

Intro Research on consumption tends to focus on buying new things. However, we often buy items that we already own. This project examines the trade-off between new items we consider buying and those we already own, with a specific focus on clothing.

Summary We conducted two exploratory studies with students to examine clothing habits. Then, in three pre-registered studies, we found that: (1) increasing the saliency of a garment you already own decreases the likelihood of purchasing a new one; (2) framing a potential purchase as a replacement or partial replacement of a garment you already own (vs. an addition to the wardrobe) decreases purchase likelihood; (3) this effect is more pronounced in social contexts, where variety may be more valued.

Exploratory Studies

1. One session study (N = 68): The average age of clothes among MBA students was **18 months**, a result we found to be consistent on MTurk. There is no significant difference across different garments (e.g., T-shirts, jeans, etc.). Factors that people believe contribute to a garment's usage duration (e.g., high-end quality, fashion) do not significantly predict actual usage duration (i.e., how many years they use it), the only exception is **timelessness**. In both studies, **price is not predictive of usage duration**.
2. Prediction study across one week (N = 77): We asked MBA students to predict the average age of the clothes they wear (i.e., how many years ago they bought them) on a normal week and then measured across another week the actual age of what they were wearing. **People underpredicted the age of what they wear**, pointing toward the possibility that people **overweigh new clothes over old ones** in their calculation. At the end of the week, the post-treatment estimate aligned with the actual age.

Study 1: Increasing the Saliency of What You Already Own

Methods Participants (N = 351, MTurk) selected the type of top they were wearing (e.g., t-shirt, sweater). A random garment was chosen, and in the salient condition, participants noted how long ago they purchased it before seeing a shopping scenario with a similar garment. In the non-salient condition, participants saw the shopping scenario first and then indicated the age of the garment they owned.



Results Participants in the salient condition expressed a lower likelihood of buying a new item ($B = -0.41$, $SE = 0.21$, $t = -1.94$, $p = .053$). The age of participants' clothes negatively predicted buying new items ($B = -0.01$, $SE = 0.005$, $t = -2.39$, $p = .018$), there was no significant interaction between salience and age of clothes ($B = 0.004$, $SE = 0.006$, $t = 0.68$, $p = .495$). **Increasing the saliency of the garments you already own may deter new purchases of similar items.**

Study 2-3: Adding vs. Replacing

Methods Participants (N = 578, MTurk) viewed a shopping scenario involving a sweatshirt. The design was a 2 usage context (home vs. public) x 2 purchase framing (adding vs. replacing).

*“You mainly wear this type of sweatshirt when being **inside the house/with your friends outside of the house**. If you buy this new sweatshirt, it will **replace/add a variety to the one you already have**.”*

In Study 3 (N = 554, MTurk), the term “replace” was changed to “*partially replace ... (i.e., you will wear your current sweatshirt less)*.”

Results The replacing condition decreased the likelihood of buying a new sweatshirt compared to the adding condition ($B = -0.74$, $SE = 0.21$, $t = -3.58$, $p < .001$). The usage context had no significant effect on purchase likelihood ($B = 0.22$, $SE = 0.21$, $t = 1.07$, $p = .287$), and there was no significant interaction ($B = 0.05$, $SE = 0.30$, $t = 0.18$, $p = .858$). In study 3, we found the same effect but only in the public context condition. **These studies suggest that people may not fully realize that buying a new garment will likely lead to partially replacing what they already own: consumption share neglect.** When this is made clear, they may be less likely to buy new items.

