

# Should I Buy This When I Have So Much? Reflection on Personal Possessions as an Anticonsumption Strategy

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## Abstract

Despite having ample possessions, many Western consumers continue to buy new things frenetically. The authors propose an approach to resist shopping temptations and stifle the buying urge: getting consumers to reflect on and evoke a momentary desire for recently used possessions. This research contributes to the anticonsumption literature by theorizing that the desire to consume, like willpower, may function as a limited motivational resource: it becomes depleted upon reflecting about favored personal possessions, leaving less desire for subsequent shopping urges. Across four studies, consumers who reflected on their recently used personal possessions experienced less desire for an unexpectedly encountered product, were less likely to buy impulsively, and expressed a lower willingness to pay for new products. The authors advance anticonsumption theory by broadening its scope. In addition to the previously proposed rejection, restriction, and reclaim strategies to help individuals shrug off marketing overtures and regulate purchasing activity, the authors suggest reflection as a practical intervention for policy makers, consumer advocates, and consumers to encourage prudent consumption.

## Keywords

anticonsumption, impulsive shopping, policy intervention, prudent consumption, reflection

When you are discontent, you always want more, more, more. Your desire can never be satisfied. But when you practice contentment, you can say to yourself, “Oh yes—I already have everything that I really need.”

—The Dalai Lama, quoted in “Oprah Talks to the Dalai Lama,” *O, The Oprah Magazine* (August 2001)

Wilful waste makes woeful want.

—Elizabeth Gaskell, *Wives and Daughters* (1866).

During the Great Depression of the 1930s and the Second World War, Western consumers widely quoted the aphorism “Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without.” However, it would find little resonance among many of today’s consumers. Two defining characteristics of contemporary culture are rampant consumerism, as manifested in the continual acquisition of new goods, and the relatively little attention focused on savoring or using up what one already has. By a global standard, most Western consumers have ample possessions (Menzel and Mann 1994), and yet they spend significant time, effort, and money buying new things (Cherrier 2009; Montoya and Scott 2013; Robin, Dominguez, and Tilford 2008). Underlying such

acquisition is the expectation that acquiring new things will bring about a transformation of one’s life and improve it in some significant way (Richins 2011). However, this transformation often fails to materialize after purchase, leading many consumers to experience an “emotional low” and continue to acquire material goods (Richins 2013).

Against the backdrop of rampant, acquisitive consumerism and its attendant negative consequences at individual and societal levels (Cherrier and Murray 2002), anticonsumption research posits that consumers must take a stand and resist consumption by focusing on reasons against it (Chatzikadis and Lee 2013; Lee, Fernandez, and Hyman 2009; Yuksel 2013). This research classifies anticonsumption approaches as falling into one of three broad strategies: reject, restrict, and reclaim (Black and Cherrier 2010; Lee et al. 2011). The rejection strategy focuses on excluding particular goods and

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services from consideration (e.g., boycotting a particular brand or product category); restriction emphasizes methods to limit or regulate consumption (e.g., undertake an intermittent fast, refrain from shopping for new things); and reclaiming involves finding new and creative uses for products and reducing waste through processes of recycling, dumpster diving, and so on. In each strategy's enactment, the individual consciously articulates a clear set of reasons against consumption.

Despite anticonsumption's obvious importance and value to consumer culture, current thinking on this topic has two limitations that we seek to address with the present research. First, even though anticonsumption practices grounded in rejection, restriction, and reclaim (e.g., consumer boycotts, voluntary simplicity) have grown steadily since the Second World War, they are still employed by a minority of Western consumers. As such, anticonsumption practices remain outside mainstream consumer behavior (Chatzidakis and Lee 2013).

Second, and perhaps more important, the extant anticonsumption literature, for the most part, says little about how mainstream consumers can and should transition from their current materialistic and acquisition-fueled lifestyles to become active anticonsumers (Cherrier 2009, 2010; Cherrier and Murray 2007). Specifically, what should they do with the possessions they own? And how should they change their participation in the throwaway consumer culture and shopping-fueled lifestyles to become more aligned with the tenets of anticonsumption? To appreciate the size and scope of this issue, statistics from a particular consumption domain, clothing and shoes, are worth considering.

One recent survey found that on average, American consumers have 90 items of clothing in their wardrobes but use fewer than half of them. Most consumers have clothes they have never worn, many with original price tags intact (Iyer 2013). Yet during the mid-2000s, consumers continued to add an average of 22 garments to their already swollen wardrobes annually (Leonard 2011). What is worse, mainstream consumers throw away more than 15% of their still-usable, perfectly good clothes every year, most of which go to landfills (Cline 2014).

Another survey of American women found that they own an average of 17 pairs of shoes but only wear 3 on a regular basis (Shopsmart 2011). Stoked by marketer-generated occasions such as Black Friday, Valentine's Day, and back-to-school season, along with constant marketing messages promoting sales, deals, and limited-time offers, consumers continue to buy new items, often on impulse and without any advance planning, at rates that vastly exceed the rates at which their possessions wear out. Furthermore, such consumption is often driven by social pressure to wear the latest fashions, an individual desire for newness, and cultural norms that encourage constant novelty.

Simply put, mainstream consumers tend to lead lifestyles far removed from anticonsumption principles. They have numerous reasons, either self-generated or marketer-provided, for buying and consuming, but they typically have few arguments against buying or consuming.

What is more, as anticonsumption researchers have noted (e.g., Cherrier and Murray 2002; Dobscha 1998), impulsive, acquisitive consumerism comes with high costs. In addition to abusive labor practices and environmental degradation (Leonard 2011; Micheletti 2003), many emerging social problems such as perilously low personal savings rates (Adams and Rau 2011), high rates of indebtedness and bankruptcies (Soll, Keeney, and Larrick 2013), the prevalence of addictive buying tendencies (Koran et al. 2006), financial anxiety (Montoya and Scott 2013), and the rise in hoarding behaviors (Cherrier 2010; Steketee and Frost 2003) all attest to the significance and seriousness of this issue, and to the improbability of mainstream consumers embracing anticonsumption ideals or practices without support or interventions.

For anticonsumption to become widely appealing and adopted, it must offer a pathway to mainstream consumers to move away from their current acquisitive lifestyles (Dobscha 1998). As Cherrier and Murray (2007) point out, consumers need help and support in gradually dismantling their consumption-focused lifestyles and constructing new ones built around values other than consumption. Specifically, they need practical methods to help them wean themselves away from constant impulsive buying and increase their appreciation for and enjoyment of their current store of possessions as the "middle way" (taking inspiration from the Buddhist idea of moderation) on the route toward embracing more involved and active forms of anticonsumption. Consequently, public policy makers, anticonsumption proponents, consumer advocates, and consumers themselves must design and implement effective and feasible interventional approaches to reduce shopping and increase reflection about, and appreciation for, possessions that consumers already own (Burroughs et al. 2013; Lee and Ahn 2016; Richins 2011).

## Theoretical Framework and Research Hypotheses

After acknowledging the importance of the anticonsumption movement and pointing out its current limitations in appealing to mainstream consumers, we propose expanding the strategies of anticonsumption while staying true to its core values. Herein, we consider whether more consumers can be brought into the fold of the anticonsumption movement by using reflection as a means to regulate and reduce unplanned shopping activity, which can have many potentially negative consequences for consumers, through a straightforward, practically applicable, and instruction-based intervention. Specifically, we propose and test one method of reducing shopping urges and buying activity: evoking the individual's consumption desire by reflecting on the recent use of one's possessions. With this research, we also strive to broaden the scope of anticonsumption research and provide a useful, versatile, and practical tool to public policy makers.

