Saving Your Self: How Identity Relevance Influences Product Usage

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Although research has consistently demonstrated that people prefer to purchase products and brands that represent their identity, relatively little research has examined how this identity relevance influences product usage. Drawing from work on intertemporal choice, the present work proposes a conceptual framework for the influence of identity on product usage. The authors theorize and demonstrate an identity conservation effect, in that consumers are less likely to use nondurable identity products compared to nonidentity products because the tradeoff between possession value and in-use value is larger for identity products. Six studies demonstrate the identity conservation effect and provide support for the value tradeoff framework through both mediation and theoretically supported moderation.

Keywords: identity, product usage, possession value, in-use value, consumption

While much of the manufacturing world traditionally focuses on efficiencies that allow for mass production, the past two decades have seen a rise in personalization of consumer goods (Nagle 2017). Although companies like Nike and Mini were early adopters of customer personalization, others have more recently adopted this strategy, allowing consumers to imbue products with their identities. For example, in its "Share a Coke" campaign, Coca-Cola produces cans and bottles that feature a variety of individual names (e.g., "Share a Coke with Elizabeth") or social roles (e.g., "Share a Coke with Mom"). M&Ms also has a website for personalizing individualized candies, going as far as offering consumers the opportunity to place their own faces on the candy (www.mymms.com). These identity campaigns are often successful in generating sales, but there is evidence suggesting that this increase in sales is temporary (Estrel 2014). While many factors may account for stalled sales, one possibility is that although these products are purchased because of their identity relevance, the identity relevance leads consumers to reduce, or completely avoid, consumption of the product, thereby limiting repurchase. This is especially likely to be true for nondurable goods like bottled beverages, candy, stationery, soap, and candles, where usage reduces future utility. Thus, while integrating consumers' identities into products may be beneficial to stimulate purchase, it may also change if and how consumers actually consume the purchased identity products.

There is a long stream of research examining how consumers' identities predict and explain preferences and purchases (Belk 1988; Chan, Berger, and Van Boven 2012; Escalas and Bettman 2005; Ferraro, Escalas, and Bettman 2011; Forehand and Deshpandé 2001; Oyserman 2009). A central theme in this research is that consumers seek out and purchase products that represent aspects of their identity (Belk 1988), hereafter referred to as "identity goods," demonstrating that consumer identity is a critical and influential factor in their purchase behavior. Research has also explored identity effects on disposal behavior, examining

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the role identity plays in determining whether or not consumers want to part with identity goods (Dommer and Swaminathan 2013; Jacoby, Berning, and Dietvorst 1977; Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005; Maddux et al. 2010; Morewedge et al. 2009) as well as how they part with identity goods (Price, Arnould, and Curasi 2000; Trudel, Argo, and Meng 2016). But, while there have been examinations of identity effects on both product acquisition and disposal, there is a lack of research examining what happens between purchase and disposal. That is, once acquired and before disposal, when are identity goods used and when are they saved?

We will argue that the decision to use a product is a tradeoff between the utility from using (which we call "in-use value") and the utility from possessing the product (which we call "possession value"). For nondurable goods, this value tradeoff represents a zero-sum game, as consumers must consume the product to obtain its in-use value, thereby reducing or possibly eliminating the possession value. While we argue that identity goods will have both greater in-use value and greater possession value than nonidentity goods, we also theorize that the effect of identity on possession value will be greater than its effect on in-use value, resulting in a larger value tradeoff for identity goods. Subsequently, consumers are generally less likely to use nondurable identity goods compared to nonidentity goods, which we term the "identity conservation effect." Considering the tradeoff between possession value and in-use value, we also demonstrate that the identity conservation effect is: 1) strengthened when the identity good's possession value increases or in-use value decreases, and 2) weakened when the identity good's possession value decreases or in-use value increases.

In examining the effect of identity on usage decisions, we contribute to the identity literature by addressing the lack of research regarding identity effects on the consumer behaviors that occur between purchase and disposal. The majority of past research makes no distinction between an identity good's purchase and usage. In contrast, our research demonstrates that the relevance of a product to a consumer's identity can affect whether or not she uses the product, suggesting that preference to purchase a product is not always synonymous with preference to use a product.

To the best of our knowledge, only one other article has examined identity effects on consumption. Chugani, Irwin, and Redden (2015) find that consumers strategically slow their satiation for identity goods, in order to decrease the dissonance they experience as a result of their reduced enjoyment of identity goods. Although both their article and the present work examine identity effects in the consumption domain, Chugani et al. focus on repeated consumption experiences and the satiation processes that arise from such repetition, while the present research focuses on the choice to consume or not. Furthermore, while Chugani et al. focus on satiation, or the decrease in enjoyment from consumption of a good (i.e., in-use value) over repeated consumption experiences, we examine identity effects on both possession value and in-use value. Therefore, unlike Chugani et al., we study contexts where consumers possess the good to demonstrate that the decision of whether or not to use an identity good is based on a tradeoff between the good's possession value and in-use value.

A second contribution of this work is that it combines literatures on intertemporal choice and identity to create a value-based framework that defines both when consumers choose to not use identity goods, and when they choose to consume these goods. The majority of intertemporal choice literature suggests that consumers myopically value the benefits of consumption now more than in the future, which leads most products to be consumed quickly. Our research, however, demonstrates that a good's identity relevance moderates this discounted utility. Specifically, we find that consumers are less likely to use identity goods compared to nonidentity goods in general. In doing so, we add to work examining factors that lead to nonconsumption (Wu et al. 2017). Conceptualizing the usage decision as a tradeoff between possession value and in-use value, however, allows us to highlight contexts and situations that increase the consumption of identity goods by manipulating factors that decrease the possession value and increase the in-use value of identity goods. Thus, our framework provides a lens through which to examine product usage and conservation.

Finally, this work contributes to the stream of research that has demonstrated the value consumers place on identity possessions. Previously, identity effects on value have been examined in research on the endowment effect (Dommer and Swaminathan 2013), thus limiting the extent of their effect to a focus on monetary valuation in a disposal context. We extend this prior research by examining identity effects on two different types of value—in-use value and possession value (Woodruff and Gardial 1996)—and demonstrate that the larger tradeoff between possession value and in-use value for identity goods leads to a lower likelihood of usage. Additionally, in the disposal literature, Trudel et al. (2016) demonstrate that after consuming everyday items associated with one's identity, consumers are more likely to recycle them rather than throw them away. The authors argue that consumers do not want to trash identity goods because doing so creates negative affect, which feels like a threat to self. Negative affect from usage can lead to nonconsumption (Wu et al. 2017). Our results suggest, however, that the identity conservation effect cannot be explained by a negative affect process. Specifically, we demonstrate that consumers feel positively about using identity goods because their usage provides greater value than nonidentity goods. Furthermore, we demonstrate that a variety of contexts influence the value tradeoff, some of which make consumers just as likely to consume identity goods as nonidentity goods. Accordingly,

our identity conservation effect cannot be explained by a desire to avoid the negative affect that accompanies consumption of an identity good. When it comes to identity goods, it appears that value has differing effects depending on the decision (how to dispose vs. whether or not to consume).

We next review literature on intertemporal choice and relate it to consumption timing to build our conceptual framework for the influence of identity on product usage. We propose that the usage decision for nondurable goods is based on a tradeoff between possession value and in-use value, and that this value tradeoff will be greater for identity goods than nonidentity goods. Subsequently, usage will be less likely for identity goods. We demonstrate this identity conservation effect over a series of studies and provide evidence for our proposed process through both mediation and theoretically supported moderation.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The Consumption Decision and Discounted Utility

An extensive amount of literature in marketing and psychology has documented a strong link between consumers' identities and their purchase behavior (Forehand and Deshpandé 2001; Mannetti, Pierro, and Livi 2004; Oyserman 2009; Pelham, Mirenberg, and Jones 2002; Reed 2004; Winterich, Mittal, and Ross 2009). One robust finding from this research is that consumers prefer products that are consistent with their identities, as they help to construct and maintain their identity (Escalas and Bettman 2005; Fournier 1998; Landon 1974). Therefore, consumers seek out products and brands that are congruent with their identity, while avoiding those that are incongruent with their identity (Berger and Heath 2007; Escalas and Bettman 2005; Ferraro et al. 2011; Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995; White and Dahl 2007).

