

Slowing The Upgrade Treadmill: How Unused Utility Salience Delays Premature Replacement

Ibraheem Badahdah

University of Technology, Sydney/King Saud University

(Joyce) Jingshi Liu

Bayes Business School, City, University of London

Geetanjali Saluja

University of Technology Sydney

Vivian Pontes

QUT Business School

Cite as:

Badahdah Ibraheem, Liu (Joyce) Jingshi, Saluja Geetanjali, Pontes Vivian (2026), Slowing The Upgrade Treadmill: How Unused Utility Salience Delays Premature Replacement. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 55th, (133716)

Paper from the 55th Annual EMAC Conference, Bath, United Kingdom, June 2-5, 2026



Slowing The Upgrade Treadmill: How Unused Utility Salience Delays Premature Replacement

Abstract

Consumers frequently replace still-functioning products, contributing to environmental and economic waste. Building on research in product replacement and justification-based decision making, we propose that consumers systematically neglect to incorporate the unused utility of their incumbent product in the upgrade decision, and that making this unused utility salient raises the justification threshold for replacement. Across correlational and experimental studies, we show that highlighting unused utility before an upgrade decision deters premature upgrades and extends intended product lifespans. Study 1 provides correlational evidence among consumers indifferent to a new launch. Studies 2–4 experimentally demonstrate that making unused utility salient, via estimation or reflection tasks on remaining value, reduces upgrade likelihood, delays upgrade timing, and that justification difficulty mediates this effect.

Track: Consumer Behaviour