Prior research has shown that how products are used and enjoyed postpurchase has significant ramifications for consumer well-being (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Lee and

Ahn 2016; Richins 2013), more specifically, their financial health (Robin, Dominguez, and Tilford 2008). Consumer desire plays an important role in every stage of the consumer's involvement with a product, from when the product is first recognized as useful, through the selection and purchase processes, to its adoption, use, and eventual disposition (Dholakia 2015). Indeed, we could even go so far as to say that acquisitive consumer desire represents one of the biggest hurdles for consumer acceptance of the tenets of anticonsumption. Despite its importance, relatively little research, to our knowledge, has studied consumers' desire to use products they own or considered the effect of evoking such desire on subsequent consumer decisions (e.g., Belk 2010; Gould 1991).

In contrast, the desire to purchase new products is an extensively studied topic in consumer research, with researchers focusing on numerous factors that influence the intensity of this desire (e.g., the product's physical proximity, various sensory inputs, societal and cultural trends, group influences; Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003; Dholakia 2015; Faber and Vohs 2004). For unplanned shopping, in particular, the intensity of desire for the product directly affects the consumer's likelihood of impulsive purchase (Dholakia, Gopinath, and Bagozzi 2005; Rook and Fisher 1995; Vohs and Faber 2007). The emphasis on studying motivational drivers of impulsive purchase is consistent with marketers' interest in stimulating such buying behaviors; however, it is counterproductive to individuals and organizations that aim to increase consumer welfare by curbing shopping (e.g., anticonsumption movement members, public policy makers, consumer advocates). With this research, we seek to redress this disparity in knowledge by studying the potential link between the desire to use one's existing possessions and the desire to purchase new items.

Our central thesis is that reflecting on the recent use of one's possessions through a structured thought listing-based intervention will arouse the individual's consumption-related desire for items on this list. As a result of this arousal, we argue that consumption desire will be used up and depleted, leaving less of it available in a subsequent task, through a process we theorize as analogous to the depletion of self-control. This, in turn, will lessen the consumer's interest in buying when a subsequent task provides such an opportunity. Our hypothesis is based on the widely accepted principle among psychologists that desire plays a significant and nuanced role in regulating behavior.

Consumer self-control is often conceptualized as a struggle between willpower and desire (Hoch and Loewenstein 1991; Montoya and Scott 2013; Siemens and Kopp 2011). By studying the processes and means of self-control, past research has mostly focused on the willpower side of the motivational drivers of behavior (e.g., Carver and Scheier 2001; Koenigstorfer, Groeppel-Klein, and Kamm 2014). In particular, the prominent strength model of self-control posits that engaging in a self-regulation act depletes this resource; in the ego-depleted state, further attempts at self-control impair performance (Baumeister, Vohs, and Tice 2007; Hofmann, Vohs, and Baumeister 2012). A large body of studies has empirically tested and

supported the strength model (e.g., Koenigstorfer, Groeppel-Klein, and Kamm 2014; Montoya and Scott 2013).

Only recently have researchers begun to scrutinize the forces of desire that should be controlled in the first place. These researcher posits that the role of desire in self-control may be as important as the relatively well-understood role of restraint (e.g., Dholakia 2015; Myrseth, Fishbach, and Trope 2009; Redden and Haws 2013). Drawing on motivational theories of behavior, in particular, the strength model of self-control, as well as consumer research on satiation and sequential decision making, we theorize that like willpower (Baumeister, Vohs, and Tice 2007) and sexual desire (e.g., Pfaus 2009; Zuckerman 1971), a person's consumption desire may also function as a limited motivational resource that is depleted when it is experienced. Consequently, thinking about a recently used personal possession will generate momentary desire for the possession, such that less desire will be available for subsequent consumption-related tasks, a process that is particularly relevant when individuals make a series of shopping decisions.

At least two distinct streams of existing research provide the theoretical backbone for our hypothesis and the potential success of our proposed intervention for curbing impulsive buying: (1) the role of cognitive processes on satiation and its effects on consumer decision making and (2) the role of desire in self-regulatory behavior. Research on consumers' sequential decision making within both these streams is also relevant.

### *How Thinking Affects Satiation*

In consumer research, satiation is defined as a decline in the consumer's enjoyment, and a reduced desire for continued consumption, that follows repeated acts of consumption (Coombs and Avrunin 1977; McAlister 1982; Redden 2008). Marketing scholars have extensively studied satiation in the context of consumption. For instance, studies show that understanding the onset, occurrence, and role of satiation in eating behaviors is crucial for designing effective policy interventions for healthy food consumption (Burton and Kees 2012). At its heart, satiation relies on the idea that a consumer's current choice is dependent on previous choices. As the consumer derives utility from consuming a particular attribute (e.g., a sweet food), his(her) further utility for the same attribute diminishes (McAlister 1982). A robust finding in studies on satiation is that frequent or repeated exposure to a particular item produces stimulus satiation or monotony, lowering subsequent desire for the item (Hetherington, Pirie, and Nabb 2002). Relatedly, when individuals reflect on past consumption of a particular item, they feel satiated, as though they have consumed the same item over and over (Redden 2015). While not explicitly articulated as such, satiation plays a key role in encouraging anticonsumption. For instance, one core motivation for joining the Voluntary Simplicity movement is satiation with conventional acquisition and consumption modes (Cherrier and Murray 2007; Huneke 2005).

Many studies support the role of thinking in satiation. Wan-sink (2004) provides an extensive review of environmental factors (e.g., package size, plate shape, socializing while eating) that encourage people to keep eating, arguing that lowered monitoring and attention to one's eating activity is the common mechanism through which these disparate factors work to delay satiation. More recent research has demonstrated the occurrence of "healthy satiation," the phenomenon in which after eating unhealthy but tasty foods like candy, consumers who are high in trait self-control experience reduced desire for consuming more candy (Redden and Haws 2013). However, consumers who are low in self-control do not experience a similar drop in desire. These differences occur not just because of differences in motivation but also because the former group pays more attention to the amount they are consuming, whereas the latter group does not do so, suggesting that the drop in desire is at least partly due to being aware of and thinking about prior consumption.

Further supporting the role of thinking in the depletion of desire for an item, other research shows that even vividly imagining eating a tasty food repeatedly during an experimental session is enough to lower actual consumption of the food. The researchers attribute this effect to a reduced desire for the repeatedly imagined food, rather than that consumers consider it less palatable or tasty (Morewedge, Huh, and Vosgerau 2010). Finally, simply making past consumption feel more recent can induce satiation and result in lower desire to eat (Galak et al. 2014). In this research, the authors simply manipulated perceptions of how much time had passed since the study participant's previous meal and found that this manipulation influenced both how much consumers enjoyed the experience of eating and the volume of food they ate. In developing a taxonomy of satiation, Redden (2015) suggests that satiation has a distinct reflective component such that it is momentarily constructed using judgments and cognitions about the past consumption of the same or a similar item.