Given the abundance of research demonstrating the positive effect of identity on purchase behavior and product preference, examining identity effects on consumption may seem straightforward. Purchase and consumption, however, are two separate decisions. A purchase decision typically involves the evaluation of one option in a choice set (e.g., an identity good) against other options available for purchase (e.g., nonidentity goods). Once a product is in a consumer's possession (i.e., after purchase), however, the parameters shift to a usage decision. During the usage decision process, a consumer evaluates the benefits of using the product now against the benefits of saving the product. For nondurable goods, this ultimately leads to a tradeoff between the utility from using the good and the utility from possessing the good.

The decision of whether or not to use a product resembles an intertemporal choice where consumers compare the subjective value of options over time (Loewenstein 1996, 1988). One of the most robust findings from this stream of research is that consumers are present biased, valuing immediate rewards more highly than future rewards (Thaler 1981). Although different explanations have been proposed for this effect, from discounted utility/value (Ainslie 1975; Samuelson 1937) to present bias or myopia (Strotz 1955; Thaler 1981), all agree that the subjective value consumers derive from an immediate reward is higher than their valuations of the same reward in the future. This discounted utility perspective suggests that consumers would favor using products sooner, as opposed to saving products for later, as the value a good provides is seen to be higher now than later. Furthermore, consuming a product sooner also reduces both inventory costs (having to hold on to the product) and opportunity costs (limited ability to purchase additional products; Lewis 2004).

Although discounted utility theory has been applied to a variety of situations, researchers have also shown anomalies of this model (Frederick, Loewenstein, and O'Donoghue 2002; Loewenstein 2001). One particularly relevant exception of this value discounting rule is that a consumer's preference for later benefits (i.e., usage deferral) increases when deferring an option yields additional value. For example, research by Loewenstein (1996) shows that consumers' preference for later options increases when certain visceral factors are present, such as anticipation of the consumption experience. In other words, a usage decision is a tradeoff between using and not using; and the larger the tradeoff, the more likely a consumer will defer usage.

As discussed next, products offer both in-use value and possession value (Woodruff and Gardial 1996). We theorize that, while identity goods provide both greater in-use value and greater possession value than nonidentity goods, the effect of identity on possession value will be greater than its effect on in-use value. As a result, the tradeoff between possession value and in-use value will be greater for identity goods, thereby reducing usage.

Identity Effects on the Tradeoff between In-Use Value and Possession Value

In-use value, sometimes referred to as consumption value, is defined as the utility derived from using a product or service (Parasuraman and Grewal 2000; Woodruff and Gardial 1996). The utility referred to in this definition encompasses not only the functional utility from usage, but also hedonic, emotional, and social utility, to name a few (Babin, Darden, and Griffin 1994; Sheth, Newman, and Gross 1991; Sweeney and Soutar 2001). For example, driving a BMW not only takes a person from one place to another (i.e., functional utility), but also likely makes a consumer feel happy and may even impress others (emotional and social utility).

From an identity perspective, it is unlikely that identity goods have greater functional in-use value than nonidentity goods. For example, stationery serves the same function whether or not it is personalized. Putting your name on stationery does not change the paper or its ability to take your notes. However, the identity relevance of a good could affect the other dimensions of in-use value. It is reasonable to assume, for instance, that a mother finds more joy (i.e., emotional in-use value) from writing on a notepad that reads "Mom's Notes" (Oyserman 2009). Thus, identity goods should generally have greater in-use value than nonidentity goods.

While in-use value refers to the utility received from using a product, the notion of possession value recognizes that products can contain emblematic qualities and meanings provided to consumers from proximity and association (Richins 1994; Woodruff and Gardial 1996). Possession value is derived from the meaning, continuity, and enjoyment that possessions bring to our lives (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Prentice 1987) and relies on both public and private meanings (Richins 1994). For example, owning a BMW not only makes a consumer feel wealthy and powerful, but also leads his neighbors to make certain inferences about his personality (Burroughs, Drews, and Hallman 1991). Similar to in-use value, therefore, possession value also encompasses hedonic, emotional, and social utility. With possession value, however, the utility arises from ownership and possession, not physical usage, and consumers can glean value from products without ever having to use them. That is, a BMW owner gains utility from merely knowing that the BMW is in her driveway because utility resides in the possession's meaning, not just its function or use. Family photographs, favorite books, family heirlooms, wedding dresses, sports awards, souvenirs, and golf clubs can provide joy and pride simply from their existence and proximity (Kondō 2014). In this way, possessions form an anchor for our selves that offer protection and comfort (Belk 1988; O'Connor 2016).

Because possession value resides in meanings and associations, significant connections and links to the self should enhance it (Belk 1988; Ferraro et al. 2011; Price et al. 2000; Reed et al. 2012; Wicklund and Gollwitzer 1981). In support of this theorizing, research on identity and disposal behavior has shown that consumers inflate the monetary value of identity possessions relative to nonidentity possessions (Dommer and Swaminathan 2013) and take greater care in disposing of products related to their identity, such as limiting who they would be willing to sell the item to (Price et al. 2000) or how they would be willing to dispose of an item post-consumption (Trudel et al. 2016). In sum, identity goods have symbolic and self-expressive qualities that enhance their meanings, which should subsequently grant them greater possession value than nonidentity goods.

While we expect identity goods to have both greater in-use value and greater possession value than nonidentity goods, the effect of identity on possession value should be greater than its effect on in-use value. There is a cyclical process between identity and ownership. Identity is a fundamental motivational force of ownership, such that consumers feel greater ownership over things associated with their self (Dittmar 1992; Pierce, Kostova, and Dirks 2003). In turn, possessions become incorporated into a consumer's extended self (Belk 1988) and, subsequently, reinforce her identity (Reed and Forehand 2016). Through a cyclical and reinforcing process, identity strengthens ownership and ownership strengthens identity (Pierce et al. 2003). Thus, given the fortifying relationship between identity and possession, the positive effect of identity on possession value should be greater than the positive effect of identity on in-use value.

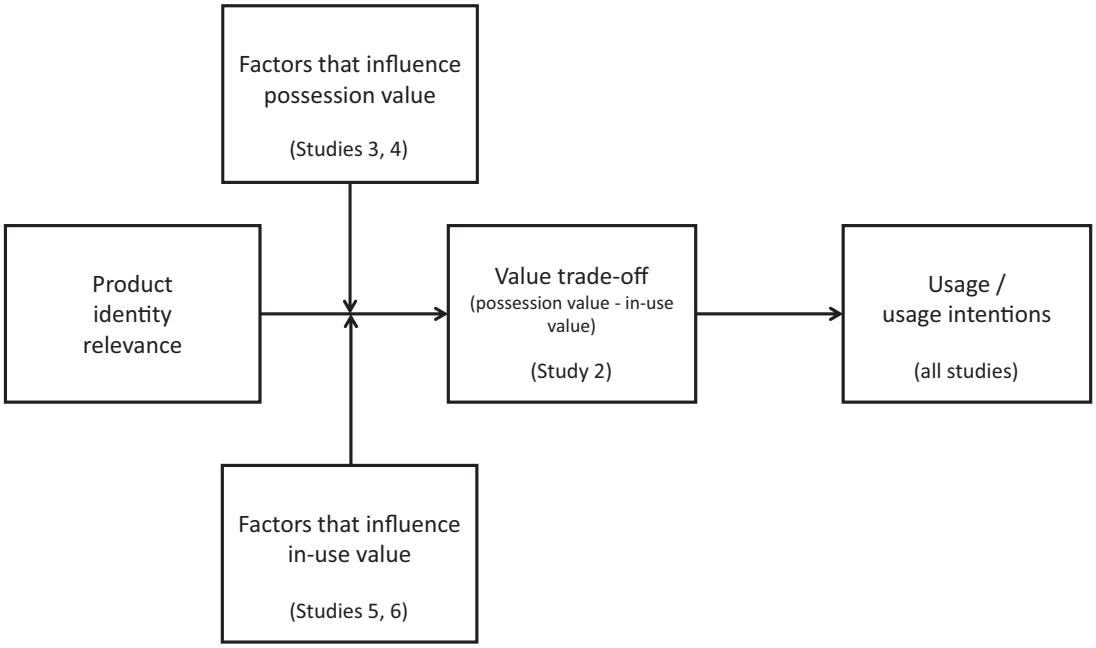
If identity has a stronger positive effect on possession value than in-use value, the difference (and hence tradeoff) between possession value and in-use value should be larger for identity goods than nonidentity goods. The larger the tradeoff, the more likely a consumer will be to defer usage, which is consistent with previous research demonstrating that consumers' preference for later benefits increases when deferring consumption provides additional value (Loewenstein 1996). Thus, we predict an identity conservation effect, in that consumers will be less likely to use identity goods compared to nonidentity goods.

