely have an impact, and if like a company that has a lot of customers who trust their brand is actively

talking about this, it could possibly influence those people to make more environmentally conscious decisions. Okay, what do you think needs to change for brands to be genuinely impactful in their sustainability or ethics work? I would say to do thorough research behind how they can change what their company is doing to actually make a better impact on their actions. Has your perception of sustainable brands changed over time? If so, how? I would say yes, because I feel like it's something that's become a lot more talked about now, and especially with social media having a big impact. I feel like it's a lot easier to access that kind of information than it used to be. Would you say people are doing it, like, just as a trend? I think in some cases, yes, especially with like, like college students, like people my age, I think sometimes, whereas other people probably do genuinely care about it. So now we're gonna move on to just behaviors and navigation when you are online shopping. Um, what factors influence your decision to buy a product online rather than in-store? I would say how accessible it is. So, like, here, like in Oxford, there's a lot of things that I can't get by going into the store or, like, it would be hard to find, so then that would lead me to buying more things online, whereas when I'm at home, I feel like I have more of an opportunity to go shop in person and get the things that I want. What tools are most useful to you when navigating a retail website? Um, having clear pictures of the products, and I also find it helpful when people leave reviews that also include pictures of the products. Can you tell me about a negative online shopping experience? Um, I would say I've definitely ordered clothes from Amazon that have like looked like they would be good quality, and then you get them and it's kind of bad. How about a positive experience? A positive experience, I guess Amazon could also be a positive experience because I've heard things like kitchen tools or kind of more like necessities that have come in a timely fashion and have been of

very good quality. Okay, well, that's all the questions I have for you today. Thank you for participating.