The aforementioned satiation studies are all consistent with the idea we advance here, which is that when the desire for an item is experienced through reflection, it contributes to the individual's satiation, arousing less subsequent consumption desire for a new item. Particularly relevant to the current research, physiological mechanisms such as actual eating and digestion are not necessary for satiation to occur; it is enough to think about the stimulus in question (Redden 2015). However, unlike extant satiation research, which is stimulus specific and focuses on the effects of a particular item on subsequent desire for the same item, our interest is in studying the effects of reflection on the recent use of a possession on the individual's purchase desire for an encountered product regardless of whether it is related to the possession.

### *The Role of Desire in Regulating Behavior*

In the extensive literature on consumer self-control, desire is conceptualized as the countervailing motivational force to self-control. The influential strength model of self-control

(Baumeister 2002; Baumeister, Vohs, and Tice 2007) posits that engaging in every act of self-regulation consumes this limited resource and depletes it; while in this ego-depleted state, further self-control attempts in any domain (not just the depleting domain) impair the individual's performance that requires self-regulatory behavior. Thus, consumers exhibit a gradual deterioration when engaging in consecutive acts of self-control. Dozens of studies, many in consumer settings with significant public policy implications, have empirically tested and supported the strength model.

A growing body of recent research shows that desire plays a significant, distinct, and nuanced role in the self-regulation process and in determining the outcome of the motivational drivers of behavior (for a recent review, see Dholakia 2015). These findings have expanded the strength model of self-control by explicitly considering the role of desire in repeated self-regulation, and they have significant implications for consumer decisions. One such expansion is the "process model of ego depletion" (Inzlicht and Schmeichel 2012), which posits that in addition to depleting self-control, acts of self-regulation also independently increase an individual's approach motivation (i.e., the capacity to experience desire) in subsequent tasks. Schmeichel, Harmon-Jones, and Harmon-Jones (2010) find that when participants had exercised self-control in an initial activity by inhibiting their common writing tendencies, they were then likely to engage in more low-stakes betting behavior in a subsequent unrelated task. This finding is germane to the present research because it directly supports our theorizing that, much like self-control, desire functions as a flexible resource available to the individual with a certain capacity that changes with the individual's thoughts and actions.

In addition, evidence abounds that desire experienced for one thing is, at least temporarily, limited and can be substituted with desire for another thing. As one example of this phenomenon, Hoch and Loewenstein (1991) suggest that a person can temporarily suppress a desire for one item by giving him- or herself a small but immediate reward of another sort. Thus, a dieter may quell the strong urge for a particular unhealthy food item with a substitute that is a healthier (but still tasty) food item (Adriaanse, De Ritter, and De Wit 2009; Liu et al. 2015). Adriaanse, De Ritter, and De Wit (2009) show that when consumers who normally eat unhealthy snacks are encouraged to form an implementation plan to switch to healthier options that includes specifying motivational cues about why such a change is warranted, they decrease their unhealthy snack consumption significantly. Liu et al. (2015) use the concept of substitution to develop an intervention they called "virtue-vice bundles" that allows consumers to judiciously manage their food choices between healthy and unhealthy options.

Furthermore, research on the "sequential mitigation effect" has examined consecutive decisions of consumers in different product categories during a single shopping trip, finding that decision makers experienced less desire for a product when they had participated in a prior, impulsive choice compared with when they did not do so (Dholakia, Gopinath, and Bagozzi 2005). In one study, participants' desire for and the likelihood

of picking up a gourmet sandwich was substantially lower if they had been given an opportunity to impulsively choose a sweater beforehand. Importantly, it was not necessary for them to choose to buy the sweater; simply participating in the task (and presumably evoking desire) was enough. Research examining sequential choices of consumers in shopping decisions further supports this idea, showing that when consumers make larger trade-offs between different alternatives available to them in an earlier choice task, their subsequent choices show effects of depletion (Wang et al. 2010).

Finally, research on balancing effects (Dhar and Simonson 1999) shows that when consumers frame the decision as a trade-off between two goals (e.g., pleasure vs. health), they tend to balance choices across sequential decisions made consecutively so that if a tasty item is chosen the first time, a healthy item is picked next. In the context of food, consumers choose a combination of virtue and vice foods to achieve a “taste-health balance point” in which lower proportions of vice foods are often preferred to higher proportions (Liu et al. 2015). While not directly addressing the consumer’s motivation, the notion of balancing across sequential decisions is consistent with the idea that if desire is evoked in a first decision, it will play less of a role in a consecutive decision. In line with this discussion, our hypotheses are as follows:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Recalling recent use of a personal possession through reflection will produce greater momentary desire when compared to a control group or planning to use an unused possession.

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Recalling recent use of a personal possession through reflection will lower the consumer’s subsequent willingness to pay (WTP) for new products when compared to a control group or planning to use an unused possession.

### *The Moderating Role of Type of Recalled Possession*

Given our focus on designing and testing an effective instruction-based intervention to reduce shopping, we also wanted to understand potential boundary conditions for H<sub>1</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>. We chose to examine the moderating role of the type of recalled personal possession—specifically, whether it is hedonic or utilitarian—in producing the hypothesized reduced shopping effect. The distinction between hedonic and utilitarian goods is central to anticonsumption research. In developing theory, anticonsumption scholars have commonly distinguished between hedonic possessions, which consumers use for sensual pleasure, fantasy, and fun and are often discretionary purchases, and utilitarian possessions, which are used mainly for functional reasons and are usually necessities (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Huneke 2005; see also Kronrod and Danziger 2013). Rejecting consumption of functional products is more difficult, and sometimes even impossible. In contrast, hedonic possessions can be given up, given away, or substituted relatively easily (Brosius, Fernandez, and Cherrier 2013). In addition to its centrality to anticonsumption research, we also chose the product type variable because of its

usefulness in designing effective public policy interventions. As one example of this usefulness, Richins (2011) demonstrates the importance of hedonic transformation expectations (e.g., “I would have more fun,” “I’d enjoy life more”) in mediating the negative effects of materialism on detrimental consumer behaviors such as overusing credit and falling in debt.

Consistent with Richins (2011), we hypothesize that when individuals reflect about their recent use of a hedonic possession, instead of “using up” consumption desire, the task will have an arousing effect and stimulate greater desire in a subsequent shopping decision, but only when this decision involves other hedonic products. This prediction is based on prior research showing that utilitarian possessions are evaluated through the perspective of whether the item satisfied its purpose, whereas hedonic possessions are judged based on their ability to produce positive emotions such as delight and excitement (Babin, Darden, and Griffin 1994). While satisfaction promotes satiation, experiencing an arousing emotion increases indulgence in behaviors sustaining that emotion (Chitturi, Raghunathan, and Mahajan 2008). Research on reverse alliesthesia also shows that sampling a consumption cue that is high in incentive value enhances subsequent seeking out and consumption of any rewarding cue (Wadhwa, Shiv, and Nowlis 2008). This difference implies that desire produced by thinking about a utilitarian personal possession will deplete the motivational resource of desire and reduce the person’s shopping. In contrast, desire produced from reflecting about a personal hedonic possession will reverse this effect, leading to greater desire in a subsequent hedonic shopping decision. Thus:

**H<sub>3</sub>:** Recalling recent use of a hedonic (vs. utilitarian) personal possession through reflection increases the consumer’s interest in buying new hedonic products, but not in buying utilitarian products.