Conceptualizing the usage decision for nondurable goods as a tradeoff between possession value and in-use value leads to additional predictions regarding when the identity conservation effect will be strengthened, and when it will be mitigated. The value tradeoff for identity goods will become even larger when possession value increases or in-use value decreases. Thus, the identity conservation effect should be strengthened by (1) increases in the possession value of the identity good or (2) decreases in the in-use value of the identity good. In contrast, the value tradeoff for identity goods should shrink when possession value decreases or in-use value increases. So, the identity conservation effect should be attenuated by (1) decreases in the possession value of the identity good or (2) increases in the in-use value of the identity good.

Figure 1 displays our complete theoretical model. We demonstrate the identity conservation effect in six studies, using both real behavior (studies 1, 5, and 6), as well as consumption intentions (studies 2–4). We provide evidence that the tradeoff between possession value and in-use value drives our effect through measured mediation of the process (study 2) and by examining multiple moderators that support our value-based conceptual framework. We first show moderation via possession value; the identity conservation effect is eliminated when a consumer does not possess the good, as possession value is eliminated (study 3). We then build on past research demonstrating that a threat

FIGURE 1

THEORETICAL MODEL AND OUTLINE OF STUDIES



increases possession value of identity goods (Dommer and Swaminathan 2013) and show that the identity conservation effect is strengthened under conditions of threat (study 4). Next, we turn to moderation via in-use value. Because identity consumption is critical to expressing who we are to others (Wicklund and Gollwitzer 1981), such contexts enhance the immediate in-use value for identity goods. Thus, we demonstrate that when self-presentation motives are high, consumption of the identity good increases and the identity conservation effect is attenuated (study 5). When the desire to signal identity is low (hence the in-use value of the identity good decreases), however, the identity conservation effect is strengthened (study 6).

STUDY 1

In study 1, we examine our main prediction that consumers will be less likely to use identity goods than nonidentity products. As a gift for participating, participants were given either a notepad that was identity relevant or a plain notepad. We observed whether or not they used their notepad later when given a task that required paper. Our expectation was that participants given the identity notepad would be less likely to use it compared to participants given the nonidentity notepad.

Participants and Procedure

One hundred thirteen undergraduate students (M_{age} = 20.41; 57.52% female) from the University of Kentucky completed study 1 for partial course credit. The study was a two-level (identity vs. nonidentity) between-subjects design.

Upon entering the lab, participants were greeted and directed to sit at individual workstations that contained a computer and a notepad placed on top of two pieces of scrap paper. At the beginning of the study, participants were asked to verify that they had both the scrap paper and the notepad and were told that the notepad was theirs to keep as a "thank you gift" for their participation in the study. All of the notepads were created specifically for this study. The identity notepad read "Notes of a Wildcat," while the nonidentity notepad simply read "Notes." The precise notepad each participant received was randomized by lab session (i.e., all participants in the same session received the same notepad) but counterbalanced across each day the study ran to eliminate any time-of-day effects.

Immediately after verifying that they had received their notepad, each participant was asked to rate the notepad's quality ("What is your initial impression of the notepad?"; 1 = "very bad" to 9 = "very good"). This served as a guise for the experiment and helped to ensure that each participant examined the product and was exposed to the

manipulation. Importantly, there was no difference in perceptions of quality across notepad conditions ($M_{identity}$ = 4.38 vs. $M_{nonidentity}$ = 4.25; $F(1, 111) = .17$, $p = .68$). Participants also rated their agreement with three statements intended to measure the novelty of the product ("This notepad is unique," "This notepad is novel," and "This notepad is different") and two statements intended to measure perceptions of scarcity of the product ("Finding a notepad like this at a store would be difficult" and "Notepads like this are scarce"). All five statements were rated on seven-point Likert scales ($\alpha_{novelty} = .80$; $r_{scarcity} = .89$). Then participants completed a series of computerized studies for about 45 minutes. Contained in these studies were three difficult problems that required a pen and paper to solve (e.g., 8384 × 1103 = ?; calculator use was prohibited). Upon completion of all of the studies, a lab manager visited the participant's workstation to collect the used paper and recorded notepad use (0 = not used; 1 = used) before allowing the student to leave the lab session.

Results and Discussion

As predicted, participants who received the identity notepad were less likely to use it compared to those who received the nonidentity notepad (17.24% vs. 45.45%; $\chi^2 = 10.51$, $p = .0012$, $\varphi = -.31$). The identity notepad was not seen as scarcer than the nonidentity notepad ($M_{identity} = 5.66$ vs. $M_{nonidentity} = 5.69$; $F(1, 111) = .02$, $p = .89$), but it was seen as more novel ($M_{identity} = 2.61$ vs. $M_{nonidentity} = 1.95$; $F(1, 111) = 9.39$, $p = .0027$, $\eta^2 = .078$). In a logistic regression with identity condition and novelty predicting use of the notepad, only the identity condition was significant (identity: $b = .74$, Wald $\chi^2 = 10.11$, $p = .0015$; novelty: $b = .13$, Wald $\chi^2 = .46$, $p = .50$).

When faced with a decision of whether or not to use a notepad, participants in study 1 were less likely to use the identity notepad than the nonidentity notepad. According to our theoretical framework, this identity conservation effect occurs because the tradeoff between possession value and in-use value is greater for identity goods. In our next study, we measure both in-use value and possession value to examine the underlying process of our effect.

STUDY 2

In study 2, we attempt to build on the results of study 1 and provide further evidence that consumers are less likely to use nondurable identity goods compared to nonidentity goods. Furthermore, we also use study 2 to investigate the process behind the effect. To do this, we used a familiar marketing campaign—the "Share a Coke" campaign from Coca-Cola—and manipulated whether the focal product was identity relevant or not. We measured consumption intentions as well as in-use value and possession value. Our prediction was that while identity goods would have greater in-use value and possession value than nonidentity goods, the difference between these two types of value would be larger for identity goods and this value tradeoff would mediate the effect of identity relevance on product usage intentions.

Participants and Procedure

Two hundred forty-one undergraduate students (M_{age} = 20.5; 64% male) from the University of Kentucky participated in study 2 in exchange for course credit. The study was a two-level (identity vs. nonidentity) between-subjects design.

At the beginning of the study, participants were asked to imagine that they had just received a bottle of Coca-Cola that was pictured on the screen. Those assigned to the identity condition were shown a picture of a Coca-Cola bottle that read, "Share a Coke with Wildcats." Those assigned to the nonidentity condition were shown a picture of a Coca-Cola bottle that read, "Share a Coke with XOXO" (see web appendix for study materials). The assignment of participants to the identity and nonidentity conditions was completely randomized.

Participants first completed a series of measures related to possession value and in-use value. For these measures, we adapted scales from prior research on consumption value (Cai, Bagchi, and Gauri 2016; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982), measuring each item on a five-point Likert scale (e.g., "owning this product makes me feel good," "using this product brings me a sense of joy"; see appendix for scale items). We also measured novelty and scarcity using the same measures from study 1 ($\alpha_{novelty} = .84$; $r_{scarcity} = .75$). Finally, participants responded to the question, "How likely would you be to consume this Coke right now?" on a five-point scale (1 = "not at all likely" to 5 = "very likely"). The study ended with demographic information.

