

Second Lives: How Consumers Repair, Repurpose, and Recirculate Products

Aylin Cakanlar

Frankfurt School of Finance & Management

Aylin Aydinli

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Femke van Horen

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Aruna Tatavarthy

NHH Norwegian School of Economics

Sai Prashanth Ramachandran

Audencia Business School

Marie-Louise Brand

Vienna University of Economics and Business (Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien)

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ABSTRACT

The “3Rs” of sustainable living - reduce, reuse, recycle - have been widely promoted in efforts to mitigate the environmental impact of consumption. Among them, recycling has received disproportionate attention from both consumers and scholars (Winterich et al., 2024). However, reuse—extending the lifespan of existing products through repairing, repurposing (e.g., upcycling) or recirculating (e.g., reselling) —offers more direct environmental benefits and is prioritized over recycling in the “3Rs” hierarchy. The central goal of this special session is to bring together four papers that advance understanding of how consumers can be encouraged to extend product lifespans and the behavioral and marketplace consequences that arise from doing so. Below the outline of each paper.

1 Caught off Guard: Understanding When and Why Some Product Failures Increase Repair Intentions (Aruna Divya Tatavarthy, Nidhi Agrawal, Helge Thorbjørnsen) examine whether the nature of product failure, sudden or gradual, influences consumers’ intentions to repair. The authors show that consumers are more likely to repair products that fail suddenly (vs. gradually), an effect driven by emotional responses to perceived waste and is moderated by individual waste aversion and consumption norms.

2 Fresh Starts and Second Lives: Fresh Start Mindset Increases Preference for Upcycled Products (Sai Prashanth Ramachandran, Femke van Horen, Aylin Aydinli) examine upcycling through the lens of consumer mindset, specifically the Fresh Start Mindset (FSM). The authors show that consumers with a stronger FSM exhibit greater preference for upcycled products. This effect is mediated by identity reframing, as upcycled products symbolically represent a break from the past and the pursuit of self-transformation, mirroring the essence of the Fresh Start Mindset.

3 Harnessing Transformation Messaging to Extend Product Lifespan and Improve Brand Support” (Aylin Cakanlar, Gergana Y. Nenkov, and Karen Page Winterich) examine how transformation messaging, which emphasizes giving products new life by altering their use or form, can be used by brands at the acquisition stage of consumption journey. The authors show that introducing such messages early in the consumption journey encourages consumers to envision alternative future uses, which in turn fosters greater cognitive flexibility, longer expected product lifespans, and stronger brand support.

4 From Seller to Shopper? How Engaging in the Resale Economy Affects Subsequent Interest in New Products (Marie-Louise Brand, Lukas Maier and Martin Schreier) investigate whether participation in the resale economy increases or decreases consumers’ subsequent interest in new products. Drawing on 15 experiments within a single-paper meta-analysis, the authors show that participation in reselling both extends product lifecycles and reduces consumers’ subsequent interest in new products, thereby providing dual benefits.