### *Overview of Studies*

We tested our hypotheses through a series of four studies. To examine effects of recalling the recent use of a personal possession, Study 1 investigates its impact on consumers’ subsequent WTP for a basket of new products, and Study 2 tests whether their desire for, and the likelihood of purchasing, an item impulsively would be affected. Study 3 examines the moderating role of type (hedonic vs. utilitarian) of possession in producing consumption desire depletion. Study 4 rules out an alternative explanation for the moderating role of type of possession. The findings of these studies show that reflection about the recent use of one’s possessions provides an effective method to quell the shopping urge and thus reduce consumption.

### **Study 1**

In this study, the treatment condition involves our proposed instruction-based intervention: reflecting, and then writing,

about a recent use experience of a personal possession. For comparison, we included two other conditions. One was a condition in which participants engaged in a similar thinking and writing task, but it was for making a plan to use a possession they had not used recently. We reasoned that the former task would produce more consumption-related desire than the latter because people often lose interest in items they own and stop using (Leonard 2011), in accordance with  $H_1$ . Consequently, less desire would be available for a subsequent consumption decision, leading to lowered WTP for new items in the former case. The other condition was a “true control,” in which participants did not perform any prior thought-elicitation task so that we could compare the effects of evoking desire in both conditions with a true control condition in which no desire was evoked at all.

### Method

We recruited 165 U.S.-based fully employed participants (average age = 37 years,  $SD = 10.6$ , 48.5% female) through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Research has shown that MTurk is more representative of the general population than traditional convenience samples (Buhrmester, Kwang, and Gosling 2011) and is reliable for experimental research (Goodman, Cryder, and Cheema 2013). We randomly assigned participants to one of three experimental conditions: recently used, recently unused, and control. Those in the recently used condition were asked to think about and describe a personal possession that they currently owned and had used recently, after which they described its most recent use in detail, explaining when, where, how, and for how long they had used it. In the recently unused condition, participants were asked to think about and briefly describe a possession they currently owned but had not used recently. Next, they were asked to form a detailed plan to use it in the near future by explaining when, where, how, and for how long they would use the possession. Note that in this study, we did not impose any restriction in our instructions regarding the type of item they could use for this task. Examples of items that participants chose included outfits, shoes, fashion accessories, and various electronic items such as laptops, smartphones, and digital reading devices (e.g., Kindle).

After completing this task, participants in both conditions indicated the level of desire they experienced for the possession at the moment on a seven-point scale anchored with 1 = “no desire at all,” 4 = “moderate desire,” and 7 = “very strong desire.” In the control condition, participants moved to the second stage of the study directly.

In the study’s second stage, participants were shown a series of five products: a cashmere sweater, a stainless steel watch, a coffeemaker, a chair, and a box of Godiva chocolates. In each case, participants indicated their estimate of the product’s actual price and then provided their WTP for it. Finally, participants provided their demographic characteristics (gender, age, amount of annual household income, and education attained).

### Results

Respondents’ descriptions of possession use (past or prospective) in the recently used and recently unused conditions varied considerably in length ( $M = 62.0$  words,  $SD = 25.8$ ). After reviewing the descriptions, some of them did not have sufficient detail. To preserve the experimental manipulation’s integrity, we excluded participants who had written plans that were less than 35 words in length (corresponding to approximately two sentences of medium length). A total of 8 respondents were excluded because of this criterion. We note that all the reported results remain substantively the same whether this restriction is enforced or not.<sup>1</sup>

**Level of experienced desire.** Results of an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) revealed that after controlling for respondents’ demographics (gender, age, income, and education), those recalling recent use of a possession ( $M_{\text{recently used}} = 5.56$ ,  $SE = .26$ , 95% confidence interval [CI] = [5.04, 6.08]) indicated significantly higher momentary desire for the item than those who planned use of a recently unused possession ( $M_{\text{recently unused}} = 4.38$ ,  $SE = .24$ , 95% CI[3.90, 4.86]),  $F(1,87) = 10.78$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .110$ ,  $b = 1.19$ , 95% CI[.47, 1.90].<sup>2</sup> As expected, participants experienced greater desire when thinking about a recently used possession than about a recently unused possession. This finding is consistent with, and supports,  $H_1$ .

**WTP for new products.** In the study instructions, we did not provide reference prices for any of the five products. Consequently, for the WTP and perceived actual price of the product provided by respondents, we flagged values that were more than three standard deviations away from the mean as outliers and removed them from the analysis. Using this approach, the average number of outliers removed in the case of each product was 3.9, and the maximum was 10.

Next, we standardized each product’s actual price and WTP. For each respondent, we averaged the standardized values to compute two scores, an index of actual prices and an index of WTPs. The WTP index was subjected to an ANCOVA with demographics and actual price index as covariates. Results revealed a significant main effect of condition ( $F(2, 143) = 3.59$ ,  $p = .030$ ,  $\eta^2 = .048$ ). Consistent with our prediction, the recently used group indicated the lowest WTP ( $M_{\text{recently used}} = -.20$ ,  $SE = .09$ , 95% CI[-.37, -.02]), and it was significantly lower than both the recently unused group ( $M_{\text{recently unused}} = .04$ ,  $SE = .08$ , 95% CI[-.12, .20]) and the control group

<sup>1</sup> We applied the same restriction (a minimum of two sentences, i.e., at least 35 words) for the reported results of all studies with this experimental manipulation.

<sup>2</sup> In all results reported herein, we controlled for respondents’ demographics, specifically, their gender, age, income, and education, because these variables could potentially influence both experience of desire and decision-making outcomes (cf. Koran et al. 2006). We also replicated each reported analysis without including the demographic variables, and the results remain the same (to avoid repetition, we do not report these results here).

( $M_{\text{control}} = .11$ ,  $SE = .08$ , 95% CI[-.04, .26]). Thus, recalling the recent use of a personal possession lowers participants' subsequent interest in buying new products as measured by their WTP for these items, consistent with  $H_2$ .

## Discussion

These results provide support for  $H_1$  and  $H_2$  and our proposed intervention to reduce shopping behavior. Consistent with our hypothesis, this study shows that participants who were instructed to recall and write about their recent use of a personal possession experienced greater momentary desire for it and subsequently indicated lower WTP for a basket of new products when compared with those who formulated a plan to use a possession they had not used recently or a control group. In the next study, we sought to delineate the link between desire evoked from thinking about a possession and subsequently desire and impulsive purchase likelihood for an unexpectedly encountered new product more directly.

## Study 2

We designed Study 2 to more directly examine  $H_1$  and  $H_2$ , which state that by being evoked through thinking about a recently used personal possession, the individual's consumption desire will be depleted and therefore evoked to a lesser degree in a subsequent shopping task involving the impulsive choice of an unexpectedly encountered product. To do this, we measured desire experienced for the unexpectedly encountered product in the second task.

In this study, after the same experimental manipulation as Study 1, we asked participants to rate their desire for impulsively purchasing a new product (jacket or headphones) and the likelihood of purchasing it. We hypothesized that respondents who had experienced greater desire from recalling their recent use of a possession would, therefore, experience relatively lesser desire for the new item and thus would be less likely to purchase it impulsively when compared with those who made a plan to use a personal possession they had not used recently with to a control group.