Results and Discussion

Consumption Intentions. Replicating the results of study 1, we again found evidence of the identity conservation effect. Participants indicated that they were less likely to drink the identity Coca-Cola compared to the nonidentity Coca-Cola ($M_{identity} = 2.55$ vs. $M_{nonidentity} = 3.36$; $F(1, 239) = 22.23$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .085$).

Value. Before examining the effect of identity on in-use value and possession value, we wanted to verify that the scales used for both measures assess different dimensions of value. Hence, we used confirmatory factor analysis to compare a unidimensional model to the two-factor model. The results demonstrated that the two-factor model (χ^2 (64, $N = 241$) = 250.72, NFI = .92, TLI = .91, CFI =.94, RMSEA = .11) fit the data better than a

unidimensional model (χ^2 (63, $N = 241$) = 366.18, NFI = .88, TLI = .85, CFI =.89, RMSEA = .14; difference χ^2 (1) = 115.46, $p < .001$). Therefore, we averaged the measures for both possession value and in-use value ($\alpha_{possession}$ = .94; $\alpha_{in\text{-}use}$ = .91).

As predicted, participants reported greater in-use value in the identity condition than in the nonidentity condition ($M_{identity} = 2.81$ vs. $M_{nonidentity} = 2.30$; $F(1, 239) = 18.37$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .071$). However, there was a greater positive impact of identity on possession value ($M_{identity} = 3.19$ vs. $M_{nonidentity} = 2.36$; $F(1, 239) = 41.91$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .15$), as hypothesized.

We next examined whether there was a significant difference in the tradeoff between possession value and in-use value across identity and nonidentity goods. The results of a two-way mixed ANOVA showed that there was a significant main effect of identity on value ($F(1, 239) = 33.83$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .12$), with participants assigning greater value to the identity Coca-Cola ($M = 3.00$) than the nonidentity Coca-Cola ($M = 2.33$). There was also a main effect of value type ($F(1, 239) = 24.05$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .091$), with participants reporting greater possession value ($M = 2.78$) than in-use value ($M = 2.56$). These main effects were qualified by a significant interaction of identity condition with type of value ($F(1, 239) = 13.24$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .052$). While there was no difference between possession value and in-use value for the nonidentity Coca-Cola ($M_{possession} = 2.36$, SD = .99; $M_{in\text{-}use} = 2.30$, SD = .90), participants reported greater possession value compared to in-use value for the identity good ($M_{possession} = 3.19$, SD = 1.01; $M_{in\text{-}use} = 2.81$, SD = .94).

We also captured the tradeoff between possession value and in-use value by subtracting the former from the later. A one-way ANOVA revealed a larger tradeoff in the identity condition compared to the nonidentity condition ($M_{identity} = -.38$ vs. $M_{nonidentity} = -.057$; $F(1, 239) = 13.24$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .052$).

Scarcity and Novelty. Compared to the nonidentity Coca-Cola, the identity Coca-Cola was seen as both more novel ($M_{identity} = 3.88$ vs. $M_{nonidentity} = 3.25$; $F(1, 239) = 23.78$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .090$) and scarcer ($M_{identity} = 3.85$ vs. $M_{nonidentity} = 2.99$; $F(1, 239) = 34.28$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .13$).

Process. To test the process underlying our identity conservation effect, we used PROCESS model 4 (Hayes 2013) with 5,000 bootstrap samples and 95% confidence intervals. We included our value tradeoff measure (possession value minus in-use value), scarcity, and novelty as competing mediators. The results revealed that the predicted indirect effect of identity on consumption intentions through value tradeoff was significant ($b = -.0936$, SE = .0487, $CI_{95} = [-.2128, -.0171]$). Importantly, the indirect effects of identity through scarcity ($b = -.1316$, SE = .0938, $CI_{95} = [-.3379, .0284]$), and novelty ($b = -.0114$, SE = .0784, $CI_{95} = [-.1660, .1441]$) were not significant.

Discussion

The results of our first two studies demonstrate that consumers are less likely to use nondurable identity goods compared to nonidentity goods. Although identity goods are perceived as scarcer and more novel, these characteristics do not account for the identity conservation effect. Moreover, study 2 provides initial evidence that the identity conservation effect arises because of the tradeoff between possession value and in-use value; the difference between possession value and in-use value was larger for identity goods, which led to a lower likelihood of consuming the identity good compared to the nonidentity good.

In the next four studies, we look for further evidence of our value tradeoff framework by using process by moderation designs. We have theorized that the usage decision for nondurable goods is a tradeoff between possession value and in-use value, and that this tradeoff is larger for identity goods. It follows that the identity conservation effect will be mitigated when possession value is eliminated (study 3) and strengthened when the possession value of the identity good increases (study 4). Furthermore, our tradeoff framework also suggests that the identity conservation effect will be attenuated when the in-use value of the identity goods increases (study 5) but strengthened when the in-use value of the identity good decreases (study 6).

STUDY 3

The purpose of study 3 is to provide evidence of the process for the identity conservation effect through moderation. Our theoretical framework based on the tradeoff between possession value and in-use value suggests that possession of the product is necessary for this identity conservation effect to occur. Without possession, possession value cannot be retained and thus the identity conservation effect should be attenuated. Thus, in study 3 we manipulate whether or not participants possess the product. Our expectation was that in the possession condition we would continue to find that participants are less likely to consume the identity good compared to the nonidentity good. In the no possession condition, when participants would not be able to retain possession value regardless of usage, we expected an attenuation of the identity conservation effect.

Participants and Procedure

One hundred fifty-two undergraduate students (M_{age} = 20.4; 59.9% female) from the University of Kentucky took part in a 2 (product: identity vs. nonidentity) × 2 (possession: possess vs. not) between-subjects experiment in exchange for partial course credit.

The study began with an introduction that informed participants that they would be evaluating products that they owned (possession condition) or products that were owned by someone else (no possession condition). Next, participants were told they would evaluate different types of soap they had in their guest bathroom (possession condition) or encountered at a local restaurant (no possession condition). Then, all participants were shown a slightly used bar of soap and told that it was one of the soap options they encountered. The identity relevance of the soap was manipulated such that the soap was either relevant to the participant's university identity (i.e., in the university colors with the University of Kentucky logo embossed on it) or not (the same bar of soap but in colors not affiliated with the university and no embossing). Complete descriptions and stimuli for this study can be found in the supplemental web appendix. Participants responded to the question, "How likely would you be to use this soap?" on a seven-point scale (1 = "definitely not" to 7 = "definitely would").

Results

We ran an analysis of variance (ANOVA) with product, possession, and their interaction predicting usage intentions. Although there was not a main effect of product ($F(1, 148) = 1.88$, $p = .17$) or possession ($F(1, 148) = .24$, $p = .63$), there was the predicted significant interaction of product with possession ($F(1, 148) = 5.72$; $p = .018$, $\eta^2 = .037$; see figure 2).

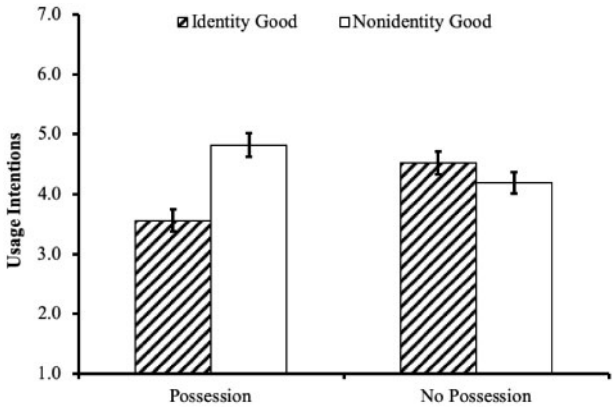
Consistent with the results of the previous studies, in the possession condition participants reported being less likely to use the identity soap compared to the nonidentity soap ($M_{identity} = 3.56$ vs. $M_{nonidentity} = 4.82$; $F(1, 148) = 6.81$, $p = .010$, $\eta^2 = .044$). In the no possession condition, however, there was no effect of identity ($M_{identity} = 4.53$ vs. $M_{nonidentity} = 4.19$; $F(1, 148) = .54$, $p = .46$). Furthermore, participants reported being more likely to use the identity soap when someone else owned the soap compared to when they themselves possessed the soap ($M_{no\ possession} = 4.53$ vs. $M_{possession} = 3.56$; $F(1, 148) = 4.11$, $p = .044$, $\eta^2 = .027$). There was no effect of possession in the nonidentity condition ($M_{owned} = 4.82$ vs. $M_{unowned} = 4.19$; $F(1, 148) = 1.82$, $p = .18$).

