

Concept

# Bandwagon effect

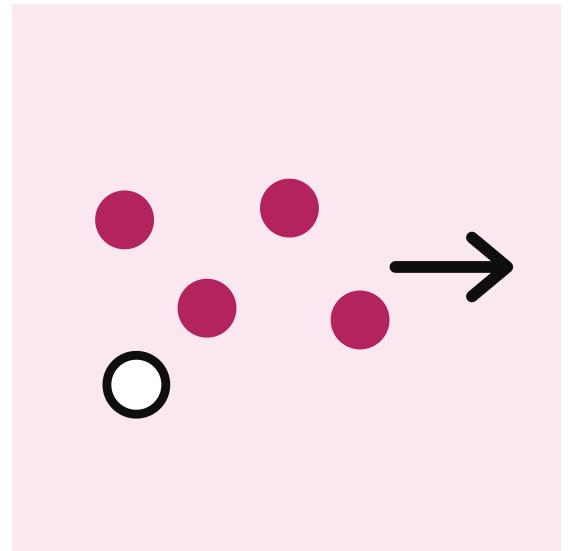
We tend to adopt a behavior, an idea or a product when we see that many people have already done so.

In Spanish

*Efecto arrastre*

Origin

Leibenstein (1950)

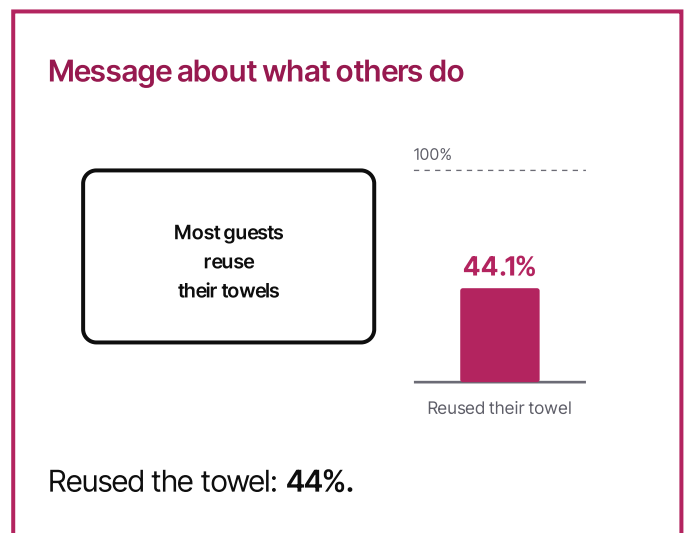
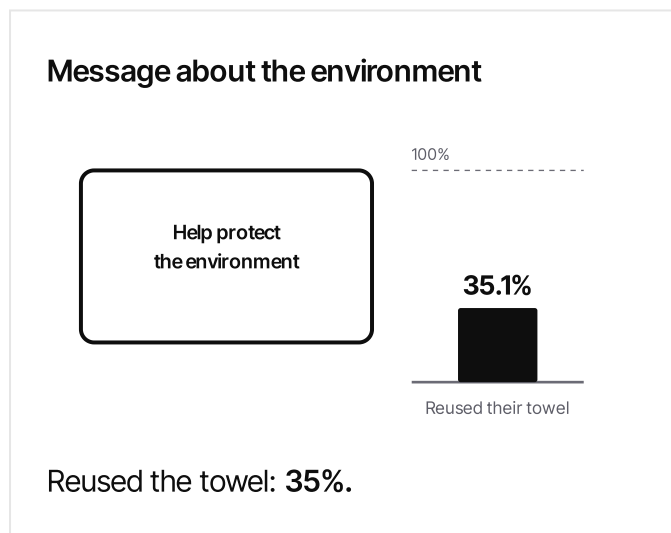


## What problem it addresses

It explains why popularity attracts more popularity, and why telling people what most others do changes behavior.

## An example

A hotel left different cards in its rooms asking guests to reuse their towels.



The request was the same. Knowing what other guests did made it more effective.

# Why it happens



When we don't know what to do, we look at others.



What most people do seems right or safest.



Besides, we want to fit in, and doing what the group does brings us closer to it.

## Applications in design

**Use it like this**

Show real data on what people similar to the decision-maker do, if it helps them decide well.

**Avoid**

Making up usage figures, reviews or “people viewing this” counters.

**Don't fall for it**

Ask yourself whether you would choose it even if nobody else had.

35% → 44%



### What the research says

Guests who reused their towel with the standard message and with the message about other guests (Goldstein, Cialdini and Griskevicius, 2008).

● ● ● **Solid evidence.** Leibenstein (1950) described the bandwagon effect in economics: demand for something grows because others already buy it.

## Connections

Used in

Dot voting

Related to

Nudge and choice architecture

Deceptive patterns (dark patterns)

Principles of influence

## Authors and works

|      |                                                          |                                                                    |
|------|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1950 | Harvey Leibenstein                                       | Described the bandwagon effect in demand theory.                   |
| 2008 | Noah Goldstein, Robert Cialdini and Vlasdas Griskevicius | Showed the power of social norms in a real-world hotel experiment. |

### Sources

#### Original sources

- Leibenstein, H. (1950). Bandwagon, snob, and Veblen effects in the theory of consumers' demand. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 64(2), 183–207. [View source \(https://doi.org/10.2307/1882692\)](https://doi.org/10.2307/1882692)
- Goldstein, N. J., Cialdini, R. B., & Griskevicius, V. (2008). A room with a viewpoint: Using social norms to motivate environmental conservation in hotels. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35(3), 472–482. [View source \(https://doi.org/10.1086/586910\)](https://doi.org/10.1086/586910)

Last reviewed: October 25, 2026

---

Atlas público de diseño, de Adriana Ojeda. Texto e ilustraciones bajo licencia CC BY 4.0.