## Method

We recruited 299 participants (38.8% female) from MTurk. The study had a three-group (recently used vs. recently unused vs. control) between-subjects design. The manipulation of the recently used and recently unused conditions was identical to Study 1, and the control group moved directly to the second phase of the study. In the second phase, participants were randomly assigned to one of two impulsive purchase scenarios (jacket or headphones):

**Jacket scenario:** "Imagine that you have gone to the mall to buy a few pairs of socks. As you are walking through the mall, your eyes fall upon a fashionable and attractive jacket. It happens to be in your size and favorite color. The salesperson tells you that the

piece on display is the last one left, and they are unlikely to get more of the jacket in this particular style in the future."

**Headphones scenario:** "Imagine that you have gone to a website to buy a music CD. As you are surfing through the website, you come across a sale for a newly introduced set of headphones, which you do not currently own. The headphone set has a lot of useful features such as Bluetooth compatibility, built-in microphone, and a one year warranty. The quantity information shows that only one piece is available in stock for the promotional price, and there is unlikely to be another sale for this particular headphone set in the near future."

These scenarios are adapted from those used in previous research; Rook and Fisher 1995). We used these two different scenarios to ensure that our results were not scenario-specific. Participants indicated their level of desire to purchase the product on a seven-point scale anchored with 1 = "no desire at all", 4 = "moderate desire," and 7 = "very strong desire." Next, participants indicated the likelihood that they would actually purchase the jacket or headphones using a percentage sliding scale bounded by 0% and 100%. Finally, participants completed the impulsive buying scale (Rook and Fisher 1995) and provided their demographic information.

## Results

**Desire experienced in the first task.** Consistent with Study 1, after controlling for respondents' demographics (gender, age, income, and education), participants who had recalled their recent use of a possession ( $M_{\text{recently used}} = 5.20$ ,  $SE = .16$ ) indicated greater momentary desire to use the possession when compared with those who made a plan to use a recently unused possession ( $M_{\text{recently unused}} = 4.47$ ,  $SE = .17$ ,  $F(1, 159) = 9.86$ ,  $p < .002$ ), in support of  $H_1$ .

**Desire experienced in the second task.** Recall that each participant completed only one of the two impulsive choice scenarios: jacket or headphones. We combined responses for the two products (jacket and headphones) in the second task for analysis. Because ample prior research shows that an important determinant of impulsive choice is the respondent's trait impulsivity (Rook and Fisher 1995; Youn and Faber 2000), we included this variable as a control variable in the analysis.

Respondents' desire for impulsive product choice was subjected to a three-group (recently used vs. recently unused vs. control) ANCOVA, with demographics and trait impulsivity as covariates. Results revealed that after controlling for demographics and the respondent's trait impulsivity, the data indicated a statistically significant main effect of group ( $F(2, 271) = 7.10$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .050$ ). As hypothesized, participants who recalled using a personal possession recently ( $M_{\text{recently used}} = 3.87$ ,  $SE = .17$ , 95% CI[3.53, 4.21]) expressed significantly lower desire for the jacket or headphones compared with the control group ( $M_{\text{control}} = 4.65$ ,  $SE = .15$ , 95% CI[4.35, 4.94]). Interestingly, those in the recently unused condition ( $M_{\text{recently unused}} = 3.97$ ,  $SE = .18$ , 95% CI[3.62, 4.32]) also had a lower desire for the product than the control group.

To the extent that the task of planning produced desire, this result is consistent with our theorizing that evoking desire for a possession reduces the desire for, and therefore interest in buying, a new product, in support of H<sub>2</sub>.

**Purchase likelihood of jacket or headphones.** Participants' purchase likelihood in the impulsive choice task was submitted to a three-group (recently used vs. recently unused vs. control) ANCOVA, including demographics and trait impulsivity as covariates. Result showed that there was a statistically significant main effect of condition ( $F(2, 271) = 5.54, p = .004, \eta^2 = .039$ ). Consistent with previous results, participants in both recently used ( $M_{\text{recently\_used}} = 35.83, SE = 2.95, 95\% \text{ CI}[30.02, 41.65]$ ) and recently unused ( $M_{\text{recently\_unused}} = 39.37, SE = 3.03, 95\% \text{ CI}[33.40, 45.35]$ ) conditions indicated a significantly lower likelihood of purchasing impulsively compared with the control group ( $M_{\text{control}} = 48.28, SE = 2.55, 95\% \text{ CI}[43.27, 53.30]$ ), providing further support to H<sub>2</sub>.

## Discussion

The results of Study 2 support our theorizing and the first two hypotheses by garnering consistent support for the effectiveness of our proposed instruction-based intervention to reduce shopping. They reveal that by evoking desire by recalling the recent use of a personal possession (a task that evoked greater desire), participants experienced less desire in a subsequent choice task and were less likely to buy the product offered to them when compared with a control group.

## Study 3

Study 3 tests H<sub>3</sub>, which posits that the type of recalled possession (hedonic vs. utilitarian) in the first reflection task will moderate the effect of desire evoked for a possession on the desire for a new hedonic product but not for a new utilitarian product. Specifically, we expected that recalling the recent use of a personal hedonic possession would not only increase the desire for it but would also increase the desire to purchase a new hedonic product afterward. Thus, instead of depleting desire, recalling the recent use of a hedonic possession would stimulate subsequent desire for a hedonic product, reversing the anticonsumption intervention we have proposed. In contrast, for a utilitarian possession, we expected to find a pattern of desire depletion consistent with the first two studies, such that recalling the recent use of a utilitarian possession would increase consumption desire and decrease interest in buying a new product.

## Method

We recruited a total of 408 participants (58.1% female) from MTurk. The design of this study was similar to that of the first two studies, but with one addition: we varied not only the first desire-evoking task (recently used vs. recently unused) but also the type of product that participants recalled in this task. Specifically, we asked half the participants to recall a possession

that fulfilled a need (i.e., a utilitarian possession) and asked the other half of the (randomly assigned) participants to recall a possession used for enjoyment or pleasure (i.e., a hedonic possession). The study, therefore, employed a 2 (task: recently used vs. recently unused)  $\times$  2 (possession type: utilitarian vs. hedonic) between-subjects design. Participants were randomly assigned one of the four manipulation conditions.

After participants completed the manipulation task, we assigned them to one of two impulsive choice tasks: utilitarian value and hedonic value. The jacket choice used in the second study was modified to emphasize either its hedonic or utilitarian characteristics. In the utilitarian value description, the functionality and ease of using and maintaining the jacket (e.g., durable material, machine washable, dries fast, wrinkle-free, good for daily wear) were emphasized. In the hedonic value description, the aesthetic gratification and pleasure from using the jacket (e.g., designed by a top designer, luxurious fabric, unique style, great for special occasions) were highlighted. All participants then indicated their desire for the jacket on a seven-point scale anchored with 1 = "no desire at all" and 7 = "very strong desire" and the probability that they would purchase the jacket using a percentage sliding scale bounded by 0% and 100%. Finally, participants completed Rook and Fisher's (1995) impulsive buying scale and provided their demographics.