Discussion

The results of study 3 provide further evidence for our theoretical framework. When consumers possess products, and thus experience the value tradeoff, they are less likely to want to use identity goods relative to nonidentity goods. When they do not possess the good, however, there is no possession value from deferring consumption and, therefore, no tradeoff from usage. Thus, the identity conservation effect is attenuated.

FIGURE 2

USAGE INTENTIONS BASED ON IDENTITY RELEVANCE OF THE PRODUCT AND POSSESSION (STUDY 3)



This also casts doubt on the alternative explanation that the identity conservation effect might be driven by an identity threat process, where consumers avoid using identity goods because any depletion of an identity product is threatening and results in negative affect (Trudel et al. 2016; Wu et al. 2017). If usage of an identity product were threatening to the self, then we would expect to find the identity conservation effect regardless of possession and would not expect possession to moderate usage intentions.

Although the identity conservation effect is not driven by a threat process, it is likely to be moderated by threat. Prior research has demonstrated that threats and insecurity increase materialism (Kasser and Kasser 2001), while felt security reduces the value consumers place on their possessions (Clark et al. 2011). Furthermore, in an endowment effect paradigm, Dommer and Swaminathan (2013) demonstrate that consumers state a higher willingness to accept for identity goods following a threat because possession of such goods help restore the self. Taken together, this research suggests that a threat increases the possession value of identity goods. An increase in the possession value of identity goods should inflate the value tradeoff even further, thus strengthening the identity conservation effect. Therefore, in study 4, we examine threat as a moderator of the identity conservation effect.

STUDY 4

According to our theorizing, the identity conservation effect should be strengthened when the possession value of the identity good increases, such as when consumers are feeling threatened. A threat to the self should increase the strength of the link between the consumer and the identity-linked product (Dommer and Swaminathan 2013), and thus

possession value. We examined this by asking participants to complete a slightly adapted version of study 2. In study 4, half of the participants were exposed to a threat. Our expectation was that in the control condition, where consumers were unthreatened, we would continue to find our identity conservation effect. In the threat condition, we expected usage of the identity good to be reduced, thus strengthening the identity conservation effect.

Participants and Procedure

Four hundred twenty-four undergraduate students (M_{age} = 20.2; 59.4% female) from the University of Kentucky took part in a 2 (product: identity vs. nonidentity) × 2 (threat: threat vs. control) between-subjects experiment in exchange for partial course credit.

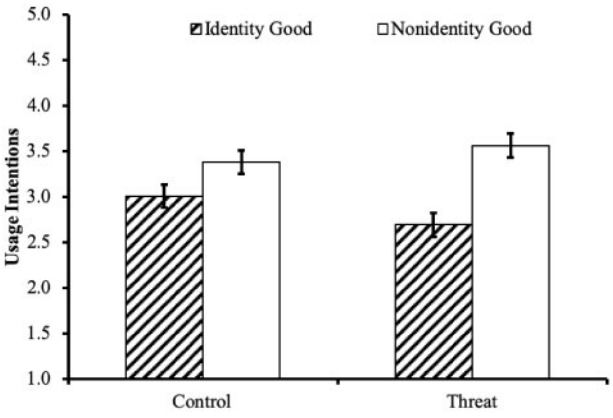
The experimental procedure utilized the Coca-Cola paradigm from study 2 with the addition of a threat manipulation. Borrowing from prior research demonstrating that defeats experienced by fans of a sports team can be threatening to the self (Cornil and Chandon 2013), participants in the threat condition were asked to remember a specific high-profile sporting event that occurred the week before where the University of Kentucky's men's basketball team was defeated in the regional final of the NCAA tournament (i.e., "March Madness"; full instructions and the results of a pretest verifying the effect of the manipulation on possession value can be found in the web appendix). Then, participants were shown either the identity Coca-Cola or the nonidentity Coca-Cola and asked to imagine that they owned the Coca-Cola shown, before responding to the question, "How likely would you be to consume this Coke right now?" on a five-point scale (1 = "not at all likely" to 5 = "very likely"). Participants in the control condition did not respond to the sports team defeat prompt, but rather were immediately directed to the Coca-Cola usage paradigm.

Results and Discussion

An ANOVA with product, threat condition, and their interaction predicting participants' consumption intentions revealed both a significant main effect of product ($F(1, 420) = 23.46$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .053$) and a significant interaction ($F(1, 420) = 3.78$; $p = .053$; $\eta^2 = .009$; see figure 3). As expected, in the control condition, we find consistent evidence for the identity conservation effect. Participants indicated they were less likely to drink the identity Coca-Cola compared to the nonidentity Coca-Cola ($M_{identity} = 3.01$ vs. $M_{nonidentity} = 3.38$; $F(1, 420) = 4.35$, $p = .038$, $\eta^2 = .010$). A threat, however, marginally reduced participants' stated willingness to consume the identity good ($M_{threat} = 2.69$ vs. $M_{control} = 3.01$; $F(1, 420) = 3.06$, $p = .081$; $\eta^2 = .007$), resulting in a stronger identity conservation effect in the threat condition ($M_{identity} = 2.69$ vs. $M_{nonidentity} = 3.56$ $F(1, 420) = 22.30$, $p < 0.001$; $\eta^2 = .050$). There was no effect of threat on participants' intention to consume the nonidentity good ($M_{threat} = 3.56$ vs. $M_{control} = 3.38$; $F(1, 420) = 1.00$, $p = .32$).

FIGURE 3

USAGE INTENTIONS BASED ON IDENTITY RELEVANCE OF THE PRODUCT AND THREAT (STUDY 4)



Study 4 demonstrates that the identity conservation effect is strengthened by threat. This result not only is consistent with prior research demonstrating that a threat increases the value of identity possessions (Dommer and Swaminathan 2013), but also supports our theorizing that the identity conservation effect arises because of the tradeoff between possession value and in-use value. According to our framework, increasing the possession value of the identity good (via a threat) should increase the tradeoff, and subsequently intensify the identity conservation effect.

Studies 3 and 4 have demonstrated the role of possession value in the identity conservation effect. Removing possession value in study 3 mitigated the effect, while increasing possession value of the identity good through a threat increased the effect in study 4. In studies 5 and 6, we turn our focus to the other type of value in the value tradeoff: in-use value.

Our theoretical framework suggests that consumption of identity goods should increase when the momentary in-use value of identity goods is enhanced. That is, if using the identity good immediately offers additional in-use value compared to the nonidentity good, then the value tradeoff is reduced and we would expect usage of the identity good to increase. Identity consumption is critical to expressing who we are to others (Bellezza, Gino, and Keinan 2014; Berger and Heath 2007; Wicklund and Gollwitzer 1981). Therefore, in study 5 we examine a social context that increases the immediate in-use value of identity goods: self-presentation.

Self-presentation is the process of controlling how a person is perceived by others (Leary 1995; Leary and

Kowalski 1990; Schlenker 1980; Schneider 1981). Self-presentation serves important functions, including constructing and maintaining the self (Baumeister 1982; Leary 1995; Wicklund and Gollwitzer 1981), as well as creating favorable impressions of the self for interpersonal influence (Leary 1995). Consumers believe that creating these advantageous impressions helps them to acquire rewards and avoid costs (Schlenker 1980). Hence, opportunities to create a more favorable impression will provide more value, especially when consumers are concerned about the impressions they create. Thus, the usage of identity goods should increase when self-presentation concerns are high, and thus the identity conservation effect should be eliminated.

STUDY 5

Study 5 utilized a similar notepad paradigm to study 1, yet manipulated the immediate in-use value of using the good by enhancing self-presentation motivation. Our expectation was that if the motivation to engage in self-presentation was high, consumers would increase their usage of the identity good, thus attenuating the identity conservation effect.

Participants and Procedure

Three hundred fifty-three undergraduate students (M_{age} = 20.34; 52.4% male) from the University of Kentucky completed study 5 for partial course credit. The study was a 2 (product: identity vs. nonidentity) × 2 (self-presentation: high vs. low) between-subjects design.

Upon entering the lab, participants were greeted and asked to sit at individual workstations that contained a computer, a brown envelope, a notepad, and similarly sized scrap paper. At the beginning of the study, participants were asked to verify that they had each item and were told that the notepad was theirs to keep as a "thank you gift" for their participation in the study. The identity notepad read "Notes from a Wildcat," while the nonidentity notepad simply read "Notes." The precise notepad each participant received was randomized by lab session (i.e., all participants in the same session received the same notepad) but counterbalanced across each day the study ran to eliminate any time-of-day effects.

Participants were first asked to give their overall impression of the notepad ("What is your initial impression of the notepad?"; 1 = "very bad" to 9 = "very good"). Unexpectedly, there was a significant difference in impressions; participants rated the identity notepad higher than the nonidentity notepad ($M_{identity}$ = 5.28 vs. $M_{nonidentity}$ = 4.61; $F(1, 351) = 10.39$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .029$). We controlled for rating in all of our analyses, but it did not significantly change the pattern of our results, so we removed it for parsimony. Then, participants completed a series of studies, one of which was our focal task. For this task, participants were told that they would be helping out a first-year student with his/her résumé (see supplemental web appendix for complete wording and stimuli). The study began by asking participants to describe (in their own words) what made an effective résumé. Afterward, participants were asked to open the envelope by their computer and examine a résumé contained inside that was submitted by a first-year student at their university. They were asked to provide constructive feedback to the résumé's author by writing a short note about the résumé. Participants were instructed to place their note, and the résumé, in the envelope when they were finished. In the high self-presentation condition, participants were further told that "due to the number of notes each résumé might receive, each note will be screened and only the most professional will be forwarded on to the students." We verified that this manipulation increases in-use value in a pretest that is reported in the web appendix. Upon completion of all of the studies, a lab manager collected the résumé packets with feedback and coded whether or not the participant's note was written on the notepad paper (0 = not used; 1 = used).

Results

As seen in figure 4, when the self-presentation motive was low, we again found the identity conservation effect. Participants were less likely to use the identity notepad compared to the nonidentity notepad (9.38% vs. 20.39%; $\chi^2 = 3.53$, $p = .060$, $\varphi = -.15$). When self-presentation concerns were high, however, usage of the identity notepad increased compared to when self-presentation concerns were low (26.32% vs. 9.38%; $\chi^2 = 6.99$, $p = .0082$, $\varphi = .21$). Thus, the identity conservation effect was eliminated when the self-presentation motive was high (% using identity notepad: 26.32%; % using nonidentity notepad: 19.78%; $\chi^2 = 1.12$, $p = .29$). There was no effect of self-presentation in the nonidentity notepad condition ($\chi^2 = .011$, $p = .92$).

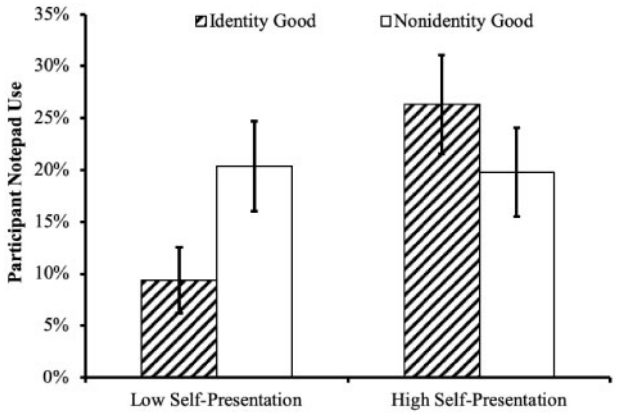
Discussion

In study 5, when self-presentation motives were low, we continued to find our identity conservation effect: participants were less likely to use the identity notepad compared to the nonidentity notepad. However, when self-presentation motives were high, presumably increasing the immediate in-use value of the identity good, consumers increased their usage of the identity notepad. The result of this increase in usage was an attenuation of the identity conservation effect.

Interestingly, in increasing the immediate in-use value of identity goods, we found an attenuation, and not a reversal, of the identity conservation effect. However, identity

FIGURE 4

USAGE BASED ON IDENTITY RELEVANCE OF PRODUCT AND SELF-PRESENTATION (STUDY 5)



goods still provide greater possession value than nonidentity goods, even in contexts where signaling or self-presentation motives are high. Thus, it is likely that two forces (immediate in-use value and possession value) are working against each other, preventing a complete reversal of our effect. So, while an increase in the immediate in-use value of the identity good increases the consumption of the identity good, the possession value of the good dampens the effect, preventing greater consumption of identity goods compared to nonidentity goods.

It is worth noting that we replicated the results of study 5 using a different moderator of in-use value: social signaling. The results of this study (which can be found in detail in the web appendix) demonstrate that when the social context allows for greater immediate in-use value of the identity good (i.e., when using the product provides others with new information about the owner of the product), usage intentions of the identity good increase, again eliminating the identity conservation effect.

Although there are many cases where consumers want to signal their identity to others, there are also other circumstances in which consumers may be motivated to hide their identity, thus decreasing the in-use value of the identity good. A decrease in the in-use value would increase the tradeoff between possession value and in-use value. Our theorizing would predict that, in this situation, usage of the identity good should decrease, thus strengthening the identity conservation effect. We test this prediction in study 6.

STUDY 6

Study 6 utilized a similar notepad paradigm to study 5. Rather than ask participants to give feedback on résumés, however, in study 6 we asked them to write encouraging notes to high school students. Half of the participants read that the high school students were at schools with poor college matriculation rates. In this case, we expected that participants would feel bad signaling their university affiliation to high school students who were unlikely to attend college. In other words, the in-use value of the identity notepad would be reduced. Our expectation was that if the motivation to signal their identity were low, consumers would decrease their usage of the identity good, thus strengthening the identity conservation effect.

Participants and Procedure

Study 6 was a 2 (product: identity vs. nonidentity) × 2 (signaling motivation: control vs. low) between-subjects design. Due to lab scheduling and participant availability, we ran study 6 at both the University of Kentucky and the Georgia Institute of Technology to reach our target sample size. In total, 297 undergraduate students (M_{age} = 20.4; 40.48% female) completed the study in exchange for partial course credit. We included a covariate for school in our analyses, but it did not change the pattern or significance of our results, so we removed it for parsimony.

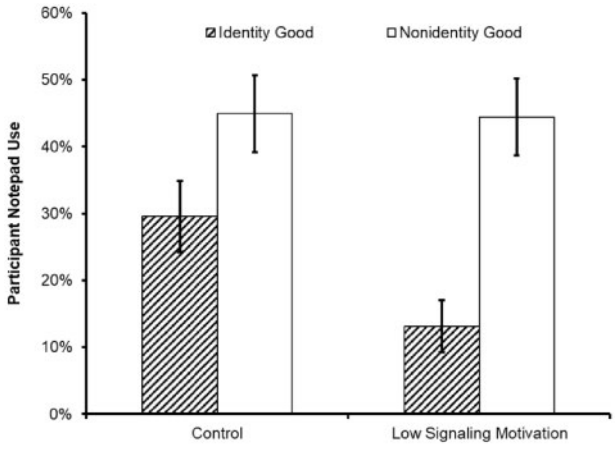
The beginning of the study was identical to that of study 5. Participants sat at individual workstations that contained a computer, an envelope, a notepad, and similarly sized scrap paper. They were told that the notepad was theirs to keep. The identity notepad read "Notes from a [school mascot]," while the nonidentity notepad simply read "Notes." Notepad condition was randomized by lab session (i.e., all participants in the same session received the same notepad) but counterbalanced across each day the study ran to eliminate any time-of-day effects.