## Results

**Desire experienced in the first task.** The results replicated findings in the previous studies, demonstrating that participants who recalled recent use of a personal possession ( $M_{\text{recently\_used}} = 5.34, SE = .11$ ) indicated greater momentary desire for it when compared with those who formulated a plan to use a possession that they had not used recently ( $M_{\text{recently\_unused}} = 4.56, SE = .11, F(1, 365) = 25.03, p < .001, \eta^2 = .064$ ). This pattern was the same regardless of whether the personal possession involved was utilitarian or hedonic. Furthermore, and not surprisingly, the desire experienced was greater for participants who recalled or made a plan to use a hedonic possession ( $M_{\text{hedonic\_possession}} = 5.12, SE = .11$ ) than for those who recalled or planned to use a utilitarian possession ( $M_{\text{utilitarian\_possession}} = 4.75, SE = .12, F(1, 365) = 5.16, p < .05, \eta^2 = .014$ ).

**Desire experienced in the second task.** To examine the effects of desire experienced on different types of target items, we conducted two separate analyses: one for the jacket emphasizing its utilitarian aspects and the second for the jacket emphasizing its hedonic aspects. We submitted participants' desire for the jacket to a 2 (task: recently used vs. recently unused)  $\times$  2 (possession type: utilitarian vs. hedonic) ANCOVA, with demographics and trait impulsivity score as covariates. Results showed that when a jacket was described by making its hedonic aspects salient, a significant interaction emerged between task and possession type ( $F(1, 172) = 10.56, p = .001, \eta^2 = .058$ ). Participants who had recalled recently using a hedonic

possession ( $M_{\text{used\_hedonic}} = 5.55$ ,  $SE = .25$ , 95% CI[5.07, 6.04]) indicated significantly higher desire for the jacket than those who planned to use a hedonic possession they had not used recently ( $M_{\text{unused\_hedonic}} = 4.57$ ,  $SE = .23$ , 95% CI[4.11, 5.02]).

This pattern of results did not hold for those thinking about utilitarian possessions in the manipulation task. In this case, the level of experienced desire for the hedonically accentuated jacket was numerically but not statistically lower when participants recalled recent use of a utilitarian possession ( $M_{\text{used\_utilitarian}} = 5.03$ ,  $SE = .22$ , 95% CI[4.61, 5.46]) than when they planned to use an unused utilitarian possession ( $M_{\text{unused\_utilitarian}} = 5.48$ ,  $SE = .19$ , 95% CI[5.10, 5.86],  $p = .12$ ).

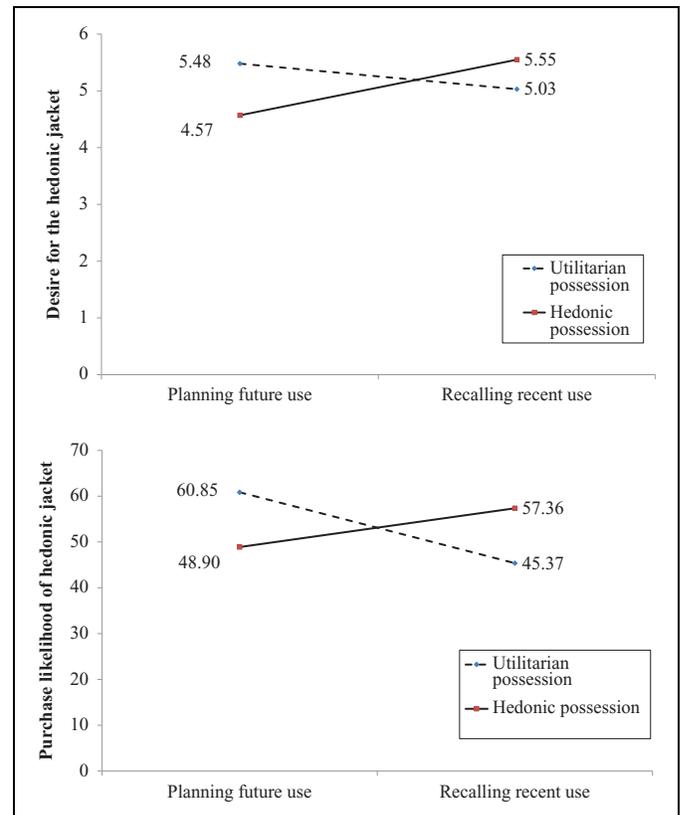
Furthermore, when the jacket was described by making its utilitarian aspects salient in the second task, we observed no statistically significant difference across the four conditions, which indicates that thinking about either type of possession in the first task did not have a systematic effect on desire for the utilitarian product in the second task. This pattern of results supports our  $H_3$ .

**Purchase likelihood in the second task.** When we conducted an ANCOVA with purchase likelihood of the jacket as the dependent variable, we observed a consistent pattern of results. When the jacket was described with its hedonic aspects made salient, the interaction term between task and possession type emerged as significant ( $F(1, 172) = 8.99$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $\eta^2 = .050$ ). Participants who had recalled a hedonic possession in the first task ( $M_{\text{used\_hedonic}} = 57.36$ ,  $SE = 4.46$ , 95% CI[48.55, 66.16]) showed a higher purchase likelihood for the jacket than those who planned to use a hedonic possession ( $M_{\text{unused\_hedonic}} = 48.90$ ,  $SE = 4.18$ , 95% CI[40.65, 57.15]). In contrast, when participants recalled use of a utilitarian possession ( $M_{\text{used\_utilitarian}} = 45.37$ ,  $SE = 3.87$ , 95% CI[37.73, 53.02]), participants indicated lower purchase likelihood of purchasing the jacket than those who planned to use their utilitarian possession ( $M_{\text{unused\_utilitarian}} = 60.85$ ,  $SE = 3.47$ , 95% CI[54.01, 67.69]). This pattern of results provides further support to  $H_3$ .

When the jacket was described with its utilitarian aspects made salient, neither the main effect of task nor interaction with possession type emerged as statistically significant, suggesting that when the second product's utilitarian aspects were emphasized, its choice was not affected by prior desire evoked from owned products. Figure 1 summarizes these results.

## Discussion

The results of Study 3 show that people who experienced greater desire by recalling use of a hedonic possession still felt greater desire for a subsequent hedonic item when compared with those who experienced relatively lower desire through forming a plan to use a recently unused personal possession. In contrast, people who experienced greater prior desire by recalling a utilitarian owned product felt less desire for a subsequent hedonic item. We did not observe this pattern of results when the second task involved a



**Figure 1.** Study 3: Interactive effect of possession type (hedonic vs. utilitarian) and task (recalling recent use vs. planning future use) on impulsive purchase intent of a hedonic product.

utilitarian item. In this case, as would be expected, study participants were immune to the level of desire experienced in the first reflection task. The main takeaway from this pattern of findings is that as an intervention to counter over-consumption, recalling the recent use of one's utilitarian personal possessions is the most appropriate way to suppress the desire for shopping hedonic items.

## Study 4

The objective of Study 4 is to obtain supporting evidence for the proposed mechanism by which recalling use of a hedonic possession affects desire for subsequent consumption. In addition to our proposed explanation that recalling the use of a hedonic possession produces positive arousing emotions, thereby reversing desire depletion, a second distinct explanation supported by consumer psychology research is that consumers have different expectations of how they will adapt to their hedonic and utilitarian possessions over time. Specifically, for hedonic possessions, they may anticipate that having used the item recently, they will feel less desire for it in the future than they do at present. Due to lower expected desire to use the hedonic possession in the future, those recalling such an item may continue to experience higher desire for a new hedonic product. We tested both explanations in this study.

## Method

We recruited a total of 229 participants (51.1% female) to participate in this study via MTurk in exchange for monetary compensation. We randomly assigned participants to one of three (possession type: hedonic vs. utilitarian vs. control) conditions. Like the previous studies, participants recalled the recent use of a possession, but the instructions regarding type of possession varied by condition. For those in the hedonic possession condition, participants were asked to think of a recently used possession they had “purchased for enjoyment or pleasure.” In the utilitarian possession condition, participants were asked to think of a recently used possession they had “purchased for necessity or convenience.” Participants in the control condition were instructed to think of any recently used possession without further reference.

As a manipulation check after completing the writing task, all participants indicated the extent to which the recalled possession is “hedonic (used for enjoyment and pleasure) vs. utilitarian (used for a necessity or convenience)” on a seven-point scale anchored with 1 = “completely hedonic,” and 7 = “completely utilitarian.” Then they indicated their desire to use the product: (1) *at this moment*, and then the level of desire they expected to feel for this product (2) *next week* and (3) *next month*. In each case, they answered on seven-point scales anchored with 1 = “no desire at all,” 4 = “moderate desire,” and 7 = “very strong desire.”

Next, participants answered questions about their experienced momentary emotions: “How do you feel about the experience of using this product at this moment?” We based these questions on prior research that has identified guilt, cheerfulness, and delight as emotional consequences for hedonic products and disappointment, security, and satisfaction for utilitarian products (e.g., Chitturi, Raghunathan, & Mahajan, 2007; 2008). Participants also completed a four-item scale assessing their level of arousal with four bipolar items: “simulated–relaxed,” “excited–calm,” “aroused–unaroused,” and “jittery–dull.” Participants rated each bipolar item on a seven-point scale. Finally, they provided their demographic information.

## Results

**Manipulation check.** A t-test showed that the hedonic versus utilitarian possession manipulation was successful ( $t = -5.03$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The mean for the hedonic condition was 3.14 ( $SD = 1.97$ ) and for the utilitarian condition was 4.79 ( $SD = 1.94$ ). The control condition ( $M = 4.43$ ,  $SD = 1.98$ ) was not significantly different from the utilitarian condition but was significantly higher than the hedonic condition.

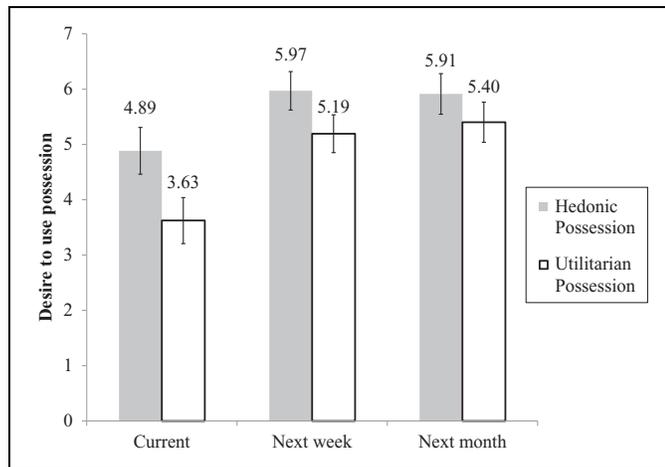
**Level of experienced emotions.** We ran a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) across three possession conditions (hedonic vs. utilitarian vs. control) for the six emotions. The results from the MANOVA were significant for the three conditions (Wilks’  $\lambda = .878$ ,  $F = 2.29$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and the univariate

tests for the two positive hedonic emotions (cheerfulness and delight) were significant as well ( $ps < .01$ ). When participants recalled recent use of a hedonic possession, they felt a greater intensity of cheerfulness ( $M_{\text{cheerfulness\_hedonic}} = 5.26$ ,  $SE = .21$ ,  $p < .01$ , 95% CI[4.85, 5.66]) and delight ( $M_{\text{delight\_hedonic}} = 5.63$ ,  $SE = .20$ ,  $p < .01$ , 95% CI[5.24, 6.02]) than when they recalled a utilitarian possession ( $M_{\text{cheerfulness\_utilitarian}} = 4.47$ ,  $SE = .20$ ,  $p < .01$ , 95% CI[4.07, 4.87];  $M_{\text{delight\_utilitarian}} = 4.43$ ,  $SE = .20$ ,  $p < .01$ , 95% CI[4.05, 4.82]). Participants in the control condition were not significantly different from those in the utilitarian condition ( $M_{\text{cheerfulness\_control}} = 4.40$ ,  $SE = .21$ , 95% CI[3.99, 4.81];  $M_{\text{delight\_control}} = 4.80$ ,  $SE = .20$ , 95% CI[4.41, 5.19]). The results show that recalling recent use of a hedonic item evokes greater degree of positive emotions such as delight and cheerfulness than recalling recent use of a utilitarian item.

**Level of experienced arousal.** Next, we conducted a similar analysis with arousal. We used a MANOVA to examine the difference between the hedonic and utilitarian conditions. The MANOVA results were significant for the three conditions (Wilks’  $\lambda = .897$ ,  $F = 2.87$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and the univariate tests for all four arousal measures were significant as well ( $ps < .05$ ). Participants in the hedonic condition felt greater arousal ( $M_{\text{hedonic}} = 4.48$ ,  $SE = .18$ , 95% CI[4.13, 4.82]) than those in the utilitarian condition ( $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 3.66$ ,  $SE = .19$ , 95% CI[3.28, 4.04]) or in the control condition ( $M_{\text{control}} = 3.67$ ,  $SE = .11$ , 95% CI[3.32, 4.02]). Consumers who recalled the recent use of a hedonic possession tended to feel greater arousal than those who recalled using a utilitarian item.

**Expectation of future desire experience.** Contrary to the lowered expectation explanation, participants in all three conditions indicated expectations of higher desire to use the possession in the future. Overall, 58.5% of the participants thought that they would have higher desire to use the possession next month, only 5.7% believed that they would feel lower desire to use the possession next month, and 35.8% did not indicate any change in desire to use the possession. When we compared changes in the level of desire to use a possession between the current and following weeks, 78.3% of the participants expected that the desire to use the item would stay constant, 8.0% believed it would be lower, and 13.7% thought it would be higher next month. This pattern of results indicates that consumers believe that their desire to use a product will be restored with the passage of time.

To test differences in expectation of desire experience between conditions, we ran a repeated-measures analysis of variance with conditions (hedonic vs. utilitarian) as the between-subjects factor and each of three time periods (current vs. next week vs. next month) as the within-subject factor. Results indicated a significant condition  $\times$  time interaction ( $F(1, 140) = 6.25$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and a main effect of condition ( $F(1, 140) = 14.04$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Participants in the hedonic possession condition reported significantly higher levels of current desire and expected desire next week, but the level of



**Figure 2.** Study 4: Experienced and expected future desire to use a possession.

expected desire next month was not different between groups. These results are summarized graphically in Figure 2. These results indicate a lack of support for the alternative explanation that lowered expectations of desire in the future drive present increased desire in the second task.

### Discussion

Our findings indicate that recalling the recent use of a hedonic possession is arousing and simulates positive emotions to a greater degree, thereby raising subsequent consumption desire. The alternative explanation that the reversal is based on lowered expectations of adaptation to hedonic possessions is not borne out. After recalling the recent use of a hedonic possession, participants continue to expect that they will experience a greater desire for such items.

### General Discussion

In this research, our main purpose was to answer the question of how to wean mainstream Western consumers, who are immersed in a materialistic, marketer-fueled, acquisitive culture based on constantly buying new things, away from this lifestyle to one that is centered in savoring and deriving enjoyment from one's current possessions and using them up to the fullest extent. Through a set of four studies, we found supportive, if preliminary, evidence that when faced with temptations offered by marketers, an effective way for consumers to shrug off these overtures and resist the urge to shop may lie in reflecting on the recent use of possessions they have. We found that the consumption desire is generated by this reflection task and subsequent desire for buying new things impulsively is lower, as is consumers' interest in making those purchases. Furthermore, when the temptations offered by marketers involve hedonic items that are designed to provide pleasure and are discretionary, consumers are best off thinking in a structured way about recent use of their functional possessions.

Drawing on such disparate research streams as the anticongestion literature, the strength model of self-regulation,

research on the role of thinking in producing satiation, and recent work on the role of desires in behavioral self-control that has discovered parallel motivational properties of desire and self-control, we theorized that, analogous to willpower, consumption desire may function as a resource. Evoking and experiencing consumption desire by thinking about a recently used personal possession may result in lower desire experience for a subsequent consumption-related decision. We note that further work is needed to fully understand the role of desire in producing lowered subsequent purchase interest. While we ruled out one mechanism in Study 4, the role of financial budgets and mental accounts also needs further examination. Likewise, experiments to more conclusively document the mediating role of consumption desire in producing the effects of the reflection strategy are needed.

The findings detailed herein enable the creation of a compelling yet simple intervention method designed to address a serious problem that forms a core concern of anticonsumption research: consumers' continual acquisition of new items that add to their already abundant stock of possessions. Our studies, which used an instruction-based reflection task requiring a few minutes, consistently show that when individuals recall their recent use of a personal possession, it evokes momentary consumption desire for the item, after which they experience less intense desire when faced with an opportunity to shop impulsively and have lower WTP for new products. We also discovered a useful boundary condition for this effect. When participants recalled using their hedonic possessions recently, the beneficial effect of stifling the urge to shop was reversed. When the reflection task aroused emotions such as delight and excitement, it stimulated rather than depleted desire intensity in a subsequent shopping decision for other hedonic products. This finding provides guidance on things to be wary of when designing a focused, effective intervention to reduce shopping.

We note that our findings are consistent with research on mindfulness practice that has offered it as an antidote to consumerism (Bahl et al. 2016; Rosenberg 2004), though they . While training in mindfulness through meditation and an increased awareness and focus on the present is seen as promoting more thoughtful and restrained shopping choices made with consciousness, and creating a sense of fulfillment that can quell consumption desire, here we argue that a much simpler (and therefore potentially more widely applicable) method of simply thinking about all the useful functional things one already possesses and how one has recently enjoyed using them may produce many of the same dampening effects on shopping urges and reduce consumption.

Our proposed method adds to the arsenal of instruments available to anticonsumption supporters by providing them with an intervention that may be easier to adopt for mainstream consumer friends and acquaintances as a "middle way" toward considering and then adopting more involved, and some would say, more difficult, anticonsumption practices such as boycotting, voluntary simplicity, dumpster diving, or intermittent fasting. Consumers could also apply our method effectively "just-in-time" to help themselves during incidental exposure

to tempting goods while they are out and about performing everyday activities. High school teachers and consumer advocates (e.g., credit counselors, other personal finance experts) could also teach this method as a systematic way to encourage students and consumers with financial troubles to shop prudently. Although we did not study this aspect directly, performing the intervention regularly before or during occasions to shop impulsively may arise may be beneficially incorporated into consumers' shopping routines. (One of the authors of this paper can anecdotally attest to its efficacy from personal experience, having employed it diligently over a period of several months.)

The present research offers reflection as a fourth distinct strategy to support anticonsumption, adding to the rejection, restriction, and reclaim strategies that anticonsumption researchers have studied extensively. There are at least two ways to think about reflection in relation to these more established anticonsumption approaches. One way is to think of it as an appropriate method for mainstream consumers who are still very much in an acquisitive lifestyle but have recognized its pitfalls, and who appreciate the merits of anticonsumption. For such anticonsumption novices, adopting the reflection method, specifically thinking about the recent use of their possessions when they encounter tempting marketing stimuli, may provide a starting point to join the anticonsumption movement, before going on to practice other methods.

A second way to think about reflection is as a method for seasoned practitioners of anticonsumption to increase the efficacy of the other three strategies. Take the case of a consumer considering brand boycott as a means of expressing his or her values (Yuksel 2013) and deciding what would be the most effective and self-identity-consistent brand to boycott. Reflecting on one's current possessions that have been recently used (as well as those that have been set aside) will provide useful information from personal experience to help make this decision. It will point to specific possessions that are made in unethical ways or by companies with questionable values that might merit a protest. As this example illustrates, a core distinction between reflection and the other three methods is that reflection is inwardly focused and emphasizes positive reasons for not consuming ("I already have wonderful things that I enjoy using, so I don't need new ones"), as opposed to the other approaches, which are motivated by negative reasons such as "symbolic incongruity, negative experiences, or value inadequacy" (Chatzidakis and Lee 2013, p. 000). Thus, reflection can complement rejection, restriction, and reclaim.

What is more, under specific circumstances or for particular people, the "reasons for" not consuming that are highlighted by a reflection exercise may interact positively with "reasons against" consumption from the other methods to strengthen the person's anticonsumption resolve. More research is needed to consider how to integrate these four strategies effectively so as to develop a lifestyle that is centered in anticonsumption principles while providing maximal well-being and fulfillment by allowing consumers to use what they already own in the most judicious and conscious way and to strengthen their identification with the core principles of anticonsumption.

Although our research focus and the studies described herein were restricted to shopping decisions, our findings raise questions about their applicability to other domains beyond shopping and anticonsumption and broadening the study of the role of desires in self-regulation more generally. For instance, it is quite possible that organizational or personal finance decisions, for example, will be similarly influenced by the level of corresponding desire experienced by an individual for a particular option—for tangible outcomes in the first case and security in the second. Desire depletion of the sort we discovered may occur when such decisions are made consecutively. However, just like self-control research, the questions of how durable such desire depletion effects are and how transferable they are across domains remain open and merit future attention.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the current work sheds light on the importance of considering consumption desire explicitly when studying questions about the interplay between desire and willpower in consumers. Because most current treatments tend to focus mainly on self-control, they either ignore consumer desire entirely or study questions in which desire is viewed as harmful and something to be stifled. Such a view is consistent with the core strain of anticonsumption research as well, which focuses on negative reasons for spurning consumption. However, there are situations in which desire stems from and contributes to positive individual and social outcomes, such as the desire for achievement, personal fulfillment, and social justice, and in such cases, understanding how to prevent rather than promote desire depletion over sequential experiences may be more important to understand. In our view, such a perspective would allow anticonsumption principles to be accessible to a broader base of consumers.

## Associate Editor

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