As in study 5, participants were first asked to give their overall impression of the notepad ("What is your initial impression of the notepad?"; 1 = "very bad" to 9 = "very good"), and again rated the identity notepad higher than the nonidentity notepad ($M_{identity}$ = 5.66 vs. $M_{nonidentity}$ = 5.17; $F(1, 295) = 7.42$, $p = .0068$, $\eta^2 = .025$). Controlling for this impression measure in our analyses did not change the pattern or significance of our results, so we removed it for parsimony.

Participants then completed a series of studies, including our focal task. For this task, participants were told that we had partnered with a nonprofit organization that gives encouraging notes to high school students (see supplemental web appendix for complete wording and stimuli). In the control condition, participants were asked to write a note that would be passed on to a high school student in their state. In the low signaling motivation condition, participants were told that the organization "works with low income schools (>50% students eligible for a free or reduced-price lunch) where the college-going rate tends to be less than 40%." Participants wrote their notes, placed

FIGURE 5

USAGE BASED ON IDENTITY RELEVANCE OF PRODUCT AND SIGNALING MOTIVATION (STUDY 6)



them in a coded envelope, and turned them in to the lab manager. The study ended with demographic questions and a manipulation check ("Please estimate the likelihood that the recipient of the note will enroll at any college or university next year"; 1 = "extremely unlikely" to 7 = "extremely likely"). Compared to participants in the control condition, participants in the low signaling motivation condition reported that the recipient of their note was less likely to attend college ($M_{\text{low signaling}} = 4.14$ vs. $M_{\text{control}} = 4.81$; $F(1, 295) = 20.67$, $p < .0001$; $\eta^2 = .066$). Furthermore, a pretest reported in the web appendix demonstrates that our manipulation reduces in-use value.

Results and Discussion

In the control condition, the identity conservation effect manifested once again with participants being marginally less likely to use the identity notepad compared to the nonidentity notepad (29.58% vs. 44.93%; $\chi^2 = 3.53$, $p = .060$, $\varphi = -.16$; see figure 5). Usage of the identity notepad dropped even further, however, in the low signaling motivation condition (29.58% vs. 13.16%; $\chi^2 = 5.95$, $p = .015$, $\varphi = -.20$), thus strengthening the identity conservation in this condition, as expected (13.16% vs. 44.44%; $\chi^2 = 18.53$, $p < .0001$, $\varphi = -.34$). Usage in the two nonidentity notepad conditions did not significantly differ ($p = .95$).

The results of this study further corroborate our theoretical framework. In the control condition we continue to find the identity conservation effect; individuals are less likely to use identity goods compared to nonidentity goods. When the context decreases the immediate in-use value of the identity good (i.e., when signaling identity may be viewed negatively), usage of the identity good decreases, thus strengthening the identity conservation effect.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

We provide support for the identity conservation effect over a series of studies that examine real and intended consumption behavior. The results of study 1 demonstrate the identity conservation effect using a real behavior, such that consumers were less likely to use notepads when they were identity relevant. Study 2 demonstrates that the identity conservation effect is driven by the tradeoff between possession value and in-use value, and is not explained by differences in scarcity or novelty. In study 3, we provide additional support for our theoretical process by showing that the identity conservation effect does not manifest in situations where consumers do not possess the product, and thereby do not have rights to its possession value. Study 4 demonstrates that a threat strengthens the identity conservation effect, presumably because a threat increases the possession value of the identity good. In study 5 we document that in situations where the immediate in-use value of identity goods is enhanced (such as self-presentation contexts that call for identity expression), usage of the identity good increases and the identity conservation effect is again eliminated. Finally, study 6 shows that when the desire to signal one's identity is low (hence the immediate in-use value of the identity good decreases), the identity conservation effect is strengthened.

Although our results support a value tradeoff theoretical framework, a limitation of the six studies presented is that they all used products featuring the university identity. We note, however, that we conceptually replicated the identity conservation effect in seven different studies, using four different identities (NFL team, parent, wine lovers, university) and five different products (Coca-Cola, M&Ms, mints, candle, salt block) while refining our methods. Because each of these studies uses a very similar design when it comes to testing our identity conservation hypothesis, and because there are a large number of them, we do not describe each study individually. Full details and materials for each of these studies are in the supplemental web appendix, and a summary description of these studies can be found in table 1. In figure 6, we provide a summary of the results from the individual studies, as well as a meta-analysis of the overall results. To conduct the meta-analysis, we followed the method outlined by Borenstein et al. (2011). For all studies, the identity good condition was coded was 1 and the nonidentity condition was coded as 0. Given that our dependent variable was usage, the resulting effect sizes were negative. Using a random effects model, which allows that the true effect could vary from study to study, we find an overall effect size of –.28 (95% CI: –.38 to –.19).

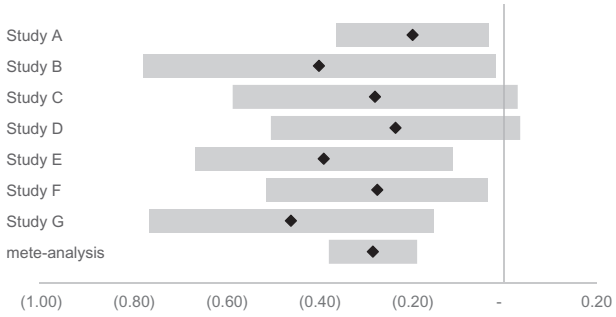
TABLE 1

SUMMARY OF METHODS, DESIGNS, AND MEASURES, ALL REPLICATE STUDIES

Study	Sample	*N*	Identity	Product	Dependent variable
A	Undergraduate students	579	University	Candle	How likely would you be to light this candle right now? 1 = not at all likely 7 = very likely
B	Undergraduate students	111	University	Mints	How likely would you be to consume these mints right now? 1 = not at all likely 7 = very likely
C	Undergraduate students	166	University	Salt block	How many times would you cook with this salt block over the next month?
D	Undergraduate students	216	University	Coca-Cola	How likely would you be to drink this Coke right now? 1 = not at all likely 5 = very likely
E	TurkPrime panel	205	Wine Lovers	M&Ms	How likely would you be to eat these M&Ms right now? 1 = not at all likely 7 = very likely
F	TurkPrime panel	275	Parent	Coca-Cola	How likely would you be to drink this Coke right now? 1 = not at all likely 7 = very likely
G	Amazon Mechanical Turk	200	NFL Team	Coca-Cola	How likely would you be to drink this soda? 1 = extremely unlikely 7 = extremely likely

FIGURE 6

D EFFECT SIZES AND 95% CONFIDENCE INTERVALS FOR EFFECT OF IDENTITY ON CONSUMPTION INTENTIONS, ALL REPLICATE STUDIES AND META-ANALYSIS



Contribution

In demonstrating and exploring the identity conservation effect, we fill in the gap between the aforementioned research focusing on the effect of identity on product acquisition and research on the effect of identity on disposal behavior (Price et al. 2000; Trudel et al. 2016). Furthermore, although we find that consumers are less likely to use identity goods compared to nonidentity goods in general, we demonstrate a series of theoretical meaningful moderators, highlighting contexts and situations that both increase and decrease the consumption of identity goods. Thus, our value tradeoff framework provides a lens through which to examine product usage and conservation.

Our findings contribute to the very small literature examining the effects of identity on consumption behaviors. Chugani et al. (2015) demonstrate that consumers satiate less quickly to products related to their identity, to decrease the dissonance that they experience as a result of their reduced enjoyment of identity goods. Satiation can be thought of as the reduction of in-use value over time. So while Chugani et al. examine the effect of repeated consumption of identity goods on in-use value over time (e.g., the enjoyment of viewing the same painting multiple times), the focus of the present research has been to examine the effects of possession value and in-use value on the choice to consume identity goods. Therefore, unlike Chugani et al., we created experimental paradigms where consumers possessed the good and examined the choice to consume (or not). Given that our results suggest that consumers are somewhat resistant to using identity goods, consumption of these goods might enhance salience and effort of consumption, which may also help stem any satiation (Bargh 1997), in line with the results of Chugani et al. (2015).

A second contribution of this work is that it combines literatures on intertemporal choice and identity to build a value tradeoff framework that explains when and why consumers choose to use or conserve identity goods. Literature on intertemporal choice suggests that consumers would tend to use products quickly, as a product's in-use value is perceived to be greater in the present than the future. The present research, however, proposes that a usage decision

is a tradeoff between possession value and in-use value. Thus, we demonstrate that a good's identity relevance moderates discounted utility because the value tradeoff is higher for identity goods. In other words, possession value may, in some circumstances, overcome discounted utility to decrease preference for immediate consumption.

A final contribution of this research is that it examines the effects of identity on two different types of value—in-use value and possession value—and considers the tradeoff between them as a driver of product usage. Thus, it adds to research that has examined the effect of identity on monetary value (Dommer and Swaminathan 2013). In a somewhat similar vein, Trudel et al. (2016) have demonstrated that after usage, when a good no longer offers any possession or in-use value, consumers are less likely to trash identity goods because doing so feels like a threat to their self. Underlying this argument is the generally accepted belief that there is a connection between the value a consumer places on himself and the value he places on products that express himself. It is this very connection, we argue, that enhances the possession value of an identity good. However, our identity conservation effect cannot be explained by a negative affect process. In study 2 we show not only that consumers feel positively about using identity goods, but also that identity goods are perceived to have greater in-use value than nonidentity goods. Furthermore, the results of studies 3 and 5 demonstrate contexts in which consumers are just as likely to consume identity goods as nonidentity goods. Accordingly, while trashing a used identity good may feel like a threat to self, consuming the identity good does not, suggesting that value might have differing effects on consumption and disposal.

Understanding consumers' usage and conservation decisions provides valuable information to managers, especially considering the growth of identity campaigns in product advertising and product personalization (Nagle 2017). First, the fact that consumers are less likely to consume nondurable identity goods suggests that personalization and identity campaigns may serve as a lasting brand reminder. Indeed, one of the authors of this article has had a "Share a Coke with Dan" bottle sitting on his desk for years. From Coca-Cola's perspective, the fact that this bottle remains on his desk is good in that it constantly reminds him of the brand. It may also be bad for Coca-Cola, however, in that his nonconsumption of the Coca-Cola has prevented him from purchasing another "Share a Coke" bottle. Our research does suggest ways to overcome this roadblock to repurchase. For instance, managers may want to highlight the signaling value of identity products to increase the usage of identity goods (and subsequently encourage repurchase). In sum, managers need to weigh the benefits of short-term sales and brand reminders against the costs of limited repurchase before offering personalization and identity campaigns.

Future Research

Given the lack of research on identity effects on product usage, there are ample opportunities for future research in this area. For instance, we specifically examined nondurable goods for which the usage decision is a zero-sum tradeoff between possession value and in-use value. Future research could examine the effect of identity on the usage of durable goods. Interestingly, we found the identity conservation effect even when usage did not eliminate possession value. For instance, the vast majority of subjects in our notepad studies used only one sheet of paper, leaving the notepad mostly intact. Future research could test the limits of the identity conservation effect, however. Given our theorizing based on the tradeoff between possession value and in-use value, we would expect the identity conservation effect to be strongest when usage eliminates possession value (e.g., if participants only had one piece of paper) and weaker when usage has minimal effect on possession value (e.g., if participants had 10,000 pieces of paper). It is also possible that when usage has no effect on possession value, the identity conservation effect does not occur. This would suggest that for durable items like clothing or glassware, the identity conservation effect would not manifest. Future research could examine, however, the interaction of factors that might influence possession and in-use value (and subsequently the identity conservation effect) for durable goods.

A related opportunity for future research would be to explore the identity conservation effect for nondurable goods for which the identity link remains on the packaging after consumption. To be sure, we found the identity conservation effect when the identity was represented on the product itself (notepads, candy), as well as when it was represented on the packaging (Coca-Cola, candle). This suggests there is not enough possession value in the packaging alone (e.g., Coke bottle) without the product (Coca-Cola) to allow for consumption of the identity goods. Future research could explore what might enhance the possession value of the identity product packaging alone enough to permit consumption of such identity goods.

For certain goods, the line between possession and consumption is blurred. Artwork, for example, can be "consumed" simply through ownership and display. Even nondurable goods could be used as displayed pieces and therefore be consumed in a more abstract way than physical consumption. Future research could examine how possession value and in-use value influence this more relaxed type of consumption.

While our results show that consumers are generally less likely to consume identity goods than nonidentity goods, we also demonstrate that when the immediate in-use value of the identity good increases this identity conservation effect is eliminated. This suggests that there may be "right times" to consume identity goods and consumers may

strategically defer consumption for these situations. Discovering which situations and circumstances allow for the increased consumption of identity goods is a ripe area for future research.

To examine the tradeoff between possession value and in-use value, it was critical to use experimental paradigms where consumers possessed the identity goods. Specifically, participants owned the products in each of our studies. And while we possess the things we own, we do not always own the things we possess. Future research could examine how our effects might translate to rental goods or the sharing economy. Our theorizing would suggest that as long as there is the potential for possession value, the identity conservation effect should manifest.

The identity conservation effect illustrates and explains an important distinction between preference to purchase and actual usage. Although consumers prefer products that are related to their identity (Belk 1988; Escalas and Bettman 2005; Reed 2004), our findings suggest that the value of nondurable identity goods lies in their possession and not just their acquisition. Indeed, liking a product does not always mean a consumer wants to use a product (Wu et al. 2017). It would be interesting to examine, however, the extent to which possession value and in-use value are considered at the purchase decision stage. Presumably in-use value is given consideration, but to what extent is possession value considered? Do consumers not begin to consider possession value until they are faced with the consumption decision? Perhaps the purchase decision is more about comparing both possession value and in-use value across options, whereas the usage decision is about comparing possession value versus in-use value for the chosen option. In general, understanding the role of possession value at the varying stages of consumer behavior (purchase, usage, disposal) is an area ripe for future research.

In conclusion, by investigating the identity conservation effect, this research makes an important contribution to the literature examining the effect of identity on the product usage process, filling in the gap between product acquisition and disposal. The results demonstrate that the tradeoff between possession value and in-use value is larger for identity goods, thereby leading to a lower likelihood of usage. Thus, when it comes to identity goods, consumers prefer to "save the self."

DATA COLLECTION INFORMATION

The data for study 1 (spring 2016), studies 2 and 3 (fall 2018), study 4 (spring 2019), and study 5 (spring 2019) was collected at University of Kentucky's Behavioral Research Lab with the help of research assistants. The data for study 6 was collected with the help of research assistants at both the University of Kentucky and the Georgia Institute of Technology. The first author analyzed the data for studies 2–5, with the consultation of the second author. The second author analyzed the data for studies 1 and 6 with the consultation of the first author.

APPENDIX

POSSESSION VALUE MEASURES

Please rate your agreement with the following (1 = "Strongly Disagree"; 7 = "Strongly Agree"):

Owning this coke gives me a sense of joy.
Owning this coke makes me feel good.
Owning this coke makes me proud.
Owning this coke impresses others.
Owning this coke makes me look good.
Owning this coke is unique.
Owning this coke is special.

IN-USE VALUE MEASURES

Please rate your agreement with the following (1 = "Strongly Disagree"; 7 = "Strongly Agree")

Drinking this coke gives me a sense of joy.
Consuming this coke makes me feel good.
Consuming this coke would make me proud.
Drinking this coke would impress others.
Consuming this coke makes me look good.
Drinking this coke is unique.
Consuming this coke